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Russia at War:
Chechnya, Georgia, and Theories of Foreign Policy

By

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A Plan B Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
In
Political Science

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The conflicts in Chechnya and Georgia are for Russia the seminal policy events of the turbulent post-Soviet era. Learning about Russian conflict policy thinking with respect to these cases should help to illuminate broader Russian foreign policy objectives and tendencies. Even though the Chechen Wars were by nature domestic conflicts, I believe that trends and patterns from that case, combined with insights from the Georgian conflict, can help identify strengths and weaknesses of major Russian foreign policy theories.

Though there are many such theories, I see that most fall into one of two broad categories. While there is some overlap, I believe that the major theories of Russian foreign policy ascribe policy decisions either to historical narratives and trends or current events and context. Within the framework of past events, I will consider two theories of Russian foreign policy: the historical continuity theory and the imposed insecurity theory. When looking at policy decisions stemming more from current happenings, I will also look at two important theories, the diversionary tension theory and the economic enabling theory. Information from my two cases can help us assess the general validity of each of the theories, or alternately, help us grasp the contingent applicability of the theories. No one theory may be able to adequately fit or explain all important events. What features of foreign policy events invoke one or the other distinctive patterns of foreign policy practice? I begin by considering these theories of Russian foreign policy, and then consider how well each theory fits each conflict. Then I explore whether conditions exist in the two cases that invoke distinctive foreign policy patterns.

One caveat: these theories often imply a unitary actor assumption for Russian foreign policy goals, strategy, and implementation. This assumption can dangerously simplify a theory if it is taken too far. Foreign policy decisions in Russia have traditionally fallen to the executive

branch, but today, the division between the duties of President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin is not always clear. There are other interested parties in play as well. Competing factions, opinions, and goals make it unwise to make such bold statements as "Russia wants" as if there is a monolithic, unified entity in charge of policy. Statements of "Russia's" desires or goals in this paper should be understood under the unitary actor framework that these theories often include or imply, with all the attendant limitations. This approach serves a useful purpose in making each theory manageable for study and discussion within the scope of the paper.

Theories of Russian Foreign Policy: A Brief Overview

1. The historical continuity theory of Russian foreign policy, advocated most strongly by Richard Pipes in the 1990s, "sees deep continuities running through and even largely determining the course of Russian history from the Middle Ages through the tsarist empire and the Soviet Union to the post-Soviet present" (Lieven 1998:5). A derivation of the theory holds that the aggressive, expansionist, and imperialist tendencies of the Russian people and culture are primordial and deeply ingrained, and that foreign policy actions of Russian leaders will necessarily take this form.

The influence of past events on current policy could stem from many sources. Historical conflicts could have engendered feelings of hostility between Russians and other groups that persist to this day, still negatively affecting policy decisions made involving that outside group. Even if such feelings might not persist naturally, elites can use images or stereotypes from past conflicts to induce polarization and influence current policy. Another possibility is a form of path dependence, with past Russian policy choices constraining (though not directly determining) present decisions. One unique feature of the historical continuity theory,

regardless of its approach, is its exclusive application to Russian foreign policy. Unlike the other theories presented in this paper, this theory is not generalizable or applicable to any other country's policy choices. Of course, other countries' policy might be driven or influenced by analogous historical events or narratives in their own past, but this theory based on Russian history can obviously only apply to Russia itself.

The distance of such events from the present makes them more or less suitable for the various applications or understandings of historical continuity. Events that occurred hundreds of years ago are unlikely to still be influencing Russian policy through path dependency, as far too many intervening events and years exist to squarely pin current policy on past decisions. Events that distant also are unlikely to remain firmly rooted in the public consciousness unless the memory, symbolism, or stereotypes that arise from such events are consciously invoked by leaders or the public to maintain their salience.

In any of its forms, historical continuity is perhaps the most amorphous and difficult theory to evaluate, because even if this were the driving force behind modern Russian foreign policy, the theory does not enumerate specific policy goals that the Russian leadership would seek under this theory. Instead, we are given the entire scope of Russian history and told to find similarities, as the threads of events in the past will help predict current behavior. This makes for a very general, malleable theory that may not be falsifiable, as almost any modern event can be tied to a historical parallel of one kind or another. The only behaviors that the theory predicts very concretely are aggressive Russian actions on its borders, often in defense of Russian interests or peoples seen as intrinsically connected to the Russians. This causes an overlap with the imposed insecurity theory, which I will discuss shortly.

Anatol Lieven discounts primordial aggression as the root cause of the majority of events in Russian history but explains the rationale of its supporters. Russia has always been a nation besieged, either literally or in its own perception. Surrounded by potentially hostile nations on all sides, the only way Russia felt it could survive was to establish buffer zones between itself and its enemies. The lack of easily defensible frontiers led Russia to use Ukraine, Poland, and during the Soviet era, its Eastern European satellite nations to deter foreign aggression and insulate the Russian homeland (Mankoff 2009:2). Similar actions were taken along the southern border of the Russian state among the tribes and empires of Central Asia. Shifting borders often led to Russian populations living behind "enemy" lines, and led to a historic desire by Russia to defend its people even if such defense required ignoring or flaunting international borders. Though studying historical continuities stretching back nearly a thousand years to find parallels in modern Russian history would take volumes, it may be worthwhile to consider how Russia views its own history.

One way to examine Russia's view of its own history would be a content analysis of two forms of media that are currently influencing the Russian population: political speeches and current Russian History textbooks used in the Russian primary education system. Both of these are places for the Russian government to affect public opinion. If either specific historical events or more general trends in Russian and Soviet history are touted, referenced, or alluded to, it may show a desire by the current administration to mold the historical record to facilitate an expansionist, aggressive Russian foreign policy by instilling certain historical narratives in the Russian population. If such narratives enable Russian aggression to be viewed as defensive, justified, or appropriate (by Russians, if not the rest of the world), then the resulting foreign

policy practices coupled with prevailing narratives could certainly appear to be primordial, or at least drawn from the past. Whether or not primordial aggression exists in the Russian culture, the theme of using other nations as proxies to achieve greater goals will resurface in other theories of Russian foreign policy.

Instead of attempting to draw final conclusions about the direction and possible motivation behind Russian educational curricula and political speech, this paper will instead examine historical events that have clear parallels with the modern events in Chechnya and Georgia. In doing so, I hope to discern whether or not such a strategy by the Russian government is possible, and if so, which events and themes lend themselves well to the narrative that the government might present. Some of the more recent events might have direct bearing on policy decisions in Chechnya and Georgia since 1991, but most are distant enough to necessitate conscious invoking by the current government or other groups to influence modern public opinion.

2. The imposed insecurity theory also incorporates historical regularities in Russian practices. Specifically, it closely concerns those nations in close proximity to Russia. The theory holds that Russian security depends directly on the insecurity of its neighbors (Asmus 2010:9). Though "imposed insecurity" is not a fully developed theory in itself, I will use the term to describe this amalgam of various theories based on Russian security and sphere of influence tactics. By keeping neighboring nations in a near-constant state of uncertainty and dependence, Russia theoretically manages to prevent any major dissent or defection to the West. From imperial times, weak states (relative to Russia) on the border have posed both a threat and an

opportunity. The threat stems from the possibility of either internal discord spreading into Russia itself or takeover by a stronger power that would pose a greater threat to Russia. The opportunity consists of the possibility of maintaining buffer states or participating in various methods of interference in the internal workings of the neighboring governments (Hosking 2001:190).

