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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**THE RUSSIAN PATTERN OF INTERVENTION
IN THE "FROZEN" CONFLICTS OF THE WIDER BLACK SEA AREA**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

Major Sorin-Gheorghe Șoană, Romanian Army

AY 14-15

Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: Dr. Anne-Louise Antonoff

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27 April 2015

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: The Russian pattern of intervention in the “frozen” conflicts of the Wider Black Sea Area

Author: Major Sorin-Gheorghe Șoană, Romanian Army

Thesis: Despite the successful annexation of Crimea and some areas of eastern Ukraine, the Russian Federation will probably not continue the expansionist policy towards the West due to the loss of the strategic surprise. However, it will continue to support secessionist movements and the emergence of new crises in the former Soviet dominions in order to create a buffer zone, to protect its energy infrastructure and economic interests, and to maintain its prevailing place in a desired multipolar world.

Discussion: The recent Russian annexation of Crimea and the following ongoing Ukrainian crisis has become a new source of regional insecurity in the Wider Black Sea Area (WBSA). Aside from the international echoes and imposed sanctions to the Russian Federation, this new transnational threat could potentially reignite the “frozen” conflicts from the area, or start new ones with effects that could potentially spread worldwide. Although it is not possible at the moment to conclude that the Russian actions have defensive or offensive posture, or to predict which former Soviet dominion will be next, if any, it is important to analyze and understand the Russian pattern in the previous cases.

Conclusion: The Russian Federation will continue to use the protection of the Russian-speakers and their right to self-determination to justify its support to secessionist movements in the former Soviet Union dominions. The reason behind this is not necessarily to regain territorial control or to revive the former Russian Empire, but to maintain its influence in these countries and to protect its energy transport infrastructure, its last “weapon” in maintaining its global key posture.

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PREFACE

Crimea's annexation and its possible echoes over the "frozen" conflicts in the Wider Black Sea Area captivated my attention due to their close proximity to my country. As a member of the Romanian Army, I am deeply concerned about the possible military consequences of these crises. Although aware of my practical inability to offer viable solutions to these conflicts, their understanding will contribute to my situational awareness and will give me proper motivations in case of involvement.

Despite the limitations, I hope that my research project will contribute to a better problem framing, and help policy-makers to take appropriate decisions to maintain the region's peace and security. Although at first sight the paper could be interpreted as offering a more Eastern than Western perspective about the "frozen" conflicts from the region, the purpose of it is not to blame one side or the other for their actions or to exonerate them for the consequences of their actions, nor to advocate their agenda or public speeches about it, but to present as much as possible the complex environment of the region that influenced the actual *status quo*.

I would like to thank Dr. Anne-Louise Antonoff for her help in shaping my paper, the ladies from the Leadership Communication Skills Center for their help in improving my English language proficiency, and Major Malkhaz Makaradze from Georgia for his insights in this matter.

INTRODUCTION

Aside from the presumable triumph of the Western civilization, the end of the ideological Cold War unlocked the Pandora's Box of nationalism instead of the desired eternal peace, or the "end of history."ⁱ Driven by the spirit of self-determination, helped by the weakened Soviet Union, and supported by the international community, the former fourteen Soviet Republics used Article 72 from the Soviet Constitution of 1977 to proclaim their independence,ⁱⁱ thus in effect dissolving the Soviet Union in December 1991.

With the notable exception of Belarus, which remains even today the closest ally of the Russian Federation (RF), and to some extent Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, with which the RF has stable economic relations,ⁱⁱⁱ all the other former Soviet Republics have different types of issues with the RF, namely ethnical,^{iv} religious,^v territorial,^{vi} political,^{vii} or a combination between them, linked with economic issues as well. These issues were the direct consequences of the former Russian Empire/Soviet Union occupation policy, translated into massive deportation of the indigenous population or relocation in other areas and their replacement with Russian ethnics as part of the process of Russification,^{viii} followed by

ⁱ Basically a Hegelian concept, later promoted by Karl Marx, and finally proclaimed by Francis Fukuyama in his essay "The End of History?", published in *The National Interest*, in Summer 1989 (<http://www.kropfpolisci.com/exceptionalism.fukuyama.pdf>). According to the last point of view, history will flow into a single direction, towards democracy and liberalism, in the absence of another powerful ideological competitor or contestant.

ⁱⁱ This article stated, „Each Union Republic shall retain the right freely to secede from the USSR.” (<http://www.departments.bucknell.edu/russian/const/77cons03.html#chap09>).

ⁱⁱⁱ As part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and, as future intent, in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).

^{iv} Like the case of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Georgia.

^v Like the case of Azerbaijan and, although not former Soviet Republic, but federal subjects of Russian Federation, in the case of Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia.

^{vi} Like the case of Ukraine, Estonia, Georgia.

^{vii} Like the case of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, in which Russian Federation maintains military bases or forces without the countries acceptance.

^{viii} Russification is a policy that enforces traditional Russian values either domestically or internationally (<http://www.yourdictionary.com/russification>).

Korenization,ⁱ and Sovietization,ⁱⁱ collectivization of agriculture and forced industrialization, and finally the notorious forced labor camps for political prisoners and common criminals, which led to the Soviet genocide. All these set conditions for several conflicts in the Wider Black Sea Area (WBSA), which includes twelve countries around the Black Sea. The definition of this area and the geopolitical implications of the conflicts within it will be discussed later in the paper.

In the majority of these new states, the transition was highly problematic, with numerous socio-economic issues. Aside from the historical longer or shorter struggle of these new countries with the former sovereign, there were also conflicts between these new countries, and increasingly internal problems up to civil war. While some countries managed to escape from the RF influence, namely the three Baltic States, which joined NATO and the European Union in 2004, others remained to some extent under the RF influence, economic or even military. Caught between the ongoing West-East struggles, the former Soviet dominions were the greatest losers.

Several conflicts arose and remained “frozen” under the pressure of the RF and/or international community, without a definitive solution. A “frozen” conflict is one in which no violent fight is still occurring, although the tensions remain, and no political solution accepted by all sides is in place. Although a ceasefire agreement is imposed – usually, but not necessarily, in conjunction with the presence of an international force that supervises the buffer zone – it is still possible that a reduced number of victims still exist, while nationalist/patriotic speeches (official and unofficial) are often promoted. From the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which openly started in 1988, up to the current Ukrainian conflict, all will be presented in this paper in the quest of discovering a Russian pattern of intervention, if any.

ⁱ Korenization derived from Russian word *Korenizatsiya* meaning “nativization” or “indigenization”, literally “putting down roots”, or “root population” (<http://www.translationdirectory.com/glossaries/glossary196.htm>), which actually signifies to promote indigenous population on lower levels of state bureaucracy or even in central Soviet government, and to use local languages to the widest possible extent to prove the “universality” of the communist doctrine and to harmonize the ethnical relationships inside the Soviet Union.

ⁱⁱ Sovietization is a policy that enforces the Soviet cultural patterns or governmental policies (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sovietize>).

The recent Russian annexation of Crimea and the following ongoing Ukrainian crisis has become a new source of regional insecurity in the Wider Black Sea Area (WBSA). Aside from the international echoes and imposed sanctions to the Russian Federation, this new transnational threat could potentially reignite the “frozen” conflicts from the area, or start new ones with effects that could potentially spread worldwide.

Although it is not possible at the moment to conclude that the Russian actions have defensive or offensive posture, or to predict which former Soviet dominion will be next, if any, it is important to analyze and understand the Russian pattern in the previous cases. The purpose of the analysis is not to confirm a further “Russian Winter”ⁱ or to predict the Ukrainian conflict’s future outcome, nor to give an ultimate solution to solve it, but rather to frame it in a more coherent, although not exhaustive, understanding.

Despite the successful annexation of Crimea and some areas of eastern Ukraine, the Russian Federation will probably not continue the expansionist policy towards the West due to the loss of the strategic surprise. However, it will continue to support secessionist movements and the emergence of new crises in the former Soviet dominions in order to create a buffer zone, to protect its energy infrastructure and economic interests, and to maintain its prevailing place in a desired multipolar world. The RF will continue to use the protection of the Russian-speakers and their right to self-determination to justify its support to secessionist movements in the former Soviet Union dominions. The reason behind this is not necessarily to regain territorial control or to revive the former Russian Empire, but to maintain its influence in these countries and to protect its energy transport infrastructure, its last “weapon” in maintaining its global key posture.

ⁱ Unlike the 1968 “Prague Spring,” which was an attempt at freeing oneself from the Soviet Union influence, or the 2010 “Arab Spring,” which intended to be a democratization and liberalization of the Middle East countries in revolt against autocratic regimes, the purpose of the “Russian Winter” is to maintain or to return the former Soviet Republics under the RF influence.

Main actors

The current status of WBSA's "frozen" conflicts was influenced not only by the RF or its leaders, past or present, but also by other multiple actors with regional interests. None of these conflicts appeared overnight with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and none were solved by it. The roots of the region's conflicts go back in time and usually started with the particular moment in history when each dominion was occupied. Each conflict was influenced by the specific occupation policy presented above, and by each former dominion's different reactions to the policy.

In general, as in every other conflict in the world, there are four actors or groups of actors: the two antagonists directly involved in the conflict (in this case the RF and each former Soviet Republic), their neighbors, and the international community (including non-state actors), each with divergent interests and involved to different extents and in different ways. Among the international community, the most notable are the United States, NATO, and the European Union.

Driven by its exceptionalism policy and by the quest of maintaining a world leading role, as well as economic and military domination, the United States continues to apply, at least from the Russians' perspective, its containment policy against the RF. Moreover, the RF considered that NATO is the perfect instrument to fulfill this policy, while each former Soviet Republic that tries to join the Alliance is perceived by the RF as a direct threat to its security due to close proximity to its borders.¹ The EU's interests are both economic (obtain unrestricted access to a new emergent market) and strategic (preserve its energy security still highly reliant on resources of the RF). The RF, although the originator and principal responsible for the region conflicts, felt surrounded and forced to react to international pressures, which essentially contradict its interests

¹ In according with the last Russian Military Doctrine (December 19, 2014), which branded the expansion of NATO as a fundamental threat to Russia (<http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/international/europe/2014/12/28/new-russian-military-doctrine-labels-nato-main-threat/20966651/>).

(protect its energy infrastructure to maintain its global key posture). Finally, the former Soviet Republics are traversing a long transformation period in quest of their national identity. The dissolution of the Soviet Union encouraged their suppressed nationalism agenda and the formulation of new national interests. Trying to differentiate themselves from each other and to revert to their pre-Soviet identity or to shape a new identity freed from the RF influence, the former Soviet Republics looked for Western support to replace their extensive dependence on the RF. Encouraged by the West and hindered by the RF, the former Soviet Republics remain in a very vulnerable geo-political situation.

The research question

Regardless of the causes that led to several conflicts in the WBSA and the different level of the Russians' implication in them, why did the RF favor their conversion into a “frozen” status? This question includes three secondary research questions that underpin the defensive-offensive posture dilemma of the RF in the quest of protecting its vital strategic interests:

1. Is there a Russian pattern of intervention in all the “frozen” conflicts from the region?
2. Will one or more of the “frozen” conflicts re-emerge due to the Crimean precedent?
3. Will the Russian Federation start a new conflict?

Significance

One of the major concerns, and probably the most sacred role of any state is to provide security to their people. Aside from the protection of the core territory, in the RF case, genuine or at least proclaimed, the protection of the Russian-speakers/Russian ethnics from diaspora is another major concern or instigation for the Russian geopolitics. In three of four “frozen” conflicts from the WBSA (exception being the Nagorno-Karabakh) and in the ongoing Ukrainian crisis, the RF used the Russian-speakers/Russian ethnics' protection as a justification for its actions.

All these conflicts, aside from the internal misfortunate consequences, have also significant impacts on WBSA security and on world security as well. The main concern is that the “Russian Winter” could potentially spread to other former Soviet Republics, either to reignite the “frozen” conflicts, or to start new ones.

Limitations

The most significant limitation of this paper is the lack of access to primary sources from both western and eastern perspectives. Due to the lack of official documents, this analysis is not exhaustive, nor predictive because the Ukrainian conflict is ongoing, which can be subject to rapid and unforeseen changes that could have significant impacts on the other “frozen” conflicts from the WBSA. That is why the research will take into consideration the events that occurred up to the end of March 2015. Finally, the multiple actors with divergent interests could react illogically, rendering irrelevant the proposed conclusions, which should be considered possible effects, not solutions to solve the problems; thus the author acknowledges their caducous nature and the fact that their value is more theoretical rather than practical.

Research Methodology

A brief geo-political description of the WBSA will be used first to provide a contextual image of the region and its relevance. In addition, a chronological approach will be used to provide a clear historical image of the WBSA conflicts and to present their possible causes. It will be followed by a comparative method to determine if a possible Russian intervention pattern exists in all of the “frozen” conflicts to answer the primary question and three sub-questions. The implications for the WBSA regarding the possible future use of the Russian pattern of intervention in other former Soviet Republics will be analyzed counterclockwise, starting with the Baltic countries, to allow for a more explicitly geopolitical perspective on the analysis as each conflict affects and is affected by its neighbors. Although not part of the WBSA, the Central

Asian countries, as well as the Far South-East countries, and the Arctic region will also be included in the analysis to offer a possible perspective of the current RF global strategy. Finally, although not predictive, the conclusions will propose some findings from this overview of the conflicts from WBSA and their relevance to the region and world security.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Balkan and Caspian areas were the cradle of several nations, but also transient areas for several migratory ethnicities. A gate between the Occident and Orient, a crossroad of economic and geo-political interests, the region was a place of continuous fighting. Under increasing international and internal pressures, communism and the Soviet Union collapsed, generating new conflict hotbeds. Ancient ethnical issues, increasing socio-economical grievances, and political tensions broke out in the former Soviet Republics in the absence of a strong leadership that confined them, or a shared identity that overwrote the particular identity of the ethnicities within.

The Wider Black Sea Area (WBSA)

The definition of the area

Although it does not share a common cultural, linguistic, ethnical, or historical identity, the Wider Black Sea Area (WBSA) is a region that includes the six neighboring countries of the Black Sea (Ukraine, Russian Federation, Georgia, Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania), and six more other states (Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece, Moldova, and Serbia). Encompassing nearly 20 million square kilometers from two continents and almost 335 million people, WBSA is a transnational



Figure 1: The Wider Black Sea Area

politico-economical entity that shares common interests.ⁱ It was formally established in 1992 through the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). In 1999 it acquired international legal identity and was transformed into a full-fledged regional economic organization – the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation.¹ Its purpose is to “foster interaction and harmony among its members, as well as to ensure peace, stability and prosperity, encouraging friendly and good-neighborly relations in the Black Sea region.”²

The importance of the area

WBSA is a regional initiative that has an increasing international importance due to three factors: economic development potential, natural resources and energy supply, and geo-strategic location. Aside from the claimed cooperation, there are some internal tensions generated by the hegemonic tendencies of the RF and, to some extent, Turkey, and also external tensions generated by the competition or conflicting interests with other regional or international organizations like GUAM,ⁱⁱ Southeast European Cooperative Initiative, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Commonwealth of Independent States, or the newest Eurasian Economic Union, in which some of the WBSA countries are members too.

There is an economic competition among the RF and the EU, because both considered WBSA as an emergent market that must be conquered and/or maintained. Due to its influence in energy sector and its military capabilities, the RF is still able to economically control the north-east part of the WBSA despite the EU's opposition and desire. Beginning with the admission of Romania and Bulgaria to EU in 2007, the relations between EU and BSEC increased when EU adopted a regional cooperation initiative titled “Black Sea Synergy” as part of its European

ⁱ Agriculture and agro-industry, banking and finance, combating organized crime, culture, customs matters, education, emergency assistance, energy, environmental protection, exchange of statistical data and economic information, healthcare and pharmaceuticals, information and communication technologies, institutional renewal and good governance, science and technology, small and medium enterprises, tourism, trade and economic development and transport.

ⁱⁱ Organization for Democracy and Economic Development of Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova.

Neighborhood Policy (ENP). The RF disagreed with this proposed synergy because it emphasized, aside from the economic cooperation policies, the EU's efforts to solve the “frozen” conflicts from the region. Instead of this synergy, the RF and EU have a separate framework agreement, the four Common Spaces, which does not include the security issues of the region.³

There is also fluctuating energy cooperation between the RF and EU. WBSA is Europe's major transport and energy supplier, a sector that is still under the RF's quasi-control despite the other regional pipelines initiatives like BTC (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan), South Caucasus/BTE (Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum), Baku-Supsa, Trans-Caspian Gas, or the undermined Nabucco project and the uncertain TANAP (Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline), TAP (Trans Adriatic Pipeline), IAP (Ionian Adriatic Pipeline), ITGI (Interconnector Turkey-Greece-Italy), South Stream, or White Stream.



Figure 2: Russia-Europe gas pipelines⁴

Despite that not so many years ago, WBSA was irrelevant for NATO and the EU, currently it is their new strategic frontier. The recent “hard” security focus of the EU in an effort to become a relevant regional actor, and increasingly NATO's eastward expansion to gain former Soviet dominions, has created more tensions with the RF, itself in a quest to regain the influence in its lost satellites countries, or at least to maintain its buffer zone with the western world. Aside from being in the middle of the old West-East struggle, WBSA is also the main gateway to Europe of the trans-regional threat of fundamentalist terrorism and other Middle East security issues, and at the same time, an emerging transit hub of western capabilities to fight against these threats.

The conflicts from WBSA

Stagnant economy, social grievances, excessive military expenditure and focus,ⁱ ethnic fragmentation, and local nationalism of the fourteen autonomous republics of the Soviet Union increased internal pressures. Also, *Glasnost* (political openness) and *Perestroika* (economic restructuring) policies of Mikhail Gorbachev,ⁱⁱ its new moral approach,⁵ and international pressures, all led to the fall of communism in Europe by the end of 1989, and the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991.⁶ The transition towards democracy of the former Soviet Union Republics and communist satellite countries in Europe was a long and painful process that is not yet completed in several instances.⁷

“Liberated” from Soviet governance, voluntarily or not,ⁱⁱⁱ the former Soviet Republics faced several issues. Economically, they were still highly dependent on the old regime. Years of communist indoctrination altered the people’s history, mentality, and core values. Massive ethnic relocation negatively impacted the culture and traditions of the ethnicities. The more than 160 ethnic groups with different religion and beliefs rediscovered ancient hatred. Lack of the former Soviet Union’s military “umbrella” determined security concerns for its former dominions. Unemployment and other social problems increased. Politicians and governments, even if they lacked legitimacy and authority, perpetrated abuses.

All these circumstances caused several tensions that degenerated into military conflicts that eventually remained “frozen” despite political efforts to settle. In one form or another, varying from encouraging or supporting to starting the conflicts, the RF had a significant role. Currently there are four “frozen” conflicts in WBSA: Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Transdniestria, and Abkhazia. Although a RF internal problem, the Chechnya conflict could also be considered, to some extent, a “frozen conflict” case. Aside from that, the particular case of Crimea and the

ⁱ Including the loss of the Soviet-Afghan war.

ⁱⁱ The last leader of the Soviet Union.

ⁱⁱⁱ Like it was the case of Belarus and Kazakhstan.

ongoing conflict from eastern Ukraine are the ones that revived internationally the security issues of the region due to their possibility to reignite the previous mentioned crises or to start new ones. Each conflict has its particularities, although some characteristics are present in all of them due to the political, economic, or military implications of the RF. The common characteristics of the RF involvement in conflicts form a certain possible pattern that will be acknowledged later in the paper.

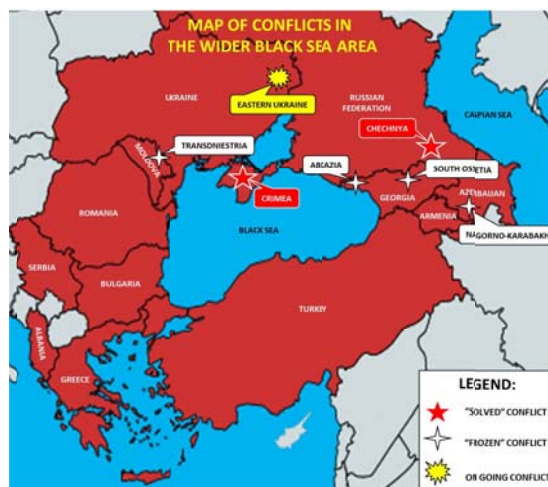


Figure 3: Map of WBSA conflicts

Nagorno-Karabakh case

The Nagorno-Karabakh case is the first one in the series, which actually precluded the fall of the Soviet Union that is considered the starting point or at least the favorable circumstance for the emergence of all the region's conflicts. It officially started on 20 February 1988 when the Soviet of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) requested transfer from the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic to the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic,⁸ but the roots of the conflict could be traced back in time.¹ While some scholars claimed ancient tensions between Azeri and Armenians, in reality, until 1905-1907, the clashes were against external threats.⁹

Sporadic fights between the Azeri and the Armenians in 1988 forced the Soviet Union to take political control over the region in 1989, and to intervene with troops in 1990. The declaration of independence of Armenia on 23 August 1990 was followed in January 1992 by a similar declaration of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR), while the conflict escalated into a full-scale military one. In May 1992 Armenia opened a corridor through Lachin, thus finally

¹ For historical background and the timeline of the conflict, see *Appendix A: Historical data about Nagorno-Karabakh and the timeline of the conflict* at page 51.

connecting NKR with Armenia. Fighting continued until 12 May 1994 when the final ceasefire agreement became effective.

The conflict left behind several thousand dead and wounded. Their number and the refugees or displaced persons' number increased each year after the imposed ceasefire.¹⁰ Numerous cases of ethnic cleansing were reported, thus increasing old tensions between Azeri and Armenians. Currently, approximately 14 percent of Azerbaijan's territory is still under Armenian's occupation/control.¹¹



Figure 4: Nagorno-Karabakh area¹²

The arbitrary decision to give Karabakh to Azerbaijan in 1921 could be considered the primary cause of the later conflict. Stalin, Commissar of Nationalities for the Soviet Union at that time, was possibly influenced in his decision by the necessity to placate Turkey, which supported Azerbaijan, and also by economic considerations (the possibility of losing control of oil in Azerbaijan).¹³ Basically, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is a geopolitical dispute generated by the perceived mythical importance of the region as a national identity cradle by both sides and also by the *Divide et Impera* (divide and rule) policy of the former Soviet Union, which supported both countries for different reasons (ethnic affinity in the case of Armenians, despite the committed genocides against them, and economic reason in the case of Azeri.) At the same time, the USSR sought to increase the quarrelling between them to forestall an advance in their individual secession tendencies as well as to weaken a possible alliance of the two opponents against the USSR itself.

From a legal point of view, in 1921, when Karabakh was arbitrarily given to Azerbaijan and in 1988, when the conflict broke out, both Armenia and Azerbaijan were members of the Soviet Union and therefore subject to its laws. According to the Soviet Constitution, territorial

borders were inviolate, unless the Soviet republics reached a mutual agreement on new borders and this agreement was approved by the Soviet Union. Despite Armenia and NKAO's request for transfer of authority, Azerbaijan disapproved it; therefore, the Soviet Union disregarded the request. After the fall of the Soviet Union, the situation remained unchanged, even as the former Soviet Republics become new independent countries, because the former borders were protected by international law (the controversial *uti possidetis juris*ⁱ.)¹⁴

To some extent, favorable political circumstances and ethno-religious differences could be considered secondary causes, but not as relevant as in the case of contemporary conflict in Yugoslavia. In 1988, due to the economic issues and newly political policies, the Soviet Union was not able anymore to effectively control its dominions, thus allowing them to openly express their secessionist tendencies and nationalist discourses. Collective memories of the past genocides, although more committed by external actors (Ottomans and Russians) rather than the other side, also fueled the tensions between Christian Armenians and Turkic Azeri, but were considered more related to political causes than to ethno-religious differences. In effect, none of these secondary causes were emphasized in political discourse or used as official justification by the sides involved in conflict, which focused more on the historical rights over the disputed territory.

This situation also influenced the outcome of the conflict. The feeble and ineffective international response was primarily determined by the focus on the Bosnia case, and by the fact that the NKR conflict was in the strategic space of the RF. Without dedicated assets and procedures to solve this type of crisis, the international community refrained from applying harder pressures not only because of the RF opposition or involvement in the area, but also

ⁱ *Uti possidetis juris* (UPJ) is a principle of customary international law that serves to preserve the boundaries of colonies emerging as States. According to this principle, borders of newly sovereign states are established on the basis of their previous administrative frontiers. In essence, it requires the maintenance of the territorial status quo to preserve stability, order and traditional legal boundaries (http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/uti_possidetis_juris).

because of its economically based interests in the area (oil dependency at first, and market opportunities, later).

South Ossetia and Abkhazia case

The first phase of this conflict emerged in July 1989 when the Abkhazians-Georgians dispute turned violent in Sukhumi and Ochamchira. South Ossetia's conflict emerged on 10 November 1989 when the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast requested to upgrade its status to autonomous republic, but the request was denied by Georgia. On 20 September 1990, South Ossetia proclaimed its independence. Civilian clashes led to deaths on both sides, but as in the Nagorno-Karabakh case, the roots of the conflict could be traced back in time.ⁱ Despite the Soviet troops' intervention in 1991 to calm the situation, fighting continued until June 1992 when a ceasefire agreement was signed, which ended the first phase of the Georgia-South Ossetia conflict. On 23 July 1992, Abkhazia declared its independence from Georgia and Georgian forces intervened in August. Fighting continued until May 1994 when a ceasefire agreement was signed, which ended the first phase of the Georgia-Abkhazia's conflict.



Figure 5: South Ossetia and Abkhazia area¹⁵

Tensions arose again in May 1998 in Gali, and later in October 2001 in Kodori when fighting resumed between Abkhaz troops and Georgian paramilitaries until October 2002. In South Ossetia, the second phase began in June 2004 when Georgian police forces along with the Joint Peacekeeping Force of Ossetians, Russians and Georgians confronted South Ossetian militiamen and mercenaries from Russia until another ceasefire agreement was established in August 2004.

ⁱ For historical background and the timeline of the conflict, see *Appendix B: Historical data about South Ossetia and Abkhazia and the timeline of the conflict* at page 54.

Rife infringement of the ceasefire agreement and lack of a definitive political solution led to the third phase of the conflict, the “five-day war” on 7-12 August 2008. As in 1992, the RF military forces intervened and defeated the Georgian Army. Another ceasefire agreement was enforced until presently.¹⁶ Until 14 December 2014, the Six-Point Agreement of 12 August 2008 was supervised by the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM).¹⁷

The EU Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (IIFFMCG) acknowledged in its report from September 2009 that the 2008 conflict from Georgia is the culminating point of old local tensions and incidents.¹⁸ The Georgianization policy applied to Ossetians and Abkhazians was an important driver to conflict, but not the main one.¹⁹ Some old hatred generated by the past atrocities, ethnic, and cultural discriminations, inflamed the local nationalism, but as in the Nagorno-Karabakh case, the locals were able to surpass it and to coexist peacefully for a long time.²⁰

Moreover, according to the 1989 Soviet census, both minorities were the less numerous in Georgia, namely 3.04 percent (Ossetians) and 1.77 percent (Abkhazians), behind Armenians (8.10 percent), Russians (6.32 percent), and Azeri (5.69 percent). With only 17.76 percent, Abkhazians were not even the majority in Abkhazia; rather, the majority was Georgians (45.68 percent). By contrast, in South Ossetia, Ossetians were majoritarian with 66.21 percent, followed by Georgians with 28.97 percent. But almost 60 percent of the Ossetians from Georgia live outside South Ossetia, while only 3 percent of the Abkhazians from Georgia live outside Abkhazia.²¹ Paradoxically, due to common perceived identity, Georgians acknowledged more the Abkhazians’ cause, rather than that of the Ossetians, who are not perceived as indigenous.²² Also, religion was not a driver of conflict, but an asset to settle the conflict because the majority of the Abkhazians,ⁱ Ossetians, and Georgians are Christian Orthodox.²³

ⁱ The majority of Abkhazians from diaspora, however, is Muslim.

The geo-political divergences are a more important driver to conflict.²⁴ The mutually exclusive history promoted by Georgians, on one side, and Ossetians and Abkhazians, on the other side, triggered the secessionist movements due to political divergences regarding the areas' control. Less than 30 percent of the South Ossetia territory is currently under Georgian control. In the rest of the South Ossetia territory, almost all citizens have Russian citizenship due to the “passportization” policy of the RF.ⁱ The situation is similar in Abkhazia, where the Georgians' control is virtually non-existent. Georgia wants to maintain its territorial integrity and sovereignty. Abkhazia wants independence to preserve its proclaimed ancient heritage. South Ossetia wants independence to unite later with North Ossetia-Alania.²⁵ The RF will not allow this because it is concerned about a future secessionist movement of a united Ossetia. On the other side, the RF supports South Ossetia and Abkhazia secessionist movements to balance the US/NATO and EU influence and expansion in the area, and to maintain its buffer zone with these two organizations.

US/NATO and the EU have geo-political and economic interests in Georgia. They want to minimize the RF's influence in the area and the EU's energy dependency on the RF. The EU also acknowledges Georgia as a new emergent market. South Ossetia and Abkhazia relied economically on the RF, and remained an important organized crime center and an entrance point to the Caucasus region, as Transdniestria is to Europe.²⁶

Georgia's affiliation to GUAM and its break with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the RF's regional initiative, and the later Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), inflated regional tensions. The desired Caspian energy transport projects excluding the RF, the increasing US economic and military involvement in the area starting with the Rose Revolution from 2003, and the possible admission in NATO of Georgia in 2008, also contributed to the RF predictable response in protecting its interests.²⁷ Gazprom later invested in the South Ossetia area to build the

ⁱ The RF's policy to issue Russian passports to the former Soviet Republics' citizens.

Dzuarikau–Tskhinval gas pipeline. Both breakaway provinces use the ruble as their local currency and more than 2/3 of their budget comes from the RF as special subsidization. Georgia itself was heavily dependent on Russia for its energy supply until Caspian alternatives were built starting with 1999 (Baku-Supsa) and 2005 (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan). The RF troops had operated in Georgia since the early 1990s, and were regularly accused by Georgia of siding with the separatists.²⁸ On 18 March 2014, the RF signed the “treaty of alliance and integration” with Abkhazia. One year later, the RF signed a similar treaty with South Ossetia.²⁹ Potentially, although not supported by international law, the RF could use these treaties in the future to officially annex the breakaway republics, while it already recognized their independence in 2008.

A large number of casualties and displaced personnel, extensive economic losses, and social problems decreased chances for a diplomatic settlement of the conflicts, of the kind that occurred in the case of the non-violent conflict in the Autonomous Republic of Adjara from south-west Georgia in 2004. While Abkhazia is self-sufficient with regard to food and electricity,³⁰ South Ossetia is an extremely poor region that is water dependent on Georgia. Even if the international community reacted more than in the Nagorno-Karabakh case, *de facto* annexation of both breakaway provinces by the RF was possible because the international community was more focused on the Kosovo case.³¹

Moreover, aside from increasing cooperation with the two republics, the RF initially used in its rhetoric the Kosovo precedent as a model to solve the conflicts. Contrary to its intended purpose (due to the extensive human and economic losses), the Kosovo case did not restrain the RF from intervening when it considered that its strategic interests were hindered. Moreover, the international community’s inefficient response in Kosovo actually encouraged the RF to intervene in what it considered its own strategic space. But the RF later refined its rhetoric because it is in a delicate situation with respect to the Kosovo case. On the one hand, the ethnic Russians from former dominions, supported by the RF, can use Kosovo as justification to secede,

but on the other hand, it could be a huge problem if other ethnicities within the RF (like Chechens, or one of the other 160 ethnic groups within the RF) use the same argument to secede from the RF.