This interference often takes the form of threats, either outright or implied, against the territorial sovereignty of countries in the region. Specifically, the Russian government takes special interest in maintaining a sphere of influence. In contemporary times, this implies maintaining extraordinary influence over the fifteen newly independent nations that formed after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Filippov 2009:1825). Threats, perceived or actual, against the borders and boundaries of other nations are particularly apt to introduce insecurity, because the "defence (sic) of sovereignty over one's territory is the *sine qua non* of state security by virtually all standards of international relations." (Welt 2010:68). If this theory holds true, Russia continues to seek power in the areas where it has historically held sway, and also in areas where it shares ethnic, religious, or other cultural similarities that span generations.

If this theory is accurate in predicting the behavior of Russian governmental actors, we would see attempts to maintain a certain level of instability in bordering countries. The level of uncertainty will ideally keep that nation dependent on Russia for economic or social stability, without escalating into violent uprisings or massive political upheaval. Such extreme events would likely be detrimental to Russian interests in the region in most cases. The instability would be produced by a constant worry or fear of Russian intervention, whether political, military, or economic, should that border country attempt to ally itself with an outside power

(generally a Western one). In the contemporary context, interaction with Western countries on certain levels might be tolerated, but excessive influence from Western powers on Russia's border nations is not tolerated by the Russian government. In this scenario, Russia does not attempt to use too severe of threats against the territorial sovereignty of a border state, as a state that is too weakened would become easy prey for a strong outside force.

An expected consequence of this strategy is to bring the Russian government's contemporary goals in opposition to those of other countries beyond its immediate neighbors, with predictable tension as a result (Filippov 2009:1826). At times, Russia appears to employ this strategy in Eastern Europe, where threats to sovereignty and security run counter to the 1990 Treaty of Paris. The Treaty specifically rejects the maintenance of spheres of influence and emphatically states that the borders in Europe are not to be changed by military force (Asmus 2010:225). Today, perceived violations of this treaty set Russia at odds with the EU, NATO, and other powers in the region. Lending credence to the use of the strategy, Russian foreign policy goals involving satellite nations appear to have raised similar tensions with major European powers throughout much of its history.

3. A third theory of Russian foreign policy concerns current events. The diversionary tension theory sees close ties between more assertive foreign policy and the systematic crackdown on democracy in Russia during the Putin presidency, extending into the Medvedev years (Filippov 2009:1826). Certain freedoms, prominently freedom of speech and of the press, are sometimes curtailed in Russia for purposes of controlling dissent. Certain Western governments, and the Western media in particular, harshly criticize these crackdowns. As a

result, such freedoms are closely associated with the West among many Russians (Pilkington et al. 2002:91-2). Various segments of the Russian populace also react to these heavy-handed methods with vociferous dissent. The government has specific domestic and foreign policy goals, and it requires a certain democratic structure within the Russian state to successfully implement those goals. A change in that structure, even if only on the level of a shift in the relative power of parties, could fundamentally change the foreign policy realities of the government. Russia wants to be seen as representing its peoples' interests, and this requires a certain level of openness in democratic society and responsiveness to public opinion. This reliance on public support can be dangerous, as swings in support from the ruling party to opposition parties could presage a loss of power. Should the ruling party single out groups within Russia for attack, the public would likely see through such a ploy. The state realizes this, and encourages "diversionary tension" with foreign powers to rally public opinion behind the current government, and against the "corrosive" influence of the West (Filippov 2009:1826). If public opinion can be turned against the West in general, democratic shortcomings may be able to be swept under the rug of national solidarity in times of crisis. In the modern sense, diversionary tension occurs when an incumbent government engages in purposeful, premeditated international conflict to distract its constituents from pressing domestic issues.

If this theory of policy holds true, Russia would maintain a certain manageable level of tension with historic regional rivals as preparation against future domestic unrest or dissent. When a crackdown on internal dissent or a refocusing of internal narratives is necessary, Russia would ignite a foreign conflict that could unify public opinion against an external threat (generally the West), as well as justify stricter controls on various domestic liberties and actions

to facilitate domestic control. The conflict would not involve the external threat directly, but Russia would equate the historic rival's actions with a broader attempt by that larger, external threat to weaken the Russian nation in some way.

For this paper, I will use the definition and breakdown of diversionary tension advanced by Mikhail Filippov, who synthesizes the various theoretical aspects quite well. Certain conditions must exist in order for diversionary tension to be an attractive option for policymakers, and for such an attempt to be successful. First, leaders must be sensitive to changes in public opinion. Second, the greater transparency often found in established democracies can make such diversionary conflict unwise, even if it might be desired, as there is a greater risk of the public seeing through the ruse. Thus there must be the right balance between sensitivity to public opinion and transparency. Third, national incumbents fearing forcible removal from power are more likely to effectively employ this tactic. Fourth, the domestic audience must have a fairly high level of cohesion, or the diversionary tactics may well split the populace over an issue rather than unite them behind the leadership. Finally, suitable targets for diversionary war must pose a low military risk and small chance of failure. Targets of such tactics have every incentive to avoid the provocations for war, and for this reason the easiest targets are countries or populations with which the national government has a long-standing rivalry (*Ibid.*:1827-8).

4. Finally, a fourth theory of Russian foreign policy is the economic enabling theory. Like imposed insecurity, this is a term I will use to describe a mix of various theories. This model also involves national stability and strength, particularly in an economic sense. Following the falloff

in prestige after the end of the Cold War, Russia seems eager to prove to the word that it remains a potent force in international relations – that it still matters (Mankoff 2009:6). Being proactive and taking potentially divisive action on the world stage can require a position of strength from which to act. This strength is subjective, meaning that it is Russia's own view of its own strength that matters more than universal political realities. Growing economic stability (whether perceived or actual) both facilitates and may be essential to the kind of active, confident global goal seeking that Russia may want to engage in within its sphere of influence (*Ibid.*:5).

Under this theory, the main goal of Russian policy is to be a major, relevant player on the world stage. Realizing that such a position will require economic strength, Russian foreign policy will be applied in ways conducive to strengthening its economy. Economic strength can serve as both a goal and an enabler of Russian foreign policy. Certain actions and conflicts will be undertaken to achieve or maintain economic prosperity, and once a certain level of stability is assured, economic mechanisms will be used to achieve foreign policy goals. This theory does not rule out the pursuit of economic strength for other goals, such as growth and stability for its own sake, but it assumes that Russian primacy is the driving force behind economic efforts.

Reliance on economic stability is a precarious basis for foreign policy. Even before the Russian economic crash of the late 1990s, theorists warned of the danger of Russia's reliance on the export of raw materials (Lieven 1998: 173). Such a one-dimensional economy made Russia very wealthy in the Putin era, but the global recession that began in earnest in 2008 has cast doubt on Russia's ability to compete in the global market. It may be useful to track Russian action in Georgia and Chechnya according to relative economic stability at the time of the

action. More than current economic success must be taken into account however, as the first war in Chechnya was waged at a time of near-poverty for the nascent Russian Federation. The advocates of economic enabling theory consider that conflicts can be instigated with the goal of future economic prosperity or stability, as long as either the current level of economic strength allows the successful prosecution of the conflict or some economic factor makes avoiding the conflict seemingly unwise.

Historical Continuity Theory

The story of Russian history traditionally began with the appearance of the Slavs in historical records dating back to the 6th century, C.E. Occupying the vast Eurasian plain, political entities from early Kievan Rus all the way to the present day Russian Federation (all such entities will be referred to as "Russian states" in this work for simplicity's sake, despite their various political configurations and ethnic makeup) have had to deal with "the most extensive and by far the most labile of the world's major empires" (Hosking, 2001:3). The danger in equating these widely varying political entities lies in the assumption that the modern Russian Federation is substantively anything like the Kievan Rus or any other early governmental forms. If historical events still have an effect on modern policy, they are more likely either more recent or purposefully maintained historical narratives in pursuit of specific policy goals. With that in mind, the various Russian states lacked easily defensible borders and had their territory expand and contract over thousands of miles in one direction or another. Throw in the presence of aggressive states on Russia's borders for much if not all of its history, and it is easy to see why Russians see themselves as perpetual victims of foreign predation (Billington, 2004:3,152). This

view was strengthened in the Soviet era as Stalin backed a narrative depicting Russia as a victim not only of constant external aggression, but also of internal betrayal (*Ibid.*:31).

Of course, Russia also played the role of aggressor quite often herself. In this section I examine illustrative historical episodes throughout Russia's history in which Russia intervened or interfered in the foreign affairs of surrounding states with the stated goal of either enhancing Russian stability or coming to the aid of a certain group within the targeted region. The first rationale, that of enhancing Russian stability and maintaining territorial integrity, would appear similar to some of the reasoning behind the Chechen conflict. As the Caucasus region historically has been a hotbed of revolutionary sentiment and secessionist movements, the historical examples that parallel current Chechen realities will primarily be drawn from that very same region of modern-day Russia. The second rationale, concerning incursions done with a stated purpose of aiding a group within a foreign polity or other interference in foreign governmental affairs, draws clear parallels with Russia's methods and stated motives in the Georgian war of 2008. Since Russian interference in foreign nations is hardly limited to the South Caucasus, historical examples of this type will come from various nations with which Russia has engaged in such tactics throughout its history.

As a few of the most salient events are identified, I will attempt to determine whether or not Russia could use such events to create a historical narrative of both victimization at the hands of foreign aggressors and morally justified crusades on behalf of oppressed "brothers" within neighboring states. A full content analysis would take not only these factors into account, but would also look for overarching themes in Russian foreign policy to ascertain whether or not Russia strives to cultivate a certain image in foreign relations that might be an

enabling factor in current aggressive policy actions. If Russia could successfully cultivate a culture of international victimization coupled with righteous adventurism, the Russian population might be much more tolerant of aggressive policy.

There are far too many historical events that could be tied into the mindset or historical narratives that enabled current action in Chechnya and Georgia to examine in any depth in this setting. For the purposes of this paper, I will attempt to highlight a few telling events in Russian history that I believe exhibit prevailing trends that may bear on the policies of the modern Russian Federation. The events I examine below are not necessarily a driving force in modern Russian politics. However, should historical inertia play a role in current policy, these events show continuity with current policy. Going further, should Russian leadership attempt to present a narrative that portrays certain types of action as the only viable options in particular conflicts, these events and the themes they present could also be used as part of a larger historical framework for Russian action.

Parallels with Modern Events in Chechnya

Russian attempts to gain a foothold on the western shores of the Caspian Sea in the 18th century brought the empire into conflict with the various tribes of the Caucasus region. Russian encroachment into their traditional ways of life may have actually accelerated the spread of Islam, as that religion supported an ideology of resistance (Hosking 2001:238). In 1785, Sheikh Mansur called for discontinuation of intertribal warfare in order to unite and drive out the Russian invaders. Though his assault was unsuccessful, it raised policy questions for the Russian governing elite that are still not fully answered today.

Specifically, it introduced the 1800s' policy question of "the sword or the samovar," an idea that basically asks "Should one slash the enemy to death or invite him for a cup of tea?" (Parfitt 2011). Though both approaches have been tried at various times, the Russian strategy has generally been one of military action, beginning with General Alexei Ermolov's service as the governor of the Caucasus. He burned forests and villages alike under the impression that depriving the native peoples of their livelihood would drive them into submission. Though these methods had worked to some degree in the steppes, the heavy-handed tactics and mass deportations from the Caucasus "left an enduring legacy of hatred and a desire for vengeance which has made the Caucasus a permanent festering sore in the Russian body politic" (Hosking 2001:239-40). Though outright conflict has waxed and waned between Russia and the Chechens, feelings of hatred and vengeance have remained fairly constant. At various points in Russian history, the states threatening Russian stability and sovereignty in the Caucasus were the Mongol and Ottoman Empires. By this point, however, governmental narratives attempted to make Islam itself the enemy against which Russia needed to aggressively defend itself. Though the anti-Islamic narrative did not remain nearly as prevalent as Russo-Chechen animosity, it too never completely left the national consciousness. This anti-Islamic sentiment generalized the conflict beyond particular ethnicities to something more akin to a clash of civilizations.

There are several parallels that can be drawn between the early conflicts with the Chechens and other local tribes and the two Chechen wars of the post-Soviet era. As they did under Sheikh Mansur, various tribes and factions united against the Russian invaders in the First Chechen War in the 1990s. Due in part to Chechnya's small size, most of the regions in the area

felt threatened by Russia's incursion and sent volunteers to aid in the conflict. The overwhelming forces brought to bear against a much smaller, religiously distinct political entity aroused fears of an eventual assault on all Muslim enclaves in the Caucasus (Lieven 1998:34).

Another parallel is the vacillation between alliances with local leaders and scorched-earth tactics in Chechnya. Following the embarrassing defeat suffered by Russian armed forces in the first conflict, the peace treaty with Chechnya called for a political solution to end armed conflict and increase economic reconstruction in Chechnya (Jack 2004: 95). Barely three years later, however, the second war featured a return to the scorched earth tactics of General Ermolov. The massive devastation from air raids, focused application of infantry and armor, and both targeted and indiscriminate artillery strikes may have reduced the level of violent attacks from Chechen insurgents (Lyall 2009:357), but the reduction in violence may well be due to the lack of surviving militants than any long-lasting influence on the motivations of the population of Chechnya. Much as they did in the 1800s, scorched-earth tactics may reduce immediate levels of resistance and insurgent violence in the Caucasus region, but provoke a long-term increase in resentment and anger in not only Chechnya, but Russia's other restless provinces in the region.

Mass deportation has also played a role in the current conflict, as the WWII exile of the entire Chechen nation still holds a powerful place in the national consciousness of the Chechen people. During the Second World War Stalin's government accused the Chechen-Ingush republic of conspiring with the Nazis. With little evidence against them, the entire population was forced to abandon their republic and settle in Kazakhstan. Over one third of the population died en route, and their return was only made possible in 1957 when Khrushchev denounced

many of Stalin's policies (Lapidus 1998:9). This episode is likely to hold a much more salient place in the collective memory of the Chechen people than tribal warfare against the Russian Empire of the 18th and 19th centuries, but that does not rule out the influence of those earlier conflicts. The invocation of those earlier abuses would need to be more consciously adopted, as unlike the deportations, there are no living victims of the early wars to remind the Chechens of Russian abuses.