Transdnistria and Gagauzia case

As in the previous cases, the Transdnistrian conflict appeared due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In June 1990, the former Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic, which included Transdnistria, proclaimed its sovereignty under the name of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova (SSRM). Fearing a declaration of independence and a future union with Romania, ethnic Slavs (Russians and Ukrainians) from Transdnistria proclaimed their sovereignty under the name of the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR). On 27 August 1991 SSRM became an independent and sovereign state under the name of Republic of Moldova, while PMR proclaimed its independence as well. Political tensions escalated into a military conflict between March-July 1992 when a ceasefire was enforced by the RF until currently.ⁱ



Figure 6: Transdnistria and Gagauzia area³²

Due to an ongoing Russification process, the region's demographic structure and cultural identity have been drastically altered. Comparing the 1936 and 2004 census data from Transdnistria, Moldovans decreased from 41.8 percent to 31.9 percent, Russians increased from 14.2 percent to 30.4 percent, as well as other ethnics from 6.4 percent to 8.9 percent, while Ukrainians remained almost constant from 28.7 percent to 28.8 percent.³³ Although the political decision to change the official language from Russian to Romanian is the proclaimed starting point of the conflict, as in the previous cases, ethnic divergences are not the main driver to

ⁱ For historical background and the timeline of the conflict, see *Appendix C: Historical data about Transdnistria and Gagauzia and the timeline of the conflict* at page 58.

conflict. Indeed, preservation of the linguistic identity concerned more Russian ethnics, rather than Moldovans. As in the case of the Georgian and Ukrainian conflicts, locals usually speak the Russian language, but Russian ethnics usually do not speak the locals' languages. Beside this, there were no other Moldovan-Slav divergences because the reported past atrocities concerned Romanians and Jews, not Moldovans and Slavs. Also, although Moldovans were the largest single ethnic group, Slavs (combined Russian and Ukrainian ethnics) were majoritarian, while the differences between ethnics' percentages is insignificant, thus "oppression" of the Slav/Russian/Ukrainian minority is not accurate.³⁴

In fact, Moldovans were more victims of the cultural "oppression", rather than Slavs. But on the other side, the Moldovan culture and identity, as currently presented, are artificial, because they cannot be really separated from the Romanian culture and identity. This local identity that competes with the Romanian one is actually encouraged by the RF, who prefers a weak Moldovan identity with extensive Russian influences. This situation is highly visible on the media market that is heavily dominated by the Russian language content (newspapers, TV and radio stations, cable providers with predominant Russian channels, cinemas, advertising, etc.). Also, Moldovan identity in Transdnistria is not perceived, including by Moldovans, as a native one due to the arbitrary creation of the former republic by the Soviet Union.³⁵

But a more important driver to conflict than ethno-cultural-linguistic divergences is the politic-economic divergences between Moldovans, Russians, Ukrainians, and Gagauzians.³⁶ In its relations with the RF, Moldova is concerned about the status of the Russian 14th Army (in the meantime rebranded as peacekeeping forces, or the Operational Group of Russian Forces in Moldova) that has hindered its independence and western approach, which the RF wants to

prevent.ⁱ Transdnistria, and to some extent Moldova, are economically dependent on the RF, especially for energy. The RF wants to maintain this dependency. In relation with Ukraine, Moldova is concerned about a possible territorial claim over Transdnistria due to Ukraine's historical rights.ⁱⁱ The reality is that, prior to the current conflict on its territory, Ukraine was more concerned about customs and border issues with Transdnistria generated by the corruption, the very active organized crime and paramilitary forces from there, rather than about its political annexation, despite the claimed historical rights over it. Currently, due to its western orientation and Crimean precedent, Ukraine is more concerned about a possible RF military attack coming from Transdnistria as a secondary direction, or in combined operations with forces from eastern Ukraine, and Crimea. In relations with the autonomous, but not breakaway region of Gagauzia, Moldova wants to preserve its sovereignty. In Gagauzia live a homogenous group of Turkic-speaking Orthodox Christian people,ⁱⁱⁱ which in the Gagauzia's referendum in February 2014 reaffirmed its right to secede from Moldova in the case of reunification with Romania.³⁷

The unstable political situation is also favored by the last Moldovan parliamentary election from November 2014 which, in the absence of an elected majority, instituted an unusual coalition from the major political parties regardless of their political orientation. Although in theory this politically correct representation is a good sign of democracy, in practice it will create a political gridlock and it will enhance economic grievances in what is already the "poorest country in Europe" according to their GDP^{iv} per capita.³⁸ Also, it will certainly increase the already

ⁱ RF's approach, the "Kozak memorandum" from 2003, is a solid proof of this assumption (William H. Hill, *Russia, the Near Abroad, and the West: Lessons from the Moldova-Transdnistria Conflict* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012)).

ⁱⁱ Currently, Moldova is also concerned that the RF could "offer" Transdnistria to Ukraine as partial compensation for the loss of Crimea.

ⁱⁱⁱ The situation of Gagauzians is almost similar with the one of Abkhazians in Georgia. In according with the Moldovan 2004 census, Gagauzians' ethnics are only 4,4 percent of Moldova's population, while 82,1 percent of them live in Gagauzia

(http://www.statistica.md/public/files/Recensamint/Recensamintul_populatiei/vol_1/6_Nationalitati_de_baza_ro.xls)

^{iv} Gross Domestic Product.

powerful reach of organized crime from its territory. Subsequently, this will increase social tensions that could lead to open conflicts.³⁹

Chechnya case

Understanding the complexity of the conflicts within WBSA is incomplete without the cases from North Caucasus area. From a legal point of view, they are part of the RF, thus their status and the RF's attitude and response is different from the one concerning the former Soviet dominions. The most well-known conflict from the North Caucasus region is the Chechnya-RF one, although a mixture of secessionist movements with insurgency and terrorist activities of radical Islamists is also present in Kabardino-Balkaria (KBR), North Ossetia–Alania, Ingushetia, and Dagestan.

Due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, former Soviet military officer Dzhokhar Dudayev declared an independent nation-state, the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, in 1991. Due to the fact that internal opposition backed by the RF was ineffective, the RF employed military and security forces to suppress the secessionist movement, thus officially starting the first Chechen-RF war in December 1994. The intended short conventional operation met with guerrilla warfare conducted by Chechen rebels, which led to thousands of deaths on both sides and numerous displaced persons. Eventually, Russian forces withdrew from Chechnya and signed the Khasavyurt Accord in 1996, which recognized the *de facto* independence of Chechnya. Although fearless in battles, Chechens proved less capable in administrative matters. In effect, the economy collapsed, warlords and organized crime rose, and extensive social problems appeared.



Figure 7: North Caucasus area⁴⁰

In an attempt to settle the situation, the newly elected President Maskhadov imposed Islamic law in 1999, while Chechen fighters crossed into Dagestan in an attempt to recreate the former Islamic Imamate, which triggered the second Chechen war. In September 1999, Russian forces redeployed in Chechnya in what was officially referred to as a “counter-terrorist operation.” Applying almost the same tactics as the Chechen rebels, the RF forces managed to create conditions for local elections, and on 23 March 2003, a referendum approved a republic constitution that placed Chechnya back in the RF. But fighting continued in Chechnya, and spread to Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and North Ossetia. Several terrorist attacks have been conducted, including in RF. Although the second Chechen-RF war did not officially end with an agreement,ⁱ fighting decreased progressively after Putin nominated Ramzan Kadyrov as Chechnya’s President on 1 March 2007. This reoriented the fight from Russian-Chechen to intra-Chechen.⁴¹

The two Chechen warsⁱⁱ were not the only conflicts from the region. Moreover, conflicts exist not only between the Russian ethnics and the other ethnics from the region, but between other ethnicities from the region as well. Due to the RF’s 1991 Law on the Rehabilitation of the Repressed Peoples, several ethnic tensions and cleavages emerged between Ossetians and Ingush, between Kabardins and Balkars, around the Aukhovsky district of Dagestan, and among groups in Stavropol Krai. For example, the East Prigorodny conflict between local Ingush and Ossetian paramilitary forces was an inter-ethnic conflict in the eastern part of the Prigorodny district in the Republic of North Ossetia–Alania, which started in 1989 and developed, in 1992, into a brief ethnic war with hundreds of victims and thousands of displaced. The regional tensions are also generated by the fight between the prevalence of the Circassian (in west part of the region) and Cossack (mainly in the south-east part of the region) identities.

ⁱ However, Kremlin formally ended the counterterrorism operation in 2009.

ⁱⁱ For historical background and the timeline of the conflict, see *Appendix D: Historical data about Chechnya and the timeline of the conflict* at page 60.

The main problem of the area is that, despite similarities, the many North Caucasus ethnics do not share a common identity. The Russian language is the main binding material, while ethnicity, religion,⁴² and culture are drivers to conflict, as well as the economic grievances, political differences, and social problems that fueled local insurgency and extremism beside the organized crime. Unresolved territorial disputes, unequal level of access to resources, uneven development of the provinces, extensive institutional corruption, the existence of parallel administration, and an ineffective and confusing judicial system⁴³ are among the many local problems that increase regional insecurity and risk of cross-border terrorist activities, while creating a safe haven for terrorist organizations and transnational organized crime.⁴⁴

Ukraine case⁴⁵

The ongoing Ukrainian conflict is the last one in this series, and probably the outcome will be identical with the others, namely it will be suspended into a “frozen” status.⁴⁶ There were three separate, but related phases of the Ukrainian conflict. The first phase, the regime topple, began in November 2013 when Viktor Yanukovich, the Ukrainian President, re-pivoted towards the RF despite the population’s desire towards the EU association agreement. The protest movement from the “EuroMaidan” Square was bloodily oppressed by Ukrainian police forces in February 2014. The international community banned the intervention and accused Yanukovich of genocide. Fearing for his life, he fled Ukraine to shelter in the Russian Federation. Oleksandr Turchynov acted as the interim president until the election of the current President, Petro Poroshenko on 25 May 2014.

In exile, Yanukovich requested the RF help to regain power, thus starting phase two of the Ukrainian conflict, the invasion of the Crimean Peninsula. By the end of February 2014, pro-Russian gunmen (the “little green men”) completely seized Crimea. The former Crimean autonomous government was dismissed and a referendum on Crimea joining Russia was held on

16 March 2014. Despite the international community's declaration of the referendum as illegitimate, the new Crimean Parliament declared independence from Ukraine and asked to join the RF. Crimea was absorbed into the RF two days later, despite the international community's formal opposition (*United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/262*, which declared the Crimean referendum invalid and the incorporation of Crimea into the RF illegal).⁴⁷



Figure 8: Ukraine area⁴⁸

The conflict continued in April 2014 with phase three, when pro-Russian protesters from eastern Ukraine occupied government buildings in Donetsk, Luhansk, and Kharkiv requesting autonomy. In response, the new Ukrainian authorities began “anti-terrorism” operations. Several atrocities have been committed by both sides resulting in more than 5,000 victims, including the shooting down of a Malaysian aircraft with 298 civilians aboard. The international community negotiated a fragile ceasefire, which was often violated by both sides.⁴⁹

But this short timelineⁱ is only the last part of an ancient conflict. The conflict began with ethno-political tensions between Ukrainians and Russians over their common cradle: the Khazar Khaganate/Kievan Rus. Starting in the ninth century, Ukrainians, the descendants of the former Turkic Cumans/Cossacks/Khazars population fought against the Russians, the descendants of the former Slavic Varangians/Rus population, to preserve their cultural identity. Although they were sequentially conquered by proto-Russians, Mongols, Polish/Lithuanians, Turks, Tatars, and ultimately again by Soviet Russians, the Ukrainians managed to preserve some of their national identity, but with an enormous cost. Among its struggling history, *Holodomor*ⁱⁱ remained in the

ⁱ For the timeline of the conflict, see *Appendix F: The timeline of the conflict from Ukraine* at page 63.

ⁱⁱ *Holodomor* originates from the Ukrainian words *gholod* and *mor*, which mean hunger and plague, respectively. The term may have also been originated directly from the expression *moryty gholodom*, which means "to inflict death by hunger." The Ukrainian famine (1932-1933) was caused by the policies of the government of the Soviet Union under

Ukrainians' collective memory the most prominent mark and the darkest effect of the Russification. Korenization and the Soviet Union's gift of the Crimean Peninsula in 1954,ⁱ although they enhanced Ukrainian nationalism and culture, were feeble compensations unable to erase the ancient hatred against the Russians.

Yet even in this case, ethnic divergence between Ukrainians and Russians is not the sole explanation of the ongoing Ukrainian conflict.⁵⁰ Another major cause is the economic and social problems generated by the lack of government capacity to provide vital/basic needs due to extensive corruption, misrepresentation, and mismanagement.⁵¹ Despite the slow growth of the GDP per capita and the number of employed persons, the increased inflation rate, government budget deficit, personal income tax rate, balance of trade deficit, and the low rate of attracting foreign investments determined a growing discontentment of the population.⁵² The overall economic dependency on the RF, together with the uncompetitive and declining Ukrainian economy, was largely perceived by the population as a direct cause of the Yanukovych regime and its Ukrainian eastern area associates corruption policy.

Another major cause for the popular uprising was the political issues generated by both internal and external pressures. Internally, although the public initially supported Yanukovych in the 2010 presidential election, the subsequent increased corruption, human rights violations, and inefficient economic policies led to popular opposition to the Yanukovych Party of Regions. Externally, the mutually exclusive and economically unbalanced European Union (EU) and Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) association agreement put tremendous international pressure on

Joseph Stalin, and is sometimes referred to as the Ukrainian Genocide (http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Ukrainian_Famine).

ⁱ Crimean Peninsula is a former Tatar Khanate protected by Ottoman Empire until 1783 when it was conquered by Russian Empire and included in the Taurida Governorate. In 1954, the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union led by Nikita Khrushchev transferred the region to Ukraine (David Austin Walsh, "What You Need to Know About Crimea: An Interview with Charles E. King," *Historynewsnetwork.org*, February 27, 2014 <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/154867>).

the Ukrainian leader who chose the EEU option, thus fueling western Ukrainian unwillingness to revert to the RF's political serfdom in exchange for economic benefits.⁵³

On top of these causes, the later RF's military assistance for Crimean secession and subsequently for eastern Ukrainian pro-Russian protesters raised tensions and violence up to a civil war level, and decreased the chances of diplomatic settlement of the conflict. Unfortunately, but as foreseen, international economic sanctions and pressures on the RF did not suffice to stop the violence in eastern Ukraine or the unofficial Russian military aid to it. Moreover, the economic sanctions strengthened Russian propaganda and information operations to further justify internal Russian nationalist rhetoric and the necessity of protecting external ethnic Russians "oppressed by western imperialism" and by an "illegitimate/neo-Nazi regime." Diplomatic efforts were equally unsuccessful not only because the *de facto* Russian control in Crimea is unlikely to revert by political actions alone, but also because in eastern Ukraine there appeared several uncontrolled para-military forces on both sides with their own agenda, which render impossible an effective ceasefire agreement.⁵⁴

THE RUSSIAN PATTERN OF INTERVENTION

The conflicts in the WBSA followed a pattern: newly independent Soviet successor states or their internal "autonomies" challenge the artificial borders imposed by the Kremlin during the Soviet era; national minorities or other "identity" groups that populate these enclaves wage a battle for self-determination and independence from the state, which in turn cracks down on the secessionist movement in a protracted campaign of repression and outright warfare; in some cases, neighboring "mother countries" actively support the cause of their ethnic kin in the disputed territory.⁵⁵

In response, the RF used its own pattern of intervention. Its pattern is actually an evolving pattern because it is constantly adapting and improving with each conflict that it faces. The

changing nature of the regional conflicts, different levels of the RF's involvement and interests in them, different RF administrations' approaches, the necessity of managing multiple conflicts in different stages in the same time, different interests and responses from the parties involved in conflicts, and competing interests and different international community responses, all these influenced the RF's regional strategy and foreign policy. While at first, due to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the RF had to manage its own internal struggle and was not able to focus on its former dominions, after 1999, when Vladimir Putin came to power, the situation changed.

Almost 75 years of Soviet communism replaced the *Rossyian* national identity of the old Russian Empire, which bound the locals to the Tsar and their homeland despite ethnic affiliation or religious beliefs, with the Soviet patriotism generated by the communist ideology, which emphasized the role of communism in linking the multi-ethnic identities (socialist nationalities) from the vast territory of the country. To maintain the civic Soviet Union, Stalin used deportation and relocation of the ethnic groups, and arbitrarily created heterogeneously ethnic Soviet Socialist Republics in which he enforced Sovietization. He did that to prevent the possible nationalism movements of the homogeneously ethnic population. This strategy was successful as long as the communism remained enforced, but due to Gorbachev's policies, the tensions generated by nationalism reappeared. After the fall of the communism, while the former dominions seceded, another identity emerged, the Great Russian (*Velikoruss*) identity, with its national core built around the Russian language and culture.⁵⁶ While many RF elites favor this approach, the current RF President Putin favors more the old *Rossyian* approach because in his opinion, the *Velikoruss* identity will only encourage more secessionism of the other ethnic groups from RF.⁵⁷

The pattern of intervention in the regional conflicts closely followed the different administrations' approach. While a reformer in foreign policy, Gorbachev used in internal policy the old Soviet method: the use of military forces in Nagorno-Karabakh (1990) and Georgia

(1991) to fulfill national interests (maintain the sovereignty of the Soviet Union). His successor, Boris Yeltsin, used the same method in the internal problem of Chechnya (1991), but disguised the military use of force in the case of South Ossetia (1992),ⁱ Transdniestria (1992),ⁱⁱ and Abkhazia (1994)ⁱⁱⁱ as “peacekeeping” forces to protect RF interests in the “near abroad” areas.^{iv} His strategy was actually aligned with the international trend, which was focused more on “peacekeeping” missions rather than conventional warfare. Moreover, he used the same approach even in the case of Kosovo (1999), almost creating the first NATO-Russia incident after the end of the Cold War.⁵⁸ Putin-Medvedev “tandemocracy”⁵⁹ further refined the technique and beside the strict use of conventional military forces combined with a coordinated cyberspace domain attack,⁶⁰ like in Georgia (2008), introduced in the case of Ukraine (2014) “the little green man”,⁶¹ and “the fifth column”,⁶² as part of a mastermind campaign⁶³ of hybrid war to fulfill the RF’s national interests (protect the abroad Russian-speaking population).⁶⁴

In fact, there are two distinct stages in the WBSA conflicts. The first stage, which encompasses the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (1988-1994), the first South Ossetia and Abkhazia conflicts (1989-1994), the Transdniestria conflict (1992), and the first Chechnya conflict (1994-96), is characterized by the fact that the RF was forced to react due to the nationalist movements.

ⁱ The Joint Peacekeeping Force included the Russian, Ossetian, and Georgian troops, which had been deployed along the South Ossetian border under the Dagomys Agreements signed by Eduard Shevardnadze and Boris Yeltsin on July 14, 1992. The Russian troops are part of the 4th Base (Viktor Litovkin, “20th anniversary of the Russian peacekeeping mission in South Ossetia: Hysteries in Tbilisi,” in *Valdai Discussion Club*, August 2, 2012, http://valdaiclub.com/near_abroad/47200.html).

ⁱⁱ On July 21, 1992, the Russian 14th Army’s intervention in the Transdniestria conflict forced Republic of Moldova to accept the deployment of Russian “peacekeeping” units (Vladimir Socor, “Twenty Years of Russian ‘Peacekeeping’ in Moldova,” in *The Jamestown Foundation*, July 27, 2012, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=39687&cHash=81648f1a75be687fe165de82d79b0638](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=39687&cHash=81648f1a75be687fe165de82d79b0638)).

ⁱⁱⁱ A Russian peacekeeping contingent was deployed in the summer of 1994 under the aegis of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), two months after the signing of a UN-brokered cease-fire agreement between Georgia and Abkhazia (“What Could Replace Russian Peacekeepers In Georgia’s Breakaway Regions?” in *Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty*, August 20, 2008, http://www.rferl.org/content/What_Could_Replace_Russian_Peacekeepers_In_Breakaway_Regions/1192520.html).

^{iv} The term “near abroad” (*blizhneye zarubezhiye*) was coined in the 1990s by a Russian foreign minister to describe the fourteen other former Soviet republics that had declared their independence by the time the Soviet Union broke up at the end of 1991 and represents the official Russian regional “sphere of influence” (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/513251/Russia/274475/Ethnic-relations-and-Russias-near-abroad>).

Weakened by the Soviet dissolution, the RF's chosen solution was to "freeze" the conflicts to exploit them later when the situation would be more permissive. The Kosovo war from 1999 and the RF's regime change created these favorable conditions. In effect, the second Chechnya War that began in 1999 marked the transition to the second stage, which encompasses the second and third South Ossetia and Abkhazia conflicts from 2004 and 2008, and the Ukraine conflict that began at the end of 2013, in which the RF used the "frozen" conflict in a more pro-active form, as a geopolitical weapon to counteract internal dissidence or perceived western containment.

The subversive approach of President Putin was influenced not only by his former training as a KGBⁱ officer, but also by his wish to "sell" to the international community a more acceptable perception of the RF, away from the old brute-force image. As a winner of the internal fight with the nostalgic communists and the post-Soviet personal profit oriented oligarchs, despite widespread corruption,⁶⁵ Putin managed to hold together the RF multi-ethnic colossus and even to develop it economically until the international economic crisis of 2008.⁶⁶ Internally, he continued to use authoritarian methods, including imprisoning or killing regime opponents,⁶⁷ that were questionable from an internal perspective and contested from the international community's perspective, but until Crimea's case, he carefully calibrated the RF foreign policy. Some suggested that he only bought time in his neo-imperialistic attempt to revive Russian exceptionalism,⁶⁸ while others suggested that he just wanted to protect what is left from "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century" (as Putin considered the Soviet Union collapse),⁶⁹ and to replace the US world dominance with a more equitable balance of power, a multipolar world in which the RF will maintain a privileged place aside PRC, India, and other emergent global powers.⁷⁰

ⁱ KGB (*Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti*, English Committee for State Security), was the foreign intelligence and domestic security agency of the Soviet Union. During the Soviet era the KGB's responsibilities also included the protection of the country's political leadership, the supervision of border troops, and the general surveillance of the population (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/315989/KGB>).

Putin acknowledges regional “frozen” conflicts not as regional security problems to solve, but as tools that could help him achieve his policy objectives.⁷¹ In rough and oversimplified terms, Putin’s policy is to counteract the internal opposition that could prevent him from remaining empowered, maintaining the RF’s sphere of influence in its buffer-zone with NATO (the former Soviet dominions), and reasserting for the RF a privileged place in a multipolar world.

In consequence, the RF strategy regarding the “frozen” conflicts was a combination of “soft” and “hard” approaches. The veto right in UN Security Council is one of the “soft” methods used by the RF to protect its interests. The RF uses its right to block the UN Chapter VII Resolutionsⁱ that could hinder its interests. Four UN Security Council Resolutions were adopted regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh case in 1993 (822, 853, 874, and 884), but none implied a military response.⁷² Forty-two UN Security Council Resolutions were adopted regarding the Abkhazia/Georgia case referring to the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG),ⁱⁱ but the RF deployed its own separate peacekeeping mission to maintain control over the area. The RF agreed with UNOMIG until 15 June 2009 when it vetoed UNOMIG’s extension due to the RF’s military implication in Georgian conflict. No UN Security Council Resolution has been adopted regarding the South Ossetia, Transdniestria, and Chechnya cases. The RF blocked a UN Security Council Resolution regarding Crimea,⁷³ but the non-binding UN General Assembly Resolution 68/262/2014 condemning the Crimean referendum has been adopted.ⁱⁱⁱ There were adopted, however, two UN Security Council Resolutions regarding

ⁱ Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations decides what measures shall be taken to maintain or restore international peace and security (<http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter7.shtml>).

ⁱⁱ Starting with 1993 (849, 854, 858, 876, 881, 892), 1994 (896, 901, 906, 934, 937), 1995 (971, 993), 1996 (1065, 1077, 1036), 1997 (1096, 1124), 1998 (1150, 1187), 1999 (1225, 1255), 2000 (1287, 1311), 2001 (1339, 1364), 2002 (1393, 1427), 2003 (1462, 1494), 2004 (1524, 1554), 2005 (1582, 1615), 2006 (1656, 1666, 1716), 2007 (1752, 1781), 2008 (1808, 1839), and ending with 2009 (1866).

ⁱⁱⁱ The UN General Assembly Resolutions are not subject to any member veto, but unlike Security Council, General Assembly has no power to apply general international law, therefore its recommendations do not produce legal effects (Marko Divac Öberg, “The Legal Effects of Resolutions of the UN Security Council and

Ukraine in 2014 (2202, 2166), both condemning the shoot-down of Malaysian flight MH-17 in the eastern part of Ukraine.

Political support of secessionist movements is another “soft” method used by the RF to fulfill its national interests in relation with its former dominions. The first step is to support the empowerment of a local leader who is under the RF control and/or supports the RF initiatives, and who is helped by the RF “senior advisers” and/or a various percent of the RF bureaucracy. Alexander Ankvab (Abkhazia),⁷⁴ Leonid Tibilov (South Ossetia),⁷⁵ Sergei Aksyonov (Crimea),⁷⁶ Igor Smirnov and Yevgeny Shevchuk (Transdnistria),⁷⁷ and Ramzan Kadyrov (Chechnya),⁷⁸ are examples to prove this assumption. The next step is to enforce cooperation treaties with these leaders and their breakaway territories. In a more overt or covert approach, the RF used its political power to leverage regional balance of power. While the RF openly recognized the independence of the breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008, and the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, and signed treaties with Abkhazia and Crimea in 2014 and with South Ossetia in 2015, in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh and the eastern part of Ukraine (Novorossya), the RF’s political support is more covert, although visible.

Political support is linked with another “soft” method: economic investments. All the breakaway republics are in various percentages economic and energy dependent on the RF. Although the RF’s financial support decreased in all “frozen” conflicts due to the current the RF’s economic difficulties, in the breakaway regions, the RF still provides administrative support, salaries and pension payments, public services, basic healthcare, energy supply at a discount price, and food supply.

But the best RF economic tool to leverage a political agenda is energy dependency. The RF uses energy as a geopolitical weapon not only against distant European and Asian markets to

General Assembly in the Jurisprudence of the International Court of Justice,” in *The European Journal of International Law*, vol. 16, no. 5, 2006, <http://www.ejil.org/pdfs/16/5/329.pdf>).

maintain its global influence, but also against the former dominions' markets. This weapon also serves to counteract dissident tendencies, like that of RF's closest ally, Belarus which, through the voice of its president Alyaksandr Lukashenka,⁷⁹ “the last dictator in Europe”, is contesting some of the Kremlin's initiatives.⁸⁰ But Western-oriented regional tendencies will never be successful in the absence of a strong economic counteroffer to balance the RF economic influence in the region.

The RF's economic support is linked not only with the political support of key leaders who wish to maintain their power, but also with regular citizens as well. The RF uses “passportization” policy as the only way for breakaway republics' citizens to take advantage of the benefits offered by the RF. Passportization policy began with South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008, and quickly spread to the other neighboring countries. While at first it started as a forced covert operation of the RF,⁸¹ later it continued as a genuine desire of locals, or as a trend generated by economic grievances. The passports allow the citizens of former dominions to work in Russia, and even to serve in the RF military forces.⁸² Due to the conflicts in the region and decreased recruitment capabilities,⁸³ the RF simplified the citizenship procedure and relaxed even more the recruitment conditions. Moreover, the passportization allows the RF to claim the right and the obligation to protect its citizens, which are defined as “compatriots,”ⁱ wherever they live.⁸⁴ Although it is not a principle of international law, the RF used this excuse to motivate its actions in all the conflicts from the surrounding countries where Russian ethnics live.⁸⁵



Figure 9: Russian ethnic percentage in region⁸⁶

ⁱ The concept of “compatriot” is defined in RF legislation as a name for people who either lived in Russia, or have Russian ancestry. They are given priority in getting Russian citizenship on the basis of the *jus sanguinis* (right of blood) principle (Sergey A. Belov, “Recent Developments in Russian Constitutional and Administrative Law,” in *International Journal of Legal Information*, Volume 35, Issue 2 (*The New Russia: Law and Legal Information*), Article 12, Summer 2007, 290, <http://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1101&context=ijli>).

And from this point forward, began the “hard” approach of the RF pattern of intervention. From a legal point of view, in according with the last RF Constitution adopted by the All-Nation Referendum on 16 December 1993, the authority to deploy Russian armed forcesⁱ abroad belongs to the Federation Council upon the request of the RF President. In addition to that, Federal Law No. 93 of 1995 on the Procedure of Providing Civil and Military Personnel for Operations to Restore International Peace and Security regulated the participation of Russian military personnel in peacekeeping operations.ⁱⁱ But on July 7, 2006, the upper chamber of the Russian legislature unanimously passed a resolution (SZ RF 2006, No. 29, Item 3144) entitled “On Using Formations of Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and Special Purpose Detachments outside the Territory of the Russian Federation With the Purpose of Preventing International Terrorist Activities.” This resolution freed operations abroad from parliamentary control and allowed the President to use the Russian military abroad and without time restrictions, as long as use of the military is justified by antiterrorist goals. But the RF military forces, in one form or another, have been deployed in the region prior to the adoption of these laws because RF military bases existed in all of the former Soviet dominions. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the RF became the legal successor to the Soviet Union and inherited the former Soviet armed forces. Military units located outside of the RF in other constituent Soviet republics were divided between the RF and those republics according to bilateral agreements. Many military units that were transferred under RF’s jurisdiction remained in their regular locations and were transformed into RF military bases.⁸⁷

ⁱ In RF, the regular military consists of the armed forces under the Ministry of Defense. However, according to the Constitution, the uniformed services of the Russian Federation subordinated to the President include the troops of the Federal Security Service (the former KGB), internal troops (analogous to the US National Guard), and troops of the Ministry for Emergency Management. Officers of these troops are subject to all Russian military laws and regulations. Following the constitutional interpretation, the use of any military personnel abroad is subject to parliamentary approval and control, similar to those approvals necessary for the use of regular armed forces abroad.

ⁱⁱ The Law defines general issues regarding parliamentary control over the decision to send Russian peacekeeping units for international operations and establishes the rules of recruiting, training, and sustaining the activities of members of these peacekeeping units. A separate provision prohibits the service of draftees abroad as well as their participation in military operations, including peacekeeping operations, leaving this duty to professional officers and volunteers.