The divisive effects of this violent history between Russia and Chechnya are exacerbated by a lack of shared ethnicity and religion. The ancestors of modern Chechens have lived on their current territory for at least 6000 years, and the area is still predominantly inhabited by those of Chechen descent (Nichols, 1995). 97% of modern Chechens claim Chechen as their primary language, though fluency in Russian is common. Unlike the Eastern Orthodox majority in Russia as a whole, the overwhelming majority of Chechens are Sunni Muslims whose social traditions include strong family structure and clan identification (*Ibid.*). Even after the ethnic Russian colonization efforts during the Soviet era, Chechnya was probably the least "Russian" of any of the autonomous republics within the Soviet Union. In the 1989 census of all republics within the Soviet Union, the joint Chechen-Ingush republic had the "second highest concentrations of members of the titular nationality in the total population…the highest proportion of those who considered the language of their titular nationality their 'native' language and…the highest levels of religious belief and practice" (Lapidus 1998:10).

Parallels with Modern Events in Georgia

For the first twenty years of the 18th century, the emerging Russian Empire, led by its impulsive young leader Peter I, fought against the neighboring Swedish empire. Early defeats at

the hands of the Swedes were followed by the modernization of Peter's army and the construction of St. Petersburg. After years of back and forth battles, Russia's new Baltic Fleet defeated the Swedish navy and Peter was able to devise a peace treaty on his own terms. Beyond giving Russia control over a wide swath of territory in present-day Estonia and north of Lake Ladoga, the treaty also allowed Russia to declare itself the "guarantor" of the 1720 Swedish constitution. In this way, Russians "claimed the right to interfere in Swedish internal politics, giving themselves a lever to project their power [to] the other side of the Baltic, should they think it desirable" (Hosking 2001:187). European nations, concerned about the possibility of further Russian influence, took a united stand against such Russian interference.

In a similar manner, Russia's interference in political and governmental affairs in South Ossetia gave them such a lever to project their power in Georgia should the need arise. Beyond vocal support for the Ossetians cause, Russia took de facto control of many aspects of social welfare and government bureaucracy in South Ossetia, including paying pensions and government salaries as well as providing security documents and Russian passports and residency documents to Ossetians in the region (Welt 2010:77). Following the conflict in 2008, European powers have once again unanimously decried the projection of Russian power into a foreign country. While it is possible that Russian leaders consciously use Peter's experiences as a guide, it seems more likely that they are just displaying similar behavioral traits generated from enduring cultural factors.

Another set of historical episodes that could contribute to Russian narratives and reasoning in Georgia are the Russian policies adopted toward the Balkan nations during the late 1700s and early 1800s. At various times in this period, Russia engaged in various enterprises

"on behalf" of oppressed populations in the Balkans. While the Balkans region was still under the rule of the Ottoman Empire in the 1700s, Catherine the Great dispatched a trusted messenger to Montenegro to proclaim Russia's desire for "raising and liberating…the whole Greek nation" (Mazower 2000:69). The Greek nation referred to is that of the Orthodox faith, with which the Russian people still felt solidarity, despite the differences between the Greek and Russian branches of Orthodoxy. The revolution, devoid of any meaningful Russian military support, was a failure. However, it did raise the hopes of many Slavs in the Balkans, who thought that the day of their liberation was near. The Russo-Turkish War of 1806-1812 saw Russian troops make substantial advances into the Balkans, but once again the conflict did more to raise Russia's reputation as a potential savior than it did to actually bring meaningful government change (*Ibid.*:72). In the 1820s, Russia took a more active role in local Balkan politics as military rule was imposed over the so-called "Danubian" provinces, which included Serbia. Russia's invasion of the Ottoman Empire in the 1870s led to declarations of independence for Serbia, Montenegro, and Romania. The same conflict begat a new Bulgarian state, which was quickly dismantled by the other powers in Europe for fear of Russian influence in Europe. Russia remained a "protector" of Bulgaria throughout the next decade, as it took over control of the army and the entire Ministry of War (*Ibid.*:90-95).

Three parallels with current events are shown by Russian intervention in the Balkans. First, Russia acted on behalf of an oppressed people who had ties to either ethnic or religious identity within Russia. In South Ossetia, Russia claimed to act for the preservation of the ethnic Russians living there (Asmus 2010:41), and there was also a common Orthodox religious tie between the South Ossetians and their northern kin living within the Russian Federation (PCGN

2007). Second, the slow infiltration into politics and culture that led to support for independence is another clear parallel with events in South Ossetia, as was noted in the previous section. Finally, the more-or-less unified European opinion against growing Russian power in Europe (through Bulgaria) is also similar to the fairly general outrage over Russian actions in Georgia.

Following the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, the territorial boundaries of the Russian Empire began breaking down. In the Georgian provinces, villagers across the region began isolated, violent uprisings against the Menshevik Georgian government. One such revolt involved the ethnic Ossetians. In a conflict that would later lead to the creation of the autonomous South Ossetian region of the Soviet Union, the Ossetian peasantry agitated for land redistribution from the landed aristocracy. What began as a social movement for redistribution became an ethnic conflict, seeing as the majority of landowners were ethnic Georgian nobles. Fearing defeat and searching for powerful allies, the Ossetians became Bolsheviks and the conflict escalated into the political realm (Saparov 2009:109). The turn toward the Bolsheviks reflected the historical Ossetian desire to leave Georgia and join Russia (*Ibid.*: 105). The Ossetians wanted complete separation from Georgia, while the Georgian government wanted to refuse them any special status in the government. As the Bolsheviks prevailed in the Russian civil war, they compromised by creating the South Ossetian Autonomous region within Georgia, satisfying neither side (*Ibid.*: 120). Both the intervention of the Russian government on behalf of the Ossetians and the continued desire for Ossetian unification with Russia have a clear connection with the modern conflict. This continuity may be

one of attitudes persisting through time. This preference for connection with Russia is partially a product of both ethnicity and religion.

The Ossetians are believed to be descendants of a tribal Samaritan nation called the Alans who moved into the area hundreds of years ago, and they speak an Indo-Iranian dialect. 75% are Orthodox Christians, with most of the remaining population adhering to the Sunni branch of Islam. A common religion has helped the Ossetians coexist rather peacefully with their Russian neighbors for most of their history. Upon the formation of the Soviet Union, the traditional Ossetian lands were divided between North Ossetia in Russia and South Ossetia in Georgia. The shared ethnicity with their northern neighbors, coupled with a common religious heritage, has sustained the desire for reunification with Russia throughout both the Soviet and Post-Soviet periods (PCGN, 2007).

Conclusions

The intrinsic problem with issues of historical continuity is that of proving causality. Simply finding similar events in Russia's past in no way proves that said events are determining or even affecting the course of modern Russian policy. The over-generalizability of the historical continuity is its greatest weakness, as it does not set out a rigorous system of conditions or features that can be examined and tested for a set of events. Still, I believe that the past can affect the present passively, as either policy decisions or political and governmental structures instituted at some point in history can constrain current policy choices. Past events can also be used actively by leaders seeking to advance their own agenda, either by drawing lessons from such events or using them to imbue the nation with emotion. As mentioned earlier, it may be possible for the current administration in Russia to use specific events or more general themes

in Russian history to strengthen a particular cultural understanding or identity that is more accepting of aggressive action in conflicts like the ones in Chechnya and Georgia. As for historical events determining current policy, I believe that there are too many examples of modern policy being driven by more contemporary concerns to accept the historical continuity theory as the major driving force behind Russian action.