RF military bases, however, did not exist in all of the “frozen” conflicts areas. If RF military bases and forces already existed in the area, they were reinforced and upgraded, as in the case of Abkhazia (Bombora Air Base and Ochamchire Naval Base, part of the 7th Military Bases),⁸⁸ or Crimea (Sevastopol Naval Base, Kacha and Gvardeysky Air Bases).⁸⁹ In other cases, even if military bases existed in the past, they were used and improved by the rebranded RF peacekeeping forces deployed there, as in South Ossetia (Tskhinval, and Java Bases, part of the 4th Military Bases),⁹⁰ or Transdniestria (military bases of the former 14th Soviet Army).⁹¹ In the Nagorno-Karabakh area, however, there are no RF military bases, although the military bases from Armenia (102nd Military Base in Gyumri, and Erebuni Air Base) could provide the necessary military aid. In Chechnya, Kadyrov tried to reduce the number of RF military bases,⁹² but the general RF policy on military bases in the former Soviet Republics was to extend as much as possible their existence.

For this purpose, the RF signed an agreement with Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2009 permitting the bases to stay for another 49 years⁹³ and with Armenia in 2010 extending the RF bases’ lease until 2044.⁹⁴ A similar agreement was signed with Ukraine in 2010 to extend the lease for Russia's Black Sea Fleet in the Crimea until 2042,⁹⁵ which was currently nullified by the RF’s Crimea annexation. No such agreement has been signed with Transdniestria (because the RF did not officially recognize its independence) or Chechnya (because it is part of the RF). But similar agreements have been signed in 2012 with Kyrgyzstan for the use of the Kant Air Base until 2032,⁹⁶ in 2013 with Tajikistan for the use of the RF’s 201st Division Base until 2042,⁹⁷ and in 2014 with Belarus to strengthen the RF’s presence in the area.⁹⁸

Aside from the RF’s official military presence in the region (conventional military forces and bases, and peacekeeping forces with or without international mandate), in the “frozen” conflicts, the RF used some unconventional methods and assets to fulfill its strategic interests. Financial aid to the insurgency,⁹⁹ use of unchecked humanitarian convoys,¹⁰⁰ use of the “fifth

column”ⁱ in the breakaway territories to undermine the legitimate authorities and worldwide to support RF’s actions,¹⁰¹ intensive propaganda campaigns,¹⁰² and use of the “little green man”ⁱⁱ to coordinate and execute subversive actions to prevent re-establishment of territorial integrity,¹⁰³ are some of these methods that replaced, preceded, or completed conventional military operations in the “frozen” conflicts.¹⁰⁴ Although surrounded by secrecy and hard to prove using only open-source information, these hybrid war methods could not be excluded from the broader image of the RF’s pattern of intervention in the region.

Among the “frozen” conflicts from WBSA, the many similarities are present in the cases of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Transdnistria, and Ukraine. Some of these are as follows:

- RF’s supportive regime was replaced or province requested independence;
- legitimate authorities reacted and violence erupted with Russian victims as result;
- the protection of the Russian-speaking population was used as justification to intervene by the RF;
- the RF provided political and economic support;
- passportization was used to increase the number of Russian ethnics;
- the RF financed insurgency;
- the RF sent humanitarian and military aid;
- the RF intervened with troops either as peacekeeping or conventional forces;
- the RF created or maintained military bases;
- the RF used an intense propaganda campaign and other unconventional warfare methods.

ⁱ Clandestine group or faction of subversive agents who attempt to undermine a nation’s solidarity by any means at their disposal (<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/206477/fifth-column>).

ⁱⁱ The “Green Army” concept, which signifies the rise of local population against a perceived illegitimate government, is not new in Russian folklore. Ironically, the previous case was the one from Russian Civil War (1917-1923) when armed peasant groups indirectly helped the “White Army” loose confederation of Anti-Communist forces to fight against the “Red Army” of the Bolshevik government.

The RF's pattern of intervention applies mostly to them because both other two cases, Nagorno-Karabakh and Chechnya, lacked a fundamental trigger or used justification: the existence of "oppressed" Russian-speaking population/Russian ethnics on that territory. Whether this "oppression" is a cause of the conflicts or a result of them is hard to establish, as well as the starting point's role or influence in the regional conflicts of the RF's subversive campaign and provocations. Also, the question of whether the RF's care for its compatriots is genuine, or is only a justification for RF's own form of nation building policy, is inconclusive due to the lack of relevant open-source information.

In general, the militarization of the borders,ⁱ economic integration, and political annexation are the required steps in this nation building process from RF's perspective, regardless of the methods used to obtain it. Each "frozen" conflict is in a different stage of this process. Abkhazia skipped the first step because the Inguri River is a natural border with Georgia, although some reinforcement of Russian checkpoints in 2008 was misinterpreted as wall construction.¹⁰⁵ The second step was fulfilled in March 2014, while the third step is not accomplished yet. In 2013 began the construction of the "rural Berlin Walls" in South Ossetia.¹⁰⁶ The second step was accomplished in March 2015, while the third step is not accomplished yet. Transnistria skipped the first step because the Dniester River is a natural border with Moldova, but was subject to a Ukrainian initiative of militarization of the borders in 2014 to stop contraband and to prevent the movement of heavy military equipment and personnel into Ukraine.¹⁰⁷ Neither one of the other two steps were accomplished. Nagorno-Karabakh is not a subject of RF's nation building, but in 2010, the RF signed an extended defense pact with Armenia,¹⁰⁸ and Armenia has been part of an EEU initiative since January 2015,¹⁰⁹ which, by extension, could be considered as constituting for Nagorno-Karabakh as well the second step, while the third step will not be accomplished. Crimea

ⁱ The process involves the installation of fence and barbed wire to physically delimitate the new administrative border line.

skipped the first step due to its geographical location, and passed directly to the third step in March 2014. Chechnya is part of the RF, so it is not a subject of nation building, although the personal pragmatic alliance of President Putin with the Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov¹¹⁰ unofficially thwarted the self-determination agenda of Chechnya, thus fulfilling the RF interest.

This probably incomplete RF's pattern of intervention is not a step-by-step procedure invented by President Putin, but an improvement upon the policies of past RF administrations, and should not be considered a mandatory check-list in future similar attempt, if any. While its true nature (defensive or offensive) is still subject to debate, it marks a constant internal improvement in the RF government's dealings with similar cases. Moreover, the RF's pattern of intervention is also influenced by external variables. Some of the current favorable conditions for the RF to use this pattern in eastern Ukraine's case and further are the opportunity of the situation in Ukraine, the risk of a global war, the proclaimed US pivot to Asia, the EU's lack of consensus regarding active measures against the RF due to its energy dependency on the RF and to its own internal economic problems, and the focus of US and EU on other transnational threats, particularly ISIL/ISIS.ⁱ

The implications for WBSA

Due to competing interests in the area of the former Soviet dominions and the multitude of environmental variables, it is almost impossible to predict accurately the next target of the RF, if one may assume another will occur. Numerous surrounding countries of the RF could be solid candidates for targeting in the current regional expansion of hybrid warfare conducted by the RF.¹¹¹

Some analysts suggested that one of the Baltic countries could be the next target.¹¹² The RF has applied the small steps procedure: the "frozen" conflicts in WBSA to test the former

ⁱ The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)/The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) is an insurgent movement that intends to establish an Islamic caliphate in the Middle East.

dominions, the Crimean precedent to test international response, the pro-Russian demonstrations,¹¹³ the RF suspension of the bilateral agreement with Lithuania on exchange of information on weaponry in Kaliningrad,¹¹⁴ the cross-border incidents,¹¹⁵ the submarine incursion into the North Sea,¹¹⁶ the numerous airspace violations with the RF planes launched from the Chernyakhovsk and Donskoye air bases from Kaliningrad,¹¹⁷ the increasing number of military drills in the region,¹¹⁸ and the RF's withdrawal from the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty,¹¹⁹ all could be considered indicators and warnings (I&W) to prove this idea.¹²⁰ The international community's responses to all these increasing provocations have been feeble and inconsistent, which has increased the RF confidence in a similar response to future gradually increasing attempts. Moreover, Lithuania could be a target because the RF needs a land bridge with its exclave Kaliningrad,¹²¹ Latvia because it has the largest Russian ethnic population from the region,¹²² and Estonia because it has the smallest army¹²³ or because the RF needs freedom of movement in the Gulf of Finland for its Baltic Fleet vessels stationed in Kronstadt. In all three cases, the RF will probably be supported by Belarus, its closest ally in the region.

The counter-argument for this assumption is that all Baltic countries are NATO members, and the RF risks starting a global war.¹²⁴ Moreover, due to the increasingly hybrid threats in the region, Article 5 of the NATO's Charter currently covers not only conventional military attacks, as previously stated, but also cyber-attacks and other unconventional threats.¹²⁵ On the other side, some have suggested that precisely because NATO is reluctant to involve itself in a global nuclear war, it would seek a diplomatic solution instead of a military response.¹²⁶

To some extent, the precedence for such a result is the situation of Ukraine. Although Ukraine is not a NATO member entitled to invoke Article 5, under the 1997 NATO-Ukraine Charter, NATO committed itself "to support Ukrainian sovereignty and independence, territorial integrity, democratic development, economic prosperity and its status as a non-nuclear weapon state, and the principle of inviolability of frontiers, as key factors of stability and security in

Central and Eastern Europe and in the continent as a whole.”¹²⁷ NATO nevertheless failed to prevent or to solve the current situation. The increased cooperation with NATO was possible because Ukraine signed in 1994 the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, which presumably guaranteed its assistance, but did not oblige its co-signatories to intervene¹²⁸ in case of aggression against it in exchange for the removal of all the nuclear weapons from its territory.¹²⁹ Ukraine fulfilled its part of the memorandum by 1996, but both the US and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland failed to fulfill their commitment, while the RF completely violated the agreement by invading Ukraine.

Ukraine is already in an unstable situation due to the on-going conflict. Although the main reason for Crimea annexation by the RF was to protect its Black Sea Fleet base from Sevastopol, and subsequently the access to Mediterranean Sea and further,¹³⁰ it could also be further used for the Russian ballistic missiles defense system in response to the NATO ballistic missile defense system.¹³¹ That could also be the case of Transdnistria, Belarus, and exclave Kaliningrad, which can be used to accommodate elements of defensive system, or even an offensive one, like long-range nuclear-capable bombers.¹³²



Figure 10: Missile defense in Europe¹³³

Also, the RF has strategic interests in the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine due to the defense industry factories from there that produce spare parts for the RF’s defense systems, including nuclear weapons.¹³⁴ Ruptured cooperation with Ukraine’s defense industry will significantly disrupt the RF’s strategic defense capabilities. Not only is that industry vital for the RF from a strategic perspective, but also its control will also be beneficial from an economic perspective.¹³⁵ Moreover, such control will prevent Ukraine from building its own nuclear capabilities.¹³⁶

Another important reason for the RF to obtain control in the southern part of Ukraine is because the RF needs a land bridge with Crimea, the latest annexed territory, since it is unable yet to build a bridge across the Kerch Strait,¹³⁷ or a tunnel underneath.¹³⁸ The current layout of pro-Russian forces in eastern Ukraine does not fulfill this purpose either.¹³⁹ If this objective will be achieved, it will allow the RF to continue further the seizure of the southern part of Ukraine, thus completely cutting off Ukraine's access to the Black Sea, and creating a land bridge with the Transdnistria "frozen" conflict. This objective will only be achieved if the RF intervenes openly in the conflict, which is unlikely.¹⁴⁰ Crimea was a target of opportunity for the RF, while the eastern part of Ukraine was an incomplete bonus because the momentum was lost.¹⁴¹ Despite the fact that the RF lost the strategic surprise, it is possible to use further the ethnic justification to fulfill this purpose.



Figure 11: Ukraine ethno-linguistic map¹⁴²

The RF still has a strategic advantage because Ukraine is used as a buffer zone with NATO. Due to the on-going conflict, it is unlikely that Ukraine will be able to join NATO or the EU, which means that the RF has fulfilled its strategic interest. The same explanation applies to all the countries in which "frozen" conflicts exist that are used as a buffer-zone with NATO. The RF is not interested in (re)conquering its former dominions because such conquest would widen its border with NATO, which is not in the strategic interest of the RF. However, at the same time, the RF is interested in maintaining the "frozen" conflicts in the region because that is the only way to maintain these countries in its sphere of influence, simultaneously hindering NATO from fulfilling its objective (which Russia perceives as eastern expansion of NATO and the RF containment).¹⁴³



Figure 12: Former Warsaw Pact countries¹⁴⁴



Figure 13: NATO member countries¹⁴⁵

The Republic of Moldova is in the same situation as Ukraine. Due to the “frozen” conflict in Transdniestria, it is unable to join NATO.¹⁴⁶ The unstable political situation, extended social problems, and the fact that it is the poorest country from Europe, makes Moldova unattractive to the EU as well. From the RF perspective, it is unlikely that Transdniestria will become an exclave like Kaliningrad because it lacks the latter’s strategic advantages. Transdniestria lacks access to the Black Sea, and it is not rich in natural resources either. Although in theory it could accommodate elements of the RF strategic defense missiles system (its only strategic advantage besides being a buffer zone with NATO), the lack of specific infrastructure, insufficient control in the area, and the disrupted supply line due to the on-going conflict from Ukraine decreased its importance to the RF. In Transdniestria, however, the RF still holds Europe's largest weapons stockpile.¹⁴⁷ But with almost non-existing direct air and sea line of communications if Ukraine and Republic of Moldova cut off transit rights, the only possible link with the RF is a land bridge including Odessa and the territory up to the Kiliya Branch of the Danube River (the border with Romania). Of course, the lack of the RF material support in the area¹⁴⁸ does not exclude personal initiative of the military personnel stationed in Transdniestria or other pro-Russian fighters and supporters from the area. Any provocation could offer the RF the chance to use the justification to protect the Russian-speakers from the area and to re-emerge the “frozen” conflict.¹⁴⁹

Other views hold that the South Caucasus area will be the next RF target. The “treaty of alliance and integration” of the RF with Abkhazia (March 2014) and South Ossetia (March 2015) could be the last step to their annexation by the RF, as the local referendum was in the Crimea case. The existing land bridge with both separatist provinces favors this approach. Nevertheless, by officially annexing Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the RF will lose its ability to hinder NATO’s expansion plan in Georgia, or Georgia’s desire to adhere to it. Due to the associated economic cost, the complete integration of the provinces will be less beneficial for the RF rather than freezing them in the current state. Both are irrelevant as land surface to the RF. Unlike Crimea/Ukraine case, they are not even part of the proclaimed ancestor Russian civilization’s cradle.¹⁵⁰ Also, only a very small portion of the Baku-Supsa pipeline crosses through South Ossetia.¹⁵¹ Moreover, South Ossetia will create an additional problem for the RF because of the possible secessionist movement of North Ossetia-Alania. In addition, their integration will confirm the perception of the international community regarding an RF expansionist tendency, which will determine a stronger response. Another possible effect is that it will render ineffective the RF’s propaganda, the main strongpoint of which is the defensive posture of the RF, not an offensive one.

On the other side, it is possible that the RF, in conjunction with Armenia, will increase the efforts to influence the events in the Georgian province of Samtskhe-Javakheti, where exists a majority of ethnic Armenians with a secessionist agenda. An independent Samtskhe-Javakheti, or one under Russian influence, would divide Georgia down the middle and create a land bridge with the RF forces in Gyumri, Armenia.



Figure 14: Province Samtskhe-Javakheti, Georgia¹⁵²

These RF forces are currently in the same situation as the ones from Transdnistria. They have severely hindered lines of communications since Georgia and Turkey refused transit rights. The remaining transit line across Iran is not very attractive for the RF.¹⁵³

Locals from this province also have numerous problems that support this assumption: poor standard of living, cultural discrimination, low quality of education, high unemployment, discriminatory citizenship,ⁱ and restrictive access to the labor market in Georgia.¹⁵⁴ The RF could exploit these locals' grievances and could use the same pattern of intervention as in Ukraine to fulfill its strategic interests.¹⁵⁵ Doing so would allow Armenia/the RF to hinder the liberalization of trade between Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan because the future Kars-Tbilisi-Baku railway passes through Samtskhe-Javakheti.¹⁵⁶ Conversely, the RF could also disrupt regional energy transport capabilities or initiatives, thus hindering Azerbaijan and EU interests.

It is unlikely that the RF will openly become involved in a new conflict in the area due to the lack of an official justification for it, but the RF could support Armenia to start it. An unintended consequence could be the re-emerging of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, either by Armenia, or by Azerbaijan. The increase of the defense budget of both Armenia and Azerbaijan, the militarization of the borders, and the willingness to use violence support this assumption. While Azerbaijanis talk increasingly of a military solution to the conflict, Armenians speak of a preventive strike.¹⁵⁷

Although Armenia has fewer military capabilities than Azerbaijan, the RF protects it due to the military forces stationed on its territory. The increasing activities of the powerful Armenian lobbies in the US Congress could indirectly support the Armenians' political agenda about the territorial dispute by preventing US intervention in it.¹⁵⁸ On the other side, even if the

ⁱ Currently, the Georgian Constitution allows dual citizenship only for people who hold high governmental positions. In effect, locals from Samtskhe-Javakheti are forced to renounce to Armenian or Russian citizenship, which allows them to work abroad. They chose either to hide their dual citizenship or asked permission to live in Georgia without having its citizenship.

international community pressures Azerbaijan for a diplomatic rather than military settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, Azerbaijan could disobey it due to Europe's apparent disengagement, indifference, and promotion of double standards over sovereignty and self-determination in the case of Ukraine and NKR.¹⁵⁹ Europe's need for energy security using a Caspian alternative to the RF could support the Azerbaijan political agenda in the case of NKR.¹⁶⁰

Regardless of which country will start a conflict in the Caspian area, the RF could use the situation in its favor by sending a "peacekeeping" mission to control the area. Without the need for a long decision process, as in the UN case, the RF will provide the quickest, even if unsolicited, regional response. Not only will that allow the RF to fulfill its strategic interests, but also the RF will use it to clear its reputation after Crimea's case by publicizing its role in maintaining regional security. To some extent, this rapid settlement of the conflict, although not in accordance with the international laws, could be *in extremis* favored by international community because of the alternative to involve other regional actors in it, like Turkey (and NATO), and Iran (and ISIS) with further undesirable consequences.

Although not part of WBSA, the Central Asian former dominion countries are the less probable to be future RF targets for conflict because they remained highly dependent on the RF, while NATO sphere of influence is reduced in the area. But they are targeted by the RF from another perspective: to be included in the newly formed Eurasian Economic Union. This economic-geopolitical initiative of the RF President Putin is meant to counteract similar initiatives as the European Union (EU), North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and to reassert a RF role in a multipolar world.¹⁶¹ Although in its infancy, the EEU continued past initiatives of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Customs Union. The EEU

is mainly focused on economic integration of the members, but like the EU, it has a political agenda as well.¹⁶²

To understand the implications of EEU for the “frozen conflicts,” one must first appreciate its wider Eurasian dynamics. The main issue is that EEU needs few members with equal rights and responsibilities to be economically viable, which the RF dislikes, but it needs more members who will be forced to reenter under Russian’s domination to be politically powerful, which the other members except for the RF dislike.¹⁶³ That is why it is also probable that Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan will receive similar treatment as Ukraine if they will not join EEU. Due to the RF pressures, Armenia already joined EEU and Kyrgyzstan is also set to join the union in May 2015.¹⁶⁴ But international economic sanctions, the fall of crude oil’s price, and the drop of the ruble’s value significantly hindered economic sustainability of the RF and its dominions. Beside the “frozen” conflicts that received less financial support, the Central Asian former dominion countries are most affected by the decrease in remittances, which could lead to political unrest.¹⁶⁵

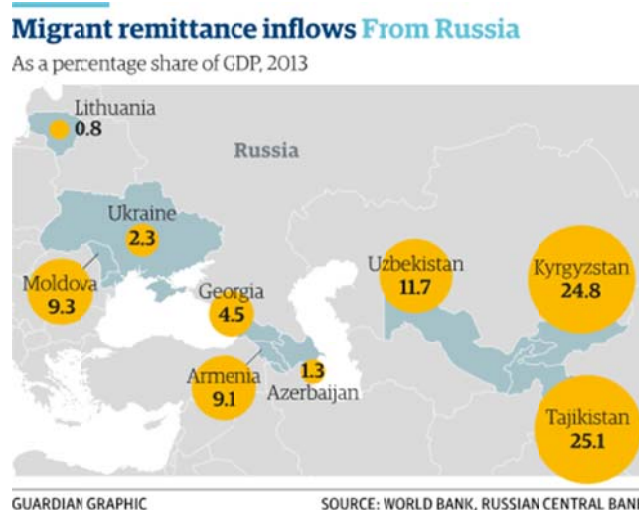


Figure 15: Remittance percentage in the region¹⁶⁶

The RF needs these countries to participate in the EEU initiative for economic, political, and social benefits. Economic aspects will be beneficial for the RF because it will have access to a large quota of a wide market. If the organization expands, the pan-Slavic political initiative will easily persuade/force others to join. Open labor markets will eventually contribute to the growth of the RF population, which is currently a big issue, especially in the Far East area.¹⁶⁷ But on the other side, the full integration of the Central Asian former dominion countries is problematic for

the RF due to the migration of the Muslim population along with the possible associated terrorist activities.¹⁶⁸

In the Far South-East, the RF strategy is more economic than political. Due to the hindered energy monopoly over Europe generated by alternative solutions, like Caspian initiatives or the US shale gas boom,¹⁶⁹ the RF was forced to seek other markets. The declared US pivot to Asia and the economic rise of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and India also favored the increase of the RF interests in the region. Increased economic and energy cooperation with PRC,¹⁷⁰ Pakistan,¹⁷¹ and India,¹⁷² while providing substantial economic advantages, was not able to compensate for the international sanctions imposed on the RF.



Figure 16: Russia-PRC gas pipeline¹⁷³

Nevertheless, more surprising than the RF economic recalibration to Asia was the RF military expansion to Arctic region.¹⁷⁴ It was envisioned in the new RF military doctrine¹⁷⁵ from December 2014,¹⁷⁶ which listed NATO's expansion and its military buildup as threats to the RF, and enforced three crucial geopolitical frontlines: the Arctic region, Crimea, and Kaliningrad.¹⁷⁷ The Arctic region is important for the RF not only from military perspective, as the shortest air route to US, but also from economic perspective due to the forecasted ice meltdown, which will open new shorter shipping routes and will allow the extraction of the region's estimated rich natural resources.¹⁷⁸



Figure 17: The Arctic region¹⁷⁹

The strategic economic and military shift of the RF to Asia and Arctic region should not be interpreted as a RF withdrawal from Europe, but as future long-term alternatives in case that the RF strategic interests on its south-western border are severely hindered. Despite the recent show of force,¹⁸⁰ due to the economic sanctions and ruble deflation, the proposed revamp of the RF

military forces will probably experience delay.¹⁸¹ But economic sensitivity does not mean the immediate political or military vulnerability of the RF.¹⁸² Due to its existing conventional military capabilities,¹⁸³ and excluding its nuclear or other unproved unconventional capabilities,¹⁸⁴ the RF is currently capable of rapid and limited offensive operations in its vicinity, although its current shortfalls¹⁸⁵ render it incapable of sustaining the offensive for a long time or distance. On the other side, due to its military ethos, the RF is fully able to conduct extensive defensive operations on its territory. Also, although the RF probably lacks the capability to engage decisively in two major operations at the same time, it can indeed support hybrid warfare in two or more “near abroad” areas. This capability is dependent on internal support, on neighboring countries’ attitudes, and on the international community’s countermeasures.¹⁸⁶

Regional insecurity, the spread of terrorism, and ethnic secessionist movements concern not only the countries with “frozen” conflicts on their territories and the RF, but also their neighbors as well, and the international community. Beside the terrorism threat at its southern border with Syria and Iraq and the possible conflict in the bordering Georgian province Samtskhe-Javakheti, Turkey is concerned about the secessionist movements because there are currently more Tatar people in Turkey than there are in Crimea, and three times more ethnic Abkhaz living in Turkey than in Abkhazia itself.¹⁸⁷

Beside the Szeklers’ autonomy request, Romania is concerned that the conflict could reach its border due to the possible re-emergence of the Transdniestrian conflict or the spread of the Ukrainian conflict in the south-west part of it.¹⁸⁸ Aside from Poland, which also hosts elements of NATO’s ballistic missile defense system, Romania is concerned that it will become a RF target.¹⁸⁹ Aside from Romania and Poland, Bulgaria is concerned that it will also be targeted by the RF due to the new NATO command center hosted on its territory.¹⁹⁰

CONCLUSIONS

A complex combination of local geo-political, economic, ethnical, and religious divergences generated, encouraged, or used as justification by the RF, led to the regional insecurity in the WBSA, which currently impacts the global stability. As response, the RF created an evolving pattern of intervention that led to the appearance, or reappearance, of several “frozen” conflicts. While at first the conflicts appeared due to the complex regional divergences and grievances and eventually ended as “frozen”, the RF used them later as geopolitical weapons to counteract internal or external threats to its Eurasian identity and strategic interests. The current RF interests covered military dimension (the maintaining of its security by using the former Soviet Republics as buffer-zone with NATO), economic dimension (the protection of its energy transport infrastructure), and political dimension (the reassertion of its global key posture in a desired multipolar world).

Unfortunately, the RF’s belt of “frozen” conflicts from the WBSA will endure indefinitely despite international efforts to solve them, and their terrible socio-political consequences. Due to the regional and international competing interests, the probability of a peaceful solution to these conflicts decreases daily. Worse alternatives to the “frozen” status of the conflicts could be the Cold War 2.0,¹⁹¹ the World War III,¹⁹² or nuclear extinction. No foreseeable simple and efficient solution could be applied for any “frozen” conflict, and even less to all of them at once.

In fact, it is probable that, if by chance one conflict is seemingly solved or deterred, another one will appear instead in another area of the same country. The reason for this is that the RF uses the “frozen” conflict method to counteract each current or future NATO’s attempt to cross into RF’s perceived sphere of influence, or to thwart its former dominions’ western aspirations or disobedience. In the event that NATO allows such countries with unsolved territorial disputes to

join it in the future,ⁱ the probable response of the RF will be to start sustained hybrid warfare to seize as much territory as possible, to organize referenda for separation, to recognize the independence of the breakaway territories, and to incorporate them directly under its sovereignty. To protect its interests, the RF could also use this method offensively even in the absence of the NATO threat, if such opportunity will appear. But due to the Crimean precedent, the RF undermined its own use of the “frozen conflict” pattern of intervention, especially on its western border, because each country from there now expects such similar RF’s actions. In essence, the RF has lost the element of surprise in applying further the current pattern.

As a consequence, the RF’s interest is to maintain the regional conflicts as indeed “frozen”, not to re-cast them as full-scale violent actions, even if maintaining them in that state means calibrated actions ranging from the political end of the spectrum (blocking peace initiatives) to direct actions (waging hybrid warfare). Likewise, the RF does not want to engage in conventional military operations, unless it is cornered, or to start a new conflict in its western border. Although highly provocative, the recent extensive show of force sort of proves the RF’s deterrent intention, not its bellicose tendency.

In fact, the only country without a “frozen” conflict on its western border, beside NATO countries, is Belarus, its current closest ally in the region. But as Lord Palmerston allegedly said: “We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow.”¹⁹³ The situation is similar on its south-eastern border, and if the RF chooses to apply its evolving pattern of intervention to enforce EEU, due to the increasing danger of the extremist terrorism in that region, it is probable that the RF’s rhetoric will shift from “protecting the Russian-speakers from there” to “protecting the ethnic Russians from the terrorists’ attacks from there” (as in Chechnya). In consequence, RF

ⁱ Although not written in the Charter as mandatory admission criteria, existing members use common international law and usually disagree to admit such new member fearing that Article 5 will be subsequently invoked to solve the territorial dispute.

“peacekeeping” forces will probably be replaced by “counter-terrorism” forces, while extensive hybrid warfare will be conducted mainly through social networks.

These virtual scenarios are certainly not unique and not necessarily the most plausible ones. Mutually exclusive interests of multiple actors involved in the region have significantly increased the number of such scenarios. In fact, the initiative of starting a future conflict in the region could not be solely attributed to the RF, especially because the RF lost the strategic surprise and initiative to use its pattern of intervention. Moreover, there are no definitive indicators and warnings to conclude that the proposed pattern of intervention will be further used either as defensive or offensive posture. Finally, extremely volatile and unpredictable, geopolitics is not always rational, while its effects are not always foreseeable.

Appendix A: Historical data about Nagorno-Karabakh and the timeline of the conflict

The 3,175 square miles of the Karabakh region are disputed on historical grounds by both Armenians and Azeri. Formerly part of the great Armenian Kingdom back in the fourth century Before Christ, by the fourteenth century Artsakh/Karabakh switched under control of Persian, Roman, Arab, Mongol, and Turkic population. For almost four centuries, the mountainous region of Karabakh gained a form of autonomy, but due to the internal Armenian elites' struggle for power, in the eighteenth century became a semi-independent Azeri Khanate ruled by Turkic Muslim families.

After the first Russo-Persian war of 1812-1813, Karabakh passed under the Russian control. By the end of the fourth Russo-Persian war in 1878, a large community of Armenians was relocated from the Ottoman Empire territory to Karabakh region, while a large number of them perished in the massacres from 1890 to 1918. In exchange, numerous (Sunni) Azeri migrated from the Caucasus to the Ottoman Empire, while many of them perished in the atrocities from 1905. Favored by the Russians due to the ethno-linguistic affinities, Armenians came to dominate business life of the whole region until the Russian revolution of 1917.

In 1918, the three peoples from the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, Georgians, Azeri, and Armenians, declared their independence, although Armenians did not have a territory at that time, each under protectorate of another power (Germany, Ottoman, and Russian). By 1921, all three states reverted under the Soviet control and later, in 1936, they became separate Soviet Socialist Republics. Although decided in 1921, but enforced only in 1923, the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) and the Nakhjivan Autonomous Republic were placed under Azerbaijani control. Despite the Armenians political efforts and violent popular uprisings in 1963 and 1968, the situation remained unchanged until 1987 when, due to the *Glasnost* (political openness) and *Perestroika* (economic restructuring) policies of Mikhail Gorbachev, tensions arose again.¹⁹⁴

The official request from February 1988 was backed up by massive popular rallies in Armenia and NKAO. Sporadic violence against local Azeri was reported in NKAO, while in retaliation, attacks against Armenians in Sumgait, Azerbaijan took place later. In June 1988, the Supreme Soviet of the Armenian SSR gave its consent for NKAO's inclusion into the Armenian SSR, but the Soviet Union Supreme Presidium formally rejected the NKAO soviet's request in July 1988 and transformed it into an economic, rather than political issue. On 21 September 1988, however, Moscow announced the introduction of martial law in NKAO and in December 1988, Karabakh Committee members were arrested and taken to Moscow, where they are held in prison until May 1989.

In January 1989, NKAO was removed from the administrative control of Azerbaijan and was ruled by a Russian Special Administration Committee, which held until November 1989 when it was replaced by the NKAO Republican Organizational Committee in an attempt to return NKAO to Azerbaijan. Armenian SSR and the National Soviet of NKAO rejected this resolution and adopted instead a resolution on re-unification of Armenia and NKAO, fueled also by the Azerbaijan railways blockade on them from August 1989.