Imposed Insecurity Theory

Historically, pressure on Russia from both Asia to the east and Europe to the West created a desire for controllable buffer states to act as defense (Billington 2004:72). This mindset has continued in various forms to the present day, and Russian history is rife with examples of seemingly contradictory military action: offensive action against neighbors to allow defensive action against more distant threats (Ermath 2010:86). While the feeling of threat from outside may persist, today's international actors, particularly NATO and the European Union, frown on the antiquated notion of "spheres of influence." As mentioned earlier, such spheres within Europe were specifically outlawed under the 1990 Treaty of Paris. In reference to Russia, the modern use of the term "sphere of influence" mainly refers back to Soviet-era tactics and beliefs. Modern Russian political leaders certainly would not boast of maintaining such a view toward their neighbors, but there is ample evidence that the former Soviet states hold a significant place in Russian foreign policy. As this is a paper about understanding Russian foreign policy from a Western perspective, I will use "sphere of influence" in regard to current Russian policy when I see it as appropriate, whether or not the Russian government itself would endorse the term. It is important to note at the outset that Russia is not unique in its approach

to certain areas of the world, as the United States, China, and other powers have vested and claimed interests in certain regions as well.

Russian tendency to see certain areas of the world as its privileged sphere has deep roots in history. Though there are multiple factors that helped create this phenomenon, one of the earliest was the 16th-century idea that Moscow (then still called Muscovy, the capital of the new tsarist empire) was the "Third Rome." The Russian Orthodox church of the time advanced the idea that the original Christian faith, centered in Rome, had become corrupted. The "Second Rome," Constantinople, had also spurned the true faith. It was left up to the true Orthodox believers of Russia to carry the torch of Christianity for the rest of the world (Hosking 2001:103). Ironically, the Third Rome concept carried little traction at the time of its first mention, and was actually ignored by state authorities and banned by church officials as heretical (Poe 2001:2). The idea only gained widespread popularity when the writings of the original author were published in the 1860s, and Russian historians since that time have ascribed everything from "the 'expansionist' foreign policy of the Imperial era, the 'messianic' thought of the Slavophiles and Panslavs of the later nineteenth century, and the Bolshevik 'drive for world domination'" to that idea (*Ibid.*). Messianic urges are not the same as attempts to control peripheral territory, but the Third Rome idea may explain some of Russia's forays into particular regions and resulting feelings of attachment, responsibility, or privilege.

A second possible source of sphere of influence thinking in modern Russian politics stems from the Slavophile and Pan-Slavism movements referenced previously. The effects of the Pan-Slavic movement on Central and Eastern Europe that began in the 1800s are far too complex for this paper to cover, but it is important to note that at least one Russian tsar,

Alexander I, showed signs of desiring to unite the Slavic people under one federative government of Slavic nations (Guins 1949:125). The Slavophile movement within Russia did not have universal acceptance, but its call to unify Slavic culture, marked by Orthodox Christianity and a spirit of national solidarity, led many Russians to see unique ties between themselves and Slavs worldwide (*Ibid.*:126). These ties permeate many political relationships today and lead to Russian interest in certain areas of Europe with ethnic Slavic enclaves.

The third historical episode that flavors much of Russia's current sphere of influence thinking was the spread of the Soviet Union. Unlike Orthodox Christianity or Slavic ethnicity, communism required neither common religion nor blood to engage outside of Russia's borders. Using a modified version of Marxism, the Soviet Union attempted to attract adherents in many regions. By accepting or coercing any and all nations whose proletariat would rise up and join the communist revolution, the Soviet Union spread into areas where the Russian Empire had never been able to hold consistent power, namely areas of Central Europe and Central Asia. The special interest that Russia continues to take in the former Soviet states has already been mentioned.

The ideas of Third Rome, Pan-Slavism, and communist solidarity all played a part in the special role that Russia sees for itself in particular areas of the world today, but can such areas truly be described as spheres of influence? If so, does Russian historical activity in the Caucasus explain their current behavior, or are contemporary events a better causal mechanism?

The idea of a Russian sphere of influence has changed subtly, but noticeably, in recent years. In 2008, shortly following the cessation of hostilities in Georgia, President Dmitri Medvedev spoke of Russia's goal to defend Russian citizens abroad and maintain the country's

spheres of “privileged interest.” Toward the end of that same year, Defense Minister Sergei Lavrov added that Russia and the former Soviet states are bound by “unique relations” and “civilizational unity” dating back to the time of the Russian Empire (Trenin 2009:3-4). This distinction between spheres of “influence” and spheres of “interest” is nuanced, but important. Dmitri Trenin asserts that the changing policy positions that Russia takes toward the countries that were part of the Soviet sphere of influence shows that while the old model of thinking about various regions still influences contemporary Russian policy, it does not determine that policy. Whereas spheres of influence are all inclusive areas on the periphery of Russia that by their very nature exclude other powers from sharing similar roles of power, spheres of interest are in many ways more specific and identifiable. The interests deal with particular aspects of policy with certain countries, rather than an overarching dominance of all policy within certain regions (*Ibid.*: 13).

Where the imposed insecurity theory is weaker in explaining current Russian behavior, however, is specifically in the “insecurity” portion of the theory. Modern Russian methods of influence lean more toward economic integration, the soft power of media and language, and strategic positioning against Islamic militants or other threats (*Ibid.:*12-14). The only major example of imposed territorial insecurity that has occurred since the fall of the Soviet Union is the Georgian conflict, fought in large measure to stop Georgia from joining NATO and the EU at almost any cost (Asmus 2010:216). As the conflict in Georgia seems to be the only key departure from the new sphere of interest thinking, the other possible reasons for that conflict will be examined in the following section. On the other hand, the invasion of Georgia could be the start of a new trend, rather than an anomaly in an otherwise more peaceful era. As this

cannot be assessed without future Russian behavior taken into account, it remains only a possibility. Rather than threatening territorial integrity, Russia has in recent years turned toward what the West deems “energy diplomacy”, which includes various forms of threats, slowdowns, and shutdowns of the supply of natural gas and oil to countries with which Russia has disagreements (Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist 2009:309,311).

Despite the change in Russian thinking in terms of influence to interest, for Western nations the mere invocation of privileged interest raises the possibility of special rights for Russia in the post-Soviet space that other countries do not share. Beyond tension with Europe under the Treaty of Paris, this approach also brings Russia squarely into conflict with the post-Cold War goals of the United States in the region. Allowing Russia to claim privileged interests and rights in Europe would repudiate more than 20 years of American foreign policy in the area (Larrabee 2010:37). This illustrates one of the basic conundrums of modern Russian policy: leaders seem to want to engage in “Great Power” politics internationally, which requires a certain level of accommodation for foreign opinion, but they also want the latitude to assert themselves in the former Soviet states (Mankoff 2009:243). Most scholars see this aggressive policy of interference as restarting under Putin, but there is evidence that the drive toward Russian primacy seen under Putin and Medvedev is merely the culmination of a process which began under Yeltsin (*Ibid.*:3-4). The new Russian primacy may be one of interests rather than influence, but that doesn’t stop Western political leaders from drawing parallels to Cold War tactics. From Russia’s point of view, those accusations are fairly hypocritical, as it is the West that seems to be continuing to expand its own sphere of influence at Russia’s expense. Factors seen as encroachments into traditionally Russian interests include the Western support for the

various “color revolutions,” NATO expansion following the end of the Cold War, missile defense installations in Europe, anti-Russian rhetoric, and most of all, the emergence of Kosovo as an independent state (Tsygankov and Tarver Wahlquist 2009:309).