In January 1990, the Soviet Union declared state of emergency in NKAO and intervened with troops that started Armenian pogroms in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, killing 130 people according to official statistics. Numerous Armenians from NKAO were deported to Armenia after Azerbaijani forces supported by Soviet forces launched an offensive against separatists. On 23 August 1990, Armenia declared independence from the Soviet Union.

Sporadic fighting continued until September 1991 when NKAO adopted the Declaration on Proclamation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR). In November 1991, Azerbaijan's Supreme Soviet annulled the autonomous status of NKAO. In December 1991, a referendum was held, in which 99.89 percent of the population declared in favor of NKR independence.

In January 1992, NKR declared its independence and conflict escalated into a full-scale military one. NKR Self-Defense Forces (SDF) conducted the Xocali pogrom, killing most of the village population of several hundred. The international community attempted to find a political solution and to impose a cease fire, but failed. Azerbaijan President was forced to resign in March 1992, and later forced to flee in Russia after a failed comeback attempt. In May 1992, the NKR SDF opened a corridor through Lachin, thus finally connecting NKR with Armenia. In June 1992, Azerbaijan forces launched offensive against NKR, which forced the displacement of almost 40,000 Armenians. Fighting continued until a two-month cease-fire was established in September 1992 due to the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) efforts.

In January 1993, The European Parliament banned the blockade of Armenia and NKR by Azerbaijan, while NKR SDF continued military operations, thus forcing the resignation of the new Azerbaijan President. At the end of April 1993, The UN Security Council passed *Resolution 822*,¹⁹⁵ for the immediate cessation of all military and hostile activities, and deployment of CSCE peacekeeping forces in the conflict zone. Several temporary cease-fire agreements were established under Russian patronage, while the Azerbaijan forces attempted to regain their lost territories in October and December 1993, but they were unsuccessful. The UN Security Council passed *Resolutions 853, 874, and 884*, but the Bishkek Protocol, the final cease-fire agreement, became effective only on 12 May 1994. Since then, several rounds of negotiations led by the OSCE Minsk Groupⁱ were held, but a political solution was not yet found and status of Nagorno-Karabakh remains unresolved.¹⁹⁶

ⁱ At its meeting in Helsinki in 1992, the then-CSCE Council requested the Chairman-in-Office to convene as soon as possible a conference on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict involving Armenia and Azerbaijan. This event was to take place in Minsk and provide a forum for negotiations towards a peaceful settlement. In 1994, the OSCE Budapest Summit established the so-called Minsk Group, which continues to work for the creation of conditions in which such a conference can take place (<http://www.osce.org/mg/108306>).

Appendix B: Historical data about South Ossetia and Abkhazia and the timeline of the conflict

The 1,467 square miles of South Ossetia was home for the ancient Caucasian Iberians, the ancestors of the current Georgians. The Ossetians are the descendants of the Alans, an Iranian ethnic group settled in current North Ossetia-Alania that transmigrated south due to the Mongols incursions in the area. The Abkhazians are the descendants of the Abasgoi, who lived aside of Moschoi/Mushki, the ancestor of Georgian Meskhetians and Mingrelians, on the current territory of Abkhazia. Over the centuries, Georgia was the object of rivalry between Arabs, Turks, Persians, Mongols, and Russians, before being eventually annexed by Russia in the 19th century.

After a brief independence during the 1917 Bolshevik revolution in Russia, Georgia was invaded by the Soviet Red Army in 1921 and incorporated into the Soviet Union a year later as part of the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic. South Ossetia became South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast, while Abkhazia became the Socialist Soviet Republic Abkhazia, both being incorporated in the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. In 1931, Abkhazia was transformed in Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, but remained part of Georgian SSR. The situation remained unchanged until July 1989 when the Abkhazians-Georgians dispute turned violent in Sukhumi and Ochamchira. In November 1989, South Ossetia declared its autonomy from the Georgian SSR, triggering three months of fighting. Less than one year later, in August 1990, Abkhazia declared its autonomy, while in September 1990, South Ossetia declared its independence, which started the first phase of the Georgia-South Ossetia conflict until 1992.

On 5 January 1991, Georgian troops entered Tskhinvali, the South Ossetia capital, and both sides reported atrocities. The Soviet troops intervened in the area after Georgia declared its independence on 9 April 1991. The civil war destabilized Georgia and on 22 December 1991 the Georgian President Zviad Gamsakhurdia fled Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia, for exile. In March 1992, Eduard Shevardnadze, a former Soviet minister, was appointed Speaker of the Georgian

parliament (equivalent to president), and on 24 June 1992 he signed the Sochi ceasefire agreement, brokered by Russia.

On 23 July 1992, Abkhazia declared its independence from Georgia, but in August Georgian forces intervened when Georgia's Interior Minister was kidnapped and held captive in Abkhazia. Violence triggered Abkhazians response, backed by Chechens, Russians, and Ossetians fighters until 27 July 1993, when a ceasefire agreement, brokered by Russia, was signed also in Sochi, like the one with South Ossetia. On 16 September 1993, violence erupted again and culminated with the Sukhumi massacre of Georgian population by the Abkhazians that began on 27 September and lasted for almost two weeks. Ethnic cleansing has been reported by both sides and ended in May 1994, when another ceasefire agreement was signed.

A Joint Peacekeeping Force of Ossetians, Russians, and Georgians were established to supervise the peacekeeping operations. In October 1993, Georgia joined the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The situation remained calm until May 1998, and later in October 2001 when fighting resumed between Abkhaz troops and Georgian paramilitaries, and Georgia was accused by the RF of harboring Chechen rebels, a claim denied by Georgia. Tensions with the RF were defused in October 2002, after Eduard Shevardnadze, the President of Georgia, promised to work with the RF to fight Chechen rebels. However, due to the Rose Revolution from November 2003 he was forced to resign and was replaced in January 2004 by Mikheil Saakashvili who promised to regain control over South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Tensions arose again in June 2004 and violent conflicts between Georgian Army and South Ossetian separatists helped by freelance fighters from the RF led to numerous victims on both sides. Another cease fire agreement was signed in August 2004, which ended the second phase of the Georgia-South Ossetia conflict.

In July 2005, the RF started to withdraw its troops from two Soviet-era military bases. In May-June 2006, tensions between Georgia and Russia rose again when Georgia demanded that the Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia have visas. On 12 November 2006, an internationally unrecognized referendum for independence was held in South Ossetia, in which the Ossetians

overwhelmingly agreed, but in a simultaneous referendum, the Georgians minority from South Ossetia voted to remained in Georgia. In November 2007, the RF withdrew its troops that had been based in Georgia since 1991, but not its peacekeeping presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

On 3 April 2008, NATO announced the decision on Georgia and Ukraine's admittance until December 2008. In response, the RF began to fully cooperate with the governments of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, enraging the Georgians. Later in April, the RF increased the number of their peacekeeping troops in Abkhazia. Georgians claimed that the RF shot down one of their drones, which the latter deny and sent more troops in Abkhazia to “prevent a Georgian attack.” In May, a U.N. investigation concluded that the drone shot down on April 21 was struck by a missile from a RF fighter jet. In response, the RF sent several hundred unarmed troops to Abkhazia “needed for railway repairs.” Georgia accused the RF of planning a military intervention.

In July 2008, a firefight occurred between Georgian and South Ossetian forces. Georgian troops took part in a United States-led military exercise near Tbilisi, while the RF troops began an exercise close to the border with Georgia. On 8 July 2008, four RF military aircraft entered Georgian airspace near South Ossetia. Moscow claimed the overflight was intended to deter a possible Georgian offensive, while the foreign ministry in Georgia denounced this act of “open aggression.” Also, a clash between Abkhaz and Georgian forces in the lower Kodori valley resulted in several injuries on both sides, while tensions rise further after Georgia accused the Abkhaz of firing mortar rounds into the Georgian-controlled upper Kodori valley.

On 7-8 August 2008, South Ossetian separatists attacked Georgian peacekeepers ending the 2004 cease fire agreement. Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili sent 10,000 troops into South Ossetia. The RF sent 20,000 troops through the Roki Tunnel in South Ossetia, and began air strikes in Georgia. The Georgians claimed that the RF forces entered South Ossetia before they moved in on 7 August, a claim that Moscow denied. The United States, Great Britain, and NATO called for a cease fire of military hostilities by both Russia and Georgia. Fighting continued

despite the EU and U.S. diplomats' efforts. On 10 August 2008, the Georgians declared a cease fire and began pulling troops out of South Ossetia, but the RF crossed border into Georgia, advancing towards the city of Gori. They also headed south of the Abkhazian-Georgian frontier in the west, while the Russian Black Sea set up a maritime cordon blocking access to the Georgian coast including the coast of Poti. On 12 August 2008, the RF stopped its military incursion into Georgia because the Georgians had been forced out of both South Ossetia and the Kodori Valley, the only part of Abkhazia they previously held, and agreed to a six-point diplomatic push for peace, ending the phase three of the Georgia-Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflict. The plan was announced by French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Russian President Dmitry Medvedev.

On 14 August 2008, Georgia's parliament voted to withdraw from CIS. On 15 August 2008, the Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili signed the cease fire agreement with Russia, brokered by French President Nicolas Sarkozy. The Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed the cease fire agreement a day later. On 19 August 2008, NATO foreign ministers met in Belgium to discuss the Georgia-Russia conflict. On 22 August 2008, the RF completed its troop withdrawal from Georgia, as part of the cease fire agreement. On 26 August 2008, the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed an order recognizing the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Only Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Nauru recognized the two breakaway regions as independent states, while Vanuatu withdrew recognition in 2013.

Later in September 2008, the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM) was established until 14 December 2014, while the RF signed treaties with Abkhazia and South Ossetia allowing it to maintain military bases and 3,800 troops in both regions. The Geneva Talks process was set in motion to offer a forum for mediation on both South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Several rounds of talks had taken place, with little substantive progress achieved. On the ground, EUMM conducted an initiative (in South Ossetia only) called the Prevention and Response Mechanism.¹⁹⁷

Appendix C: Historical data about Transdnjestria and Gagauzia and the timeline of the conflict

The struggling history of the Republic of Moldova is linked with the history of the neighboring country Romania. Part of the ancient Dacian Kingdom, after the departure of the Roman legions, the region was transited by several migratory groups of people including Slavs who cohabitated with the locals for several centuries. Beginning with fourteenth century when Romanian identity consolidated in the region, it appeared Principality of Moldova encompassing the territory between the Carpathian Mountains and the Dniester River. In the same period, the southeastern part of Moldova (the Budjak region) began to be called Bessarabia. In the sixteenth century, the principality became a tributary of the Ottoman Empire for the next 300 years. In 1775, the Ottoman Empire ceded Bukovina, a territory in north-western Moldova to the Habsburg Empire, and in 1792 ceded Transdnjestria, the territory on the right-side of Dniester River, to the Russian Empire. Following the Russo-Turkish War of 1806-1812, Russia also annexed Bessarabia and the territory between Prut River and Dniester River, and launched a massive Russification campaign. In 1918 Bessarabia returned to Romania. In 1940 the Soviet Union reoccupied Bessarabia, attached Transdnjestria, and formed the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (Moldavian SSR), while the Budjak region was ceded to Ukrainian SSR.



Figure 18: Moldova area¹⁹⁸

Gorbachev policies allowed the creation in May 1989 of the Moldovan Popular Front (MPF). MPF manifested for imposing the Romanian language as the official language (August 1989) and replaced the communist leadership (March 1990). On June 23, 1990 the republic proclaimed its sovereignty under the name of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova (SSRM). The Slavs Yedinstvo (Unity) Movement from Transdnjestria proclaimed on 2 September 1990 the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR). Violence escalated when in October 1990 MPF

attempted to stop an autonomy referendum in Gagauzia. In an attempt to settle the conflict, Gorbachev formally annulled the PMR's declaration of independence on December 22, 1990, but did not enforce it.¹⁹⁹ Instead, Russian volunteers came in November 1990 to help the separatists.²⁰⁰

On August 27, 1991, immediately after the failure of the 1991 Soviet coup d'état attempt, SSRM declared its independence under the name of Republic of Moldova, being formally recognized as an independent state by the United Nations on March 2, 1992. In response, PMR proclaimed its independence as well. Tensions turned violent in the Dubossary region in the winter of 1991-1992 between the Moldovan police and the separatists supported by the 14th Russian Army.²⁰¹ The clashes expanded in other areas and between March 2 and July 26, 1992, the conflict escalated into a full-scale military engagement. Moldovan President Snegur unsuccessfully attempted to consolidate control over the 14th Army forced from the 36 Moldovan bases, while, on April 1, 1992, Russian President Boris Yeltsin succeeded.²⁰² In May, 14th Army began an offensive against Moldovan forces, which strengthened the Transdnistrian separatist's positions.²⁰³ In June, Moldovan forces managed to push back separatist forces, but failed to gain control over Tighina (Bender), which resulted in the bloodiest clash of the conflict. On July 3, 1992, Moldovan President Snegur met with Russian President Yeltsin to determine the political status of PMR. A ceasefire agreement, however, was signed only on July 21, 1992. The Peace Accord guaranteed the special political status of PMR as part of Moldova and its right to secede in case of Moldova will unite with Romania, established security zone where a peacekeeping force comprised of Russian, Moldovan, and PMR will operate under the supervision of a Joint Control Commission (JCC).²⁰⁴ On February 4, 1993, an OSCE mission was established in the Republic of Moldova.²⁰⁵ Several political negotiations in the "5+2" format²⁰⁶ were held to solve the conflict and to withdraw the Russian Army from Moldova, but with no visible results.

Appendix D: Historical data about Chechnya and the timeline of the conflict

The approximately ten million inhabitants of the North Caucasus region²⁰⁷ were colonized by the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century, ending a long struggle with the other two ancient regional competitors: the Ottoman Empire, and Persia. The majority of the forty ethnic groups from the region are Sunni Islam, many of them practicing Sufism, or mystical Islam, which was first brought to the North Caucasus in the eleventh century. Salafism,²⁰⁸ which rejects the local customs Sufis incorporate into their religious practice, was brought to the region in the early post-Soviet years by students who studied abroad in Arab universities. The Ossetians and Russians are the main groups that are predominantly Christian Orthodox.

Like all the other conflicts from the region, instability in the North Caucasus has its roots in centuries of imperial conquest and local resistance. Cossacks began settling the region as agents of Russian expansion in the late eighteenth century, and the Russian Empire waged the nearly half-century Caucasian War from 1817 to 1864. In Dagestan and Chechnya, the Caucasian Imamate, an Islam-based resistance movement, unsuccessfully fought the invading Russian military with guerrilla tactics. Russian forces ended the war after defeating Circassians, who hail from the western Caucasus, in a battle fought just outside present-day Sochi. Soviet policies of the twentieth century further contributed to present-day instability. The Soviet Union failed to enforce a common North Caucasus political unit and established in 1922 autonomous republics for ethnic groups, codifying divisions in the North Caucasus and sowing the seeds of interethnic rivalry due to the arbitrary exclusion of ethnic groups. Arbitrary drawn borders and massive deportation exacerbated interethnic tensions and anti-Russian hatred.²⁰⁹

On 26 April 1991, the Supreme Soviet of the Russian SSR, under Boris Yeltsin's chairmanship, passed the Law on the Rehabilitation of the Repressed Peoples which aimed to remedy historical injustices and set the stage for democratization in inter-ethnic relations. In effect, shortly after the failed August Soviet coup d'état attempt, Dzhokhar Dudayev, a retired Soviet air force general, led an ouster of Chechnya's government, was elected president and

declared Chechnya's independence on September 6, 1991 under the name of Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, splitting the former Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic of the Soviet Union. While Republic of Ingushetia joined the RF, Chechnya adopted in March 1992 a constitution that defined it as a secular independent state.

Dudayev's opponents asked the RF for assistance, which led to the first Chechen-RF war starting with August 1994 (unofficially, and officially on December 11). Intense fighting took place until 19 January 1995, when RF troops regained control of the presidential palace in Grozny, the capital of the breakaway republic of Chechnya. In response, on June 14, Shamil Basayev, the Chechen commander, led a five-day hostage raid on a Russian hospital in Budyonnovsk and took 1,500 people hostage, more than 100 being killed in an unsuccessful attempt of RF's special forces to release them, while Chechens escaped. As result, on July 30, the RF and Chechen rebels signed an agreement calling for a gradual withdrawal of Russian troops and the disarmament of rebel fighters. But fight continued until December when the RF troops reoccupied Grozny and a puppet government was installed. On January 9, 1996, Chechen rebels under Salman Raduyev seized approximately 3,000 hostages from a hospital in Kizlyar, Dagestan. To free up the surrounded Chechen fighters, on January 16, other Chechens hijacked a ferry with 165 passengers and crew from the Turkish port of Trabzon bound for the Russian city of Sochi. While the first escaped, Chechen rebels blew up on February 23 a big gas pipeline in southern Chechnya forcing the RF President to start negotiations. On April 25, 1996, Dudayev was killed, but on May 27, the new Chechen leader Zelimkhan Yanderbiyev and RF's President Boris Yeltsin agreed to a peace accord that lasted until July. On August 6, Chechen rebels seized the capital. On August 27, the RF and Chechen military commanders signed the Khasavyurt Accords, an agreement for military disengagement. On November 23, Yeltsin ordered all troops withdrawn from Chechnya by January 27, when elections would be held, ending the first war with Chechnya.²¹⁰

On January 28, 1997, Aslan Maskhadov claimed victory in the Chechen elections, and on

May 12, the RF and Chechnya signed a peace treaty. Several kidnappings, including high-rank RF's officials, and other terrorist attacks have been carried, while lawlessness spread in Chechnya. Maskhadov declared at the end of January 1999 that Islamic law will be imposed in over three years. In July 1999, Chechen radicals led by field commander Basayev staged armed incursions into Dagestan in an attempt to create an Islamic state, which triggered the second Chechen war. In September 1999, Russian forces redeployed in Chechnya and Russia's new Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin, claimed the campaign is needed to quash terrorism. On October 6, Maskhadov called for a holy war against Russia. On November 25, the RF forces began the assault over Grozny that lasted until February 2000. In May, President Putin declared direct rule over Chechnya from Moscow. In June, former Chechen cleric Akhmad Kadyrov was appointed as administrative head, but fighting continued despite that official negotiations started in November 2001 to end the conflict. On October 23, 2002, Chechen rebels seized 800 hostages in a theater in Moscow, rebels and 129 hostages being killed by the RF security forces. In March 2003, the RF's authorities hailed a Chechen referendum vote in favor of a new constitution stipulating that the republic is part of the RF. In October 2003, Akhmed Kadyrov was elected president, but in May 2004 was killed by Chechen rebels. Conflict spread to Ingushetia. In September 2004, rebels sieged a school in Beslan, North Ossetia killing many. In October 2004, Kremlin-backed former Interior Minister Alu Alkhanov became president of Chechnya, following August elections. In February 2005, Maskhadov called a ceasefire and urged the Russian authorities to begin peace talks, but in March he was killed by RF security forces. Conflict spread in October in Kabardino-Balkaria. In November 2005, parliamentary elections were held in Chechnya and more than half the seats were won by pro-Kremlin Unified Russia party. On March 1, 2007, Ramzan Kadyrov was nominated by President Putin to replace Alkhanov. On January 23, 2010, the RF's Prime Minister Putin declared that peace has returned to North Caucasus, but fighting continued with low intensity until currently.²¹¹

Appendix F: The timeline of the conflict from Ukraine²¹²

I. The topple of the Yanukovych regime

November 21, 2013: Yanukovych backs off from his tentative agreement to initial an association agreement with the EU at the Vilnius Summit – contrary to his campaign promises when he was elected in 2010. Popular protests in Kiev begin immediately and grow larger with each passing week. Yanukovych uses increasing violence to suppress the protesters, and Russian media portray the Maidan protesters as Western-instigated fascists. This deception and escalation continue for three months.

December 17: Vladimir Putin throws President Yanukovych an economic lifeline, agreeing to buy \$15bn of Ukrainian debt and reduce the price of Russian gas supplies by about a third.

January 16-23, 2014: Parliament passes restrictive anti-protest laws as clashes turn deadly. Protesters begin storming regional government offices in western Ukraine.

January 28-29: Prime Minister Mykola Azarov resigns and parliament annuls the anti-protest law. Parliament passes an amnesty bill but opposition rejects conditions.

February 14-16: All 234 protesters arrested since December are released. Kiev city hall, occupied since 1 December, is abandoned by demonstrators, along with other public buildings in regions.

February 18: Clashes erupt, with reasons unclear: 18 dead.

February 20: Kiev sees its worst day of violence for almost 70 years. At least 88 people are killed in 48 hours. Video shows uniformed snipers firing at protesters holding makeshift shields.

February 21: President Yanukovych signs compromise deal with opposition leaders.

February 21-22: Yanukovych flees Ukraine; Maidan protesters take control of Kiev government buildings; an interim, pro-EU government is formed.

II. Invasion of Crimea

February 22-23: RF President Putin ordered work on „returning Crimea” to begin.²¹³

February 27: Pro-Russian separatists seize their first official building in Crimea; each day, new government buildings and military bases are surrounded and taken over by pro-Russian separatists backed by “little green men.”

March 1: Russia's parliament approves President Vladimir Putin's request to use force in Ukraine to protect Russian interests.

March 5: The US and reluctant European countries announce minor sanctions against Russia for its actions in Crimea; Russia continues to deny involvement in supporting separatists; Ukraine military forces in Crimea crumble.

March 16: Self-appointed Crimean officials, also backed by anonymous green-uniformed men with guns, hold a referendum on Crimea's secession from Ukraine; allegedly, 97 percent of voters wish to join Russia.

March 18: President Putin signs a bill to absorb Crimea into RF.

March 20: U.S. and EU announce financial sanctions against additional Russian individuals close to Putin, in reaction to Moscow’s annexation of Crimea.

March 31: In response, Putin promises to withdraw most Russian troops from Ukrainian-Russian border (but fails to do so).

III. The fight over the Eastern Ukraine

April 7: Separatists occupy government buildings in the eastern cities of Donetsk, Luhansk and Kharkiv, calling for referenda on independence for these three major regions, and asking Russia to send “peacekeepers” to protect them.

April 15: Ukrainian military operations against pro-Russian separatists in Luhansk and Donetsk (Kharkiv uprising fizzles) begin; EU remains hesitant to apply increased sanctions despite mounting evidence of Moscow's backing for the separatists.

April 17: Putin announces his concept of the historic "Novorossiya," attempting to provide historical rationale for Russia's aggression in eastern Ukraine.

April 20: US sent 600 troops temporarily to Poland and the Baltic States as a gesture of reassurance that NATO allies will be defended against similar Russian incursions.

April 24: In response to Kiev's "anti-terrorist operations" Russia begins new military exercises near its border with Ukraine.

April 26: Russian political operative Alexander Borodai, the self-declared political leader of the separatist Donetsk People's Republic cedes control of separatist fighters to Russian military intelligence officer Igor Girkin, alias Ivan Strelkov ("The Shooter").

May 11: Self-appointed pro-Russian separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk hold referenda, not recognized by Kiev or the West; they declare independence.

May 25: Petro Poroshenko is elected as Ukraine's president on a reformist, pro-EU platform, with a 54.5 percent majority; but he also says he seeks negotiations with Putin.

May 26: Putin says he will respect the results of Ukrainian elections.

Late May-Early June: Separatists begin attempts to take the strategic Donetsk airport supported by Russian armaments and "volunteers", despite Moscow's denial of involvement; Ukrainian forces fight back, with heavy casualties on both sides; continuing military clashes as separatists try to consolidate control of all of Luhansk and Donetsk regions; fighting continues near the key rebel-held town of Sloviansk.

June 14: Pro-Russian rebels shoot down a military transport plane, killing 49 Ukrainian troops, showing the sophistication of weaponry now possessed by the rebels; protesters in Kiev attack the Russian embassy.

June 16: Russia cuts off all gas supplies to Ukraine, economically reinforcing pro-Russian separatist actions in eastern Ukraine.

June 23: Poroshenko declares a temporary ceasefire based on Russian offer of negotiations for a peaceful political settlement between separatists and Kiev government; rebels officially agree one day later.

June 24: Vladimir Putin officially rescinds power to use Russian military in eastern Ukraine as a gesture of his purported commitment to a peaceful settlement; nine Ukrainian servicemen die the same day when rebels shoot down an army helicopter.

June 27: The EU signs an Association Agreement with Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova.

June 28: Rebels release eight members of OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) who had been detained since the end of May.

June 30: Poroshenko ends his unilateral ceasefire based on continuing violations by separatists with numerous Ukrainian casualties and the strengthening of rebel positions.

July 5: Rebels are pushed out of their strategic bastion of Sloviansk; Ukrainian flag hoisted over city council building, fostering optimism for Ukrainian victory in Eastern Ukraine; pro-Russian rebels publicly criticize Putin for “lack of support.”

July 14: Ukrainian military plane shot down at 21,000 feet; Kiev government says missile came from Russian territory since pro-Russian rebels did not have adequate weaponry to hit plane at high altitude.

July 17: Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 crashes in eastern Ukraine killing 298 civilians, mostly Dutch and other Europeans and Australians; plane was downed by a sophisticated Buk surface-to-air missile supplied by Russians; separatists initially boasted they had shot down a large “Ukrainian military aircraft”; when the civilian nature of the flight was discovered they instead blame Kiev for the shoot-down; Moscow denies involvement.

August 7: In response to European sanctions, Russia launches retaliatory sanctions against the West, banning food imports from Europe and the United States.

August 9: Ukrainian army surrounds Donetsk, leading to hopes of success.

August 15: Ukrainian government claims to have destroyed a Russian military convoy that had crossed into Eastern Ukraine – the most direct engagement to date between Ukrainian and Russian military forces. Putin continues to deny existence of Russian military convoys and troops in Eastern Ukraine.

August 22/23: A convoy of 280 Russian trucks crosses the Luhansk border claiming to provide “humanitarian aid” to the region. The Ukrainian government calls this a direct invasion; the U.S. and Europe threaten additional sanctions if Russia does not cease support for separatists. Most Russian trucks return, but only after delivering substantial supplies.

August 25: Poroshenko dissolves parliament and calls for parliamentary elections to be held in October. Meanwhile, Russia escalates its operations against Ukraine, launching a new offensive in Novoazovsk, southeast Ukraine, thereby opening up a second front to create a land bridge between the Russo-Ukrainian border and Crimea.

August 26: Putin and Poroshenko meet in Minsk to discuss reconciliation, and agree on a “roadmap” to a ceasefire by closing the Ukrainian-Russian border to prevent movement of soldiers and military equipment into Ukraine – but hostilities continue.

August 29: Following escalating Russian activity in eastern Ukraine, Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk announces a course towards seeking NATO membership for Ukraine.

September 5: Putin and Poroshenko reach ceasefire agreement at Minsk. Agreed points include a decentralization of power, OSCE monitoring of the Russo-Ukrainian border, release of all hostages, and measures to improve the humanitarian situation in Dombass.

September 6: Only one day after the Minsk agreements, the shelling of Mariupol begins. This is a key port city in south-eastern Ukraine previously cleared of separatists by local Ukrainian miners. Fighting also continues in Donetsk and Lugansk, despite the Minsk agreement.

September 18: Poroshenko addresses the US Congress seeking aid for Ukraine. President Obama promises \$53 million aid package \$46 million for Ukraine's military, and \$7 million for humanitarian aid.

October 12: As a purported token of de-escalation, Putin orders 17,600 Russian troops stationed in the Rostov region near the border with Ukraine to return to their bases. Putin has often shown signs of de-escalation in Ukraine right before intensifying aggression.

October 26: Ukraine holds parliamentary elections in which Ukrainians vote overwhelmingly for pro-Western parties: President Poroshenko's bloc and the People's Front headed by Prime Minister Arseniy Yatseniuk got 21.8 percent and 22.1 percent, respectively, although Poroshenko's bloc won many more seats due to its better performance in single member districts. The other pro-Western parties were Self-Reliance with 10.97 percent, the Radical Party 6.36 percent and Fatherland (led by Yulia Tymoshenko) with 5.68 percent. Total seats in new government coalition: 303 (Of 450) The Opposition Bloc (Yanukovich party's remnants) got 9.43 percent. Total seats in opposition, including independents: 79.

November 2: Pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine hold elections one week after Ukraine's parliamentary elections. Kiev and the West refuse to recognize these elections.

November 7: Russia sends a column of 32 tanks, 16 pieces of heavy artillery, and 30 trucks ferrying fighters and supplies into the eastern Ukrainian region of Luhansk.

November 30: Russia sends another "humanitarian" convoy into Eastern Ukraine despite Ukrainian protest that humanitarian aid is a guise for further military assistance to separatists. This is the eighth such convoy Russia has sent into Eastern Ukraine.

December 4: Putin holds his annual state of the nation address in which he blames the Ukraine crisis on the “unlawful” ouster of Yanukovich and on Western support for “far-right factions” controlling the Ukrainian government. He calls Western sanctions a plot to keep Russia from achieving great power status.

December 8: After a nearly six months hiatus, Russia resumes gas supplies to Ukraine, providing approximately 43.5 million cubic meters per day.

December 16: Despite a rise in interest rates from 10.5 to 17 percent, the rouble loses nearly half of its value. Although Western sanctions are an important part of the reason, the primary cause is the low price of oil (which stands well below \$60 a barrel, when Moscow needs \$100-plus to finance government budget and trade balance). Meanwhile, the U.S. implements additional sanctions on Russia.

December 26: Eastern Ukrainian separatists and Ukraine exchange hundreds of POWs.

December 29: Ukraine signs a bill that drops its non-aligned status. Moscow calls this move a threat to Russia’s national security.

January 4, 2015: An explosion destroys the door and windows of the Euromaidan Coordination Center in Odessa. Ukrainian officials call the incident a terrorist attack. This attack is just one of five similar attacks in Odessa in the past month.

January 11: Pro-Russian separatists begin an aggressive new offensive in the area surrounding the Donetsk Airport.

January 22: Under increasingly heavy assault the Ukrainian military is forced to retreat from the Donetsk Airport, which had served as a center of conflict since September 2014, due to both its symbolic and strategic value.

January 23: Alexander Zakharchenko, head of the Donetsk People’s Republic announces that separatist forces reject all forms of a ceasefire.

January 24: Grad and Uragan rockets fired by pro-Russian separatists kill 30 civilians and wound 100 others in Mariupol, in south-eastern Ukraine. Increasing evidence of direct Russian military intervention, involving more and heavier weaponry and as many as 9000 Russian troops.

January 27: The Ukrainian parliament formally labels Russia as an aggressor state and the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics as terrorist organizations.

February 11: A fresh round of peace talks are held in Minsk.

February 12: Leaders of Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany broker a peace deal to alleviate the ongoing war in Donbass. Measures include the pull-out of all heavy weapons by both sides from the frontline.

February 23: Fighting continues regardless and Ukrainian forces pull back from the town of Debaltseva. Ukraine's economy is on the brink of collapse as its GDP plunges 15.2 percent year-on-year in the fourth-quarter of 2014.

March 10: UK Prime Minister David Cameron creates a fund based on a Cold-War era scheme to help curb Russian influence in Eastern Europe. Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel adds Russia sanctions will stick until Minsk ceasefire is met, and hints sanctions could be extended until end of 2015.²¹⁴

March 31: More than 6,000 people have been killed in eastern Ukraine since April 2014, as violence continues despite ceasefire.

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