The imposed insecurity theory is intrinsically linked to foreign affairs. How does Chechnya, being a constituent part of the Russian federation rather than a border nation, fit with a theory of spheres of interest or influence? Of note here are the parallels between the original reasons for the Russian invasions of Chechnya in the 1800s contrasted with the goals of the conflict in the 1900s. Lieven sees three such common themes: the failure of sphere of influence tactics, the tradition of banditry, and lines of communication running through Chechnya (Lieven 1998:312). In the 1800s, Russia was often at odds with the Ottoman Empire. At first, Russia attempted to use Chechnya as a buffer zone. Their support of corrupt, secular regimes in Dagestan led to an Islamic uprising that spread to Chechnya, however, and threatened to lead to support and possible invasion from the Ottomans (Hosking 2001:329). The Russian government used this danger, along with the inability of Chechen leaders to restrain bandits, as pretexts for taking control of Chechnya. The final factor was the vital strategic interest that Russia saw in the region. The “lines of communication” referenced by Lieven refer to the fact that communication across the Caucasus was nearly impossible for Russia without holding Chechnya. Without that communication, the prosecution of a conflict with the Ottomans would have been very dangerous (Lieven 1998:13-14).

Can these parallels truly apply to the 1990s’ conflict when Chechnya was still a constituent member of the Russian state? In reality, things were not so clear. Chechnya was never a complacent subunit of the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, or the post-Soviet Russian

Federation. On September 6th, 1991, Chechnya made a unilateral declaration of independence from the new Russian state. Russia, preoccupied with Ukraine, the Baltics, and a host of other problems, barely even contested the move. Unlike during previous Chechen uprisings or independence movements, the Russians made no immediate armed attempts to find resolution to the conflict other than moving troops to the border, occasional verbal denunciations of the declaration, and an ineffective trade blockade coupled with economic sanctions (*Ibid.*: 74). In an interesting episode, Russia continued to pump their oil into Chechnya for processing, and then allowed the refined product to enter Russia again, despite the blockade and "sanctions." The Russian Prime minister in 1992, Yegor Gaidar, gave the following reasoning:

> "The Grozny oil refinery is the largest oil-refining enterprise in Russia and used to supply a considerable part of the North Caucasus, Stavropol Kray, Krasnodar Kray, etc. In this regard, turning off the petroleum faucet all at once […] would have punished not only Chechnya, but also Russia" (qtd. in Lieven 1998:74-75).

These actions are strikingly similar to sphere of influence policies undertaken by Russia or the Soviet Union at various points in history. In many ways, the actions are more similar to interactions with a stubborn foreign nation than to interactions with a rebellious subunit of its own state. Did these instances show that Russia once did not mind the idea of Chechen autonomy, or that they simply lacked the ability to do anything about it at the time? Many scholars believe that Chechnya's de facto independence between 1992 and 1994 was clear proof of Russian political impotence rather than a marked change in Russian policy (Trenin et al. 2004: 11). Concerned more with survival than assertive foreign policy, the nascent Russian Federation left Chechnya to its own devices for a short time.

As happened in the 1800s, however, sphere of influence tactics were not enough to overcome Chechen banditry, and the region was still of vital strategic interest. The banditry in modern days took the form of a series of bus hijackings by armed criminals, one of several factors that may have been necessary for the outbreak of war, if not sufficient by themselves (Lieven 1998:314). The lines that ran through Chechnya this time did more than facilitate communication - they pumped oil. I'll look into the economic factors behind the Chechen wars in more detail in a later section.

Conclusions

Despite Western views to the contrary, it seems clear that the interests that Russia seeks on its periphery are neither identical in scope nor focus to those sought throughout its history. A theory of imposed insecurity foresees an aggressive Russia constantly pushing and prodding at the borders of neighboring states to exploit their weaknesses and keep them from fully embracing the West. While it is clear that one of Russia's major goals is still to prevent such wholesale defection, it is also clear that Russia lacks either the ability or the will to go to any and all lengths to influence such decisions, with Georgia being the one possible exception. The old sphere of Russian influence continues to affect Russia's thinking, but it is hard to tell whether or not that is simply a matter of shared history and current convenience for Russian policymakers. The special interests in the former Soviet states could stem more from shared cultural, linguistic, and regional traits than from any lasting historical mission (whether messianic, ethnic, or ideological) that Russia may possess. Again, the imposed insecurity theory is limited in its descriptive or predictive power by its simplicity. Fleshing out the theory with more exact conditions and testable hypotheses would improve its utility.

Diversionary Tension Theory

Filippov's argument about diversionary tension was in direct response to the Georgia conflict, so in his view that conflict meets the minimum criteria for such tactics. Even still, it is worthwhile to look more closely at how Russia's domestic situation and foreign policy goals fit the various criteria of desired and potentially successful diversionary tension. Afterward, I'll take a look at how well those criteria fit the situation in Chechnya, and whether enough parallels can be drawn with that nominally domestic conflict to show a wider trend in Russian policymaking. Following a quick review of the necessary conditions according to Filippov (2009:1827-8), I will systematically study each conflict's fit under each condition. These conditions as listed describe the circumstances in which such a strategy is likely to be successful, but I will also show how the existence of such conditions in each conflict made the strategy desirable to Russian policymakers. Even if such a strategy would have been desirable at the time, it does not necessarily follow that policymakers attempted to use any form of diversionary tension. Each conflict will also be studied to see if evidence of such tactics exists.

Conditions

1. Leaders must be sensitive to changes in public opinion.
2. The greater transparency often found in established democracies can make such diversionary conflict unwise, even if it might be desired, as there is a greater risk of the public seeing through the ruse.
3. National incumbents fearing forcible removal from power are more likely to effectively employ this tactic.

4. The domestic audience must have a fairly high level of cohesion, or the diversionary tactics may well split the populace over an issue rather than unite them behind the leadership.

5. Suitable targets for diversionary war must pose a low military risk and small chance of failure. Targets of such tactics have every incentive to avoid the provocations for war, and for this reason the easiest targets are countries or populations with which the national government has a long-standing rivalry.

Georgia

1. There is a general consensus by outside observers that Russia has moved further and further toward authoritarianism under Putin and Medvedev. Despite the increasing control and centralization undertaken by the national government, there are still signs that leaders are sensitive to changes in public opinion. Party strategists within the Kremlin are reported to be "assiduous students of public opinion" (March 2009:513). The popularity of Putin (and Medvedev, though the effects have not been fully studied) is partially dependent on fraud, voter pressure, and high oil prices, but also due in part to his responsiveness to voter behavior and opinion. He garners such strong support in Russia through agreeing with the electorate on important issues, showing himself as a competent leader, and connecting closely with important demographic groups within Russia (Colton and Hale 2009:502). Though Putin and Medvedev's popularity remained high after the 2008 election, increasing worry about popular sentiment toward Western institutions and countries played a large part in motivating Russia to handle the

Georgian conflict in the way that it did, according to Filippov (2009:1829). In the case of Georgia, by the time the conflict began in earnest in August, Russia had nearly full support from the domestic population for the military efforts in South Ossetia, and maintained that support through careful control of the narratives behind the conflict (Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist 2009:324).

2. To put it mildly, "greater transparency" is not something that the Russian government generally struggles with. The tumultuous years of the 1990s featured a fairly free media, and the resulting reports of various failings on the part of government officials led to very negative public opinion during the first Chechen conflict and through the financial collapse beginning in 1998 (Jack 2004:94-5). Putin realized that an independent media can be anathema to a government that planned to accumulate power through centralization of key institutions and control over key industries. His systematic takeover and silencing of many media outlets reduced governmental transparency significantly (Larrabee 2010:35). Lack of transparency facilitates the type of authoritarian resurgence that Putin seemed to want, but it also is one of the qualities most criticized by Western media and policymakers alike. Application of diversionary tension may have seemed tempting because it could simultaneously discredit those Western voices while keeping authoritarian changes and centralization in place. This tension allowed governmental control over media narratives throughout key events leading up to the Georgian conflict, including the Second Chechen War and the various flare-ups within Georgia that preceded the 2008 war.

3. Despite Putin and Medvedev's fairly secure hold on power, there is always the possibility of forcible removal. No amount of voter pressure or manipulation of party politics can protect an incumbent from a total popular uprising, as recent events in the Middle East and northern Africa make clear. Part of the reason for Russia's swift criticism of the various "color revolutions" in 2004 and 2005 was the fear that such governmental changes were the dress rehearsals for a Western conspiracy that would lead to such a revolution within Russia and the installation of a leader sympathetic to Western (i.e. U.S.) interests (Trenin 2009:12).

4. National cohesion is fairly high in Russia, both in terms of political ideology and a sense of national unity. The large majority of Russians have supported Putin and Medvedev's party, United Russia, in recent elections. Putin won 71% of the vote in 2004, and Medvedev won with 70% four years later. In the most recent Duma elections, in 2007, United Russia carried 64% of the total vote (Colton and Hale 2009:475). Though division exists, a large enough proportion of the electorate is sympathetic to or supportive of the party in power that they are also likely to support most foreign policy positions. Cultural and identity factors that unify a large proportion of the population include a respect for traditional Russian culture that is insulated from harmful Western influences (Pilkington et al. 2002:xvi). Other factors are a shared perception of Russian honor (Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist 2009:309) and a sense that Russia should "matter" on the world stage (Mankoff 2009:6). These related traits allow Russian leaders to unify public opinion behind foreign policy actions that are seen to counteract threats to Russian primacy or reputation. Diversionary tensions using Georgia would

only have been attempted if the Russian leadership felt that a focused attack on Western values would be met with a fairly uniform response from the public rather than fragmentation of support.

5. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the rivalry between Russia and Georgia concerning the Ossetian region dates back to the 1920s and beyond. The Russian non-resolution of that conflict set the stage for the secession conflicts that erupted following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Militarily, Georgia was no match for the Russian armed forces arrayed against them in 2008. The rivalry with Russia led Georgia into the conflict as it sought to distance itself from its much larger and more powerful neighbor by attempting integration with the West (Asmus 2010:216). The same rivalry pushed Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili into stronger policy positions than were probably wise considering the looming Russian threat. The historic animosity between the two countries promised a domestic bump in public opinion if Saakashvili took a hard line against the Russians, and war was the result (Filippov 2009:1839). The tumultuous history between the two countries and the long-held desire of South Ossetians to join with their northern kin made this rivalry more attractive to the Russians than other potential conflicts, as the pretext of self-determination for the oppressed Ossetians was, for the Russians at least, a justifiable reason for invasion.

The diversionary aspect of the Georgian conflict was the attempt by Russia to reconcile two partially contradictory ideals: openness to mutual economic dependence on the West and resistance of Western voices that called for greater transparency and democratization within the Russian governmental system (*Ibid.*:1829). Though the Russian populace may have wanted

greater transparency and democratization on some level, the Russian government managed to equate such values with Western interference and meddling in Russian affairs. The conflict with Georgia, though based on legitimate concerns with Georgian policy, was in many ways a proxy conflict to mobilize public opinion against the West. According to Filippov, there is an optimal range of tension with the West that Russia tries to maintain, realizing that its population is both motivated and unified by the presence of an external threat. Ideally, the level of tension never rises high enough to seriously threaten economic relationships and agreements, but is always sufficient to discredit Western voices that call for increased transparency, democratization, and reform (*Ibid.*:1826-30). This strategy was not fully successful, as foreign investors began pulling out of the Russian market shortly before the outbreak of the Georgian conflict due to the increasing political and economic risks (Mankoff 2009). Still, the related goals of preventing Georgian integration with the West and preventing active agitation within Russia for similar integration seem to have been met, at least for now. The long-term effects of Russian policy in Georgia remain unclear.

Chechnya

1. Due to the greater latitude given to independent media and popular opinion in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian leaders were of necessity more aware of and responsive to shifts in public opinion. Though there were many causes of the Chechen conflict in the early 1990s, a not-insignificant factor was the cultural phenomenon of a Russian national identity that is tied to the state and a desire to “back a winner,” as it were (Lieven 1998:169). Another cultural factor was the people’s desire for a strong and decisive leader, particularly when the country is seen to

be in decline (Mishler and Willerton 2003:112).Yeltsin's invasion of Chechnya in 1994 was motivated in part by a desire to appear such a leader, despite the general unwillingness of the Russian population to become embroiled in such a conflict (Lieven 1998:84,87). By responding to public demand for a decisive leader but misreading the direction that the public wanted the country to move, Yeltsin was drawn into what became a vastly unpopular war.

2. The difference in governmental transparency between the first and second conflicts in Chechnya is striking. The brutal tactics employed by the military were widely criticized by a free media that was then still aggressively independent (Jack 2004:95). False claims of success and the necessity of trying to achieve "popular" goals were met with fierce scorn by journalists, and the increased availability of combat footage and information soured public opinion quickly (Lieven 1998:111). Understanding that this explosion of negative publicity had in many ways cost Yeltsin his popular support, one of Putin's major moves in office was the curtailing of media freedom and nationalization of many media outlets (Larrabee 2010:35). This increased control allowed the second conflict to be prosecuted with many of the same heavy-handed military practices without nearly the same level of backlash on the part of the Russian people. As in the Georgian conflict, the Russian people's awareness of this lack of transparency would make strategies to divert their attention attractive to Russian leadership.

3. Yeltsin was reelected in the midst of the failing war against Chechnya in the mid-1990s. His return to the presidency was never guaranteed, but in one interesting aspect his position may actually have been more secure from forcible popular removal. Despite

abysmal ratings for his performance during the Chechen war, Yeltsin benefited from a pervasive sense of political apathy coupled with a fear of chaos. The apathy led to a very low level of active opposition to Yeltsin, and a desire for a calm transition, coupled with significant support from Russian bankers in exchange for resource control, ensured a second term (Lieven 1998:14). As the Russian political situation grew more stable under Putin, I believe it may have actually made the possibility of electoral removal more likely, as Russians may have felt more confident about their country's direction, regardless of the particular party or person in power. This would depend in large measure on the amount of personal credit Putin receives for successful policy actions and the amount of blame for failures. If the Russian state is seen as strong and stable without Putin being a specifically necessary component of that success, it could increase the public perception that he is replaceable.

4. As was mentioned earlier, support for Yeltsin was not nearly as unified as it would be for his successors. One important unifying value mentioned earlier is the desire to back a winner. Unfortunately for the Yeltsin administration, the inability to project itself as a winner in the confrontation with Chechnya actually united both the Russian people and much of the military establishment against Yeltsin's prosecution of the war (Kumar 1996:25). Putin's higher levels of popularity and his ability to build strong coalitions of support, combined of course with a more successful plan for removing opposition forces in Chechnya, enhanced his ability to unite popular opinion in directions conducive to his policy positions. By equating successful policy with personal decisions, Putin solidified his hold on power. Public opinion was also mobilized much

more strongly against the Chechens in the second war, with 64% of all Russians wanting every Chechen expelled from Russia following the apartment bombings in 1999 and similar levels of support for bombing Chechen settlements (Russell 2005:108).

5. As described in previous sections, the roots of the Russian-Chechen conflict reach far into Russian history, and despite periodic success against Russian military forces, Chechnya has always seemed like an easy target for suppression, subjugation, and control.

The conflict in Chechnya seems to fit the necessary minimum criteria for successful use of diversionary tension on the part of the Russian government as well as enough of the criteria for it to be a tempting option in some senses, but it's hard to believe that the Russian government purposefully keeps the Chechen conflict simmering in order to bring it flaring to life at opportune moments (coincidental timing of the Second Chechen War with Putin's bid for presidency aside). The constant threat of terrorism and the toll taken on Russian political, economic, and military institutions seems too high for the Chechen conflict to be a ploy by the government to constrain or encourage public opinion in any particular way. Despite this fact, there are conspiracy theorists who blame the Russian government for instigating both the apartment bombings in 1999 and the Nord-Ost siege in 2002, both of which mobilized public opinion even more strongly behind the Putin administration and against the Chechens (Russell 2005:108,112). The lack of corroborating evidence fairly convincingly removes the possibility of these attacks being an attempt by Russian authorities to use the Chechen conflict as diversionary tension.

Instead, I suggest that a modified form of the diversionary tension theory may be applicable to domestic as well as foreign policy. I see some evidence that Russia uses domestic conflicts to affect international opinion in ways seen as conducive to Russian interests, just as the traditional theory sees foreign policy affecting domestic opinion. The major difference between this version of diversionary tension and the traditional form is of course that traditionally, diversionary tension is planned, premeditated, and purposeful. The diversionary measures that Russia has employed in relation to the Chechen conflict, conspiracy theories aside, are more reactionary and opportunistic due to the unwanted and more-or-less unexpected nature of the Chechen wars. One interesting event that has roots in both versions of the theory is the terrorist attack in Beslan in 2004. Though the attack fell into the category of unwanted and unexpected attacks, it was still used to mobilize public opinion against the West, as do the traditional diversionary tensions that Russia stirs up with foreign powers. In 2004, Putin blamed the attacks on Western support for the terrorists that attempted to weaken and divide Russia (Trenin 2009:12).

As pertains to my modified theory, one interesting phenomenon surrounding the Chechen conflicts is the changing descriptions of the Chechen forces in the Western press. During the first war, Western media sources spoke of 'rebels,' 'armed resistance,' and 'freedom fighters.' Attacks were not construed as terrorist acts. By the time of the second conflict, the narrative had become almost entirely one of "Islamic terrorists" (Russell 2005:102). Part of this change could be due to Western focus on other matters in the early 2000s, such as Afghanistan and the Iraq War. At least part of the shifting narrative, however, is due to Putin's successful attempt to tie the Chechen conflict to the broader War on Terror. By describing operations in

Chechnya as a integral part of the global War on Terror, Putin was able to create a sort of 'moral equivalence' for the crackdowns on personal liberty undertaken in the Russian Federation that linked such measures to similar actions within Western nations(Jack 2004:272-3). Smoother relations between Russia and various international organizations such as the EU, the G8, and the WTO were now possible due to the new 'lowest common denominator' interests - international terrorism and border control (*Ibid.*). In many ways, Putin was given *carte blanche* to act as he wished in Chechnya without significant international outcry.

Conclusions

The traditional understanding of diversionary tension goes a long way in explaining Russian behavior in Georgia as a proxy conflict with the West that unified the Russian population and diverted attention from domestic problems and dissent. As applied to the Chechen conflict, my modified version of diversionary tension theory hypothesizes that Russian opportunism applies to domestic conflicts as well. I feel that in certain circumstances, particularly during times of worldwide upheaval or stress, international relations can be manipulated or controlled by careful application of narrative structures favorable to the Russian position. Further analysis of Russian policy in other domestic conflicts would be necessary to test this theory and expand its scope.

The major weakness of this theory in explaining Russian policy is its lack of easy applicability to non-conflict events. Without further cases (which have not occurred in the post-Soviet policy decisions of the Russian government) of conflict, even strong evidence from the Georgia conflict and potential application in Chechnya is not enough to make any conclusive statements about diversionary tension's role in Russian policy. While the evidence points to its

direct role in Georgia and its possible opportunistic adoption in Chechnya, the existence of so many other motivating factors shows that diversionary tension alone is not likely to be a sufficient condition for instigating conflict.

Economic Enabling Theory

A major impetus behind conflicts across historical eras has been economic, whether in pursuit of gain or avoidance of loss. While I doubt that economic factors alone are sufficient conditions for most Russian interstate or internal conflicts, their influence should not be discounted. Economic factors have been implicated in both the Chechen and Georgian conflicts, with mercenary motivations present and salient for the Russian leadership in each case. The relationship between economic factors and aggressive policy practices are not that simple, however, as a certain minimal level of economic success can be a prerequisite for action as well as an end goal.

A likely driving force in Russian policy is the cultural and political drive for Russian primacy and importance on the global stage. There is evidence of a strong relationship between those drives and economic prosperity. Putin himself has tied the idea of Russian primacy to economic stability, describing Russia as both a former and future superpower whose dominance will rely on economic successes (Jack 2004:264). Russia's economy is heavily reliant on natural resources, and the new assertiveness in foreign policy coinciding with Putin's rise to power has been tied to the increasing oil and gas revenues of the first decade of the 21st century (Ermarth 2009:93).

As prosperity makes Russia more stable domestically, it tends to make the Russian people more lenient toward the projection of Russian power abroad by the government. This

could stem from the Russian pride in traditional culture and in Russia's place on the world stage that was referenced earlier. A stable economy builds trust in leadership that increases latitude in policymaking. The increased revenue from a successful economy also allows for increased military spending (Mankoff 2009:32). Oil revenues and other forms of income are not only an enabler of foreign policy, but also a tool. Recent applications in Ukraine and Georgia of what has been termed "energy diplomacy" are one of the primary points of disagreement between Russia and Western powers, particularly the United States (Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist 2009:309).

The scope of this paper does not allow a detailed breakdown of the various causes of each conflict or an in-depth look at the full economic indicators since the fall of the Soviet Union and the corresponding policy decisions made by the Yeltsin, Putin, and Medvedev administrations. Instead, I will focus on the economic causes of war present in each conflict. I will then examine policy examples that are either enabled or constrained by economic success, including actions that took place in the lulls in fighting between the Chechen conflicts and the buildup to the 2008 war in Georgia.

Chechnya

The ultimate cause of the first Chechen conflict is generally agreed to be the refusal of Chechen leaders to sign any form of a federal or confederal treaty, and the proximate cause and catalyst for direct intervention was the series of bus hijackings in 1994 (Lieven 1998:84-6). Not insignificant in all of this, however, was the location of Chechnya atop Russia's oil pipeline from the Caspian Sea. Chechen oil production only accounted for 1.5% of total Russian output at the outbreak of the first war, but Chechnya's location played a significant role in Russia's

desire to control oil pipelines in the region (Kumar 1996:24). Beyond future economic security, analysts also believe that Yeltsin's pursuit of a quick military victory in Chechnya was an attempt to shore up his sagging popularity by distracting the population from the dismal political and economic conditions at the time (*Ibid.*). Whether or not the direct pursuit of economic security was a stronger cause than the indirect attempt to alleviate negative perceptions of current economic conditions, the economy played a role in Yeltsin's decision to intervene.

During the uneasy peace that existed between the cease-fire in 1996 and the eruption of the second war in 1999, Russia suffered a massive financial collapse that led to a heavy devaluation of the ruble. To understand how this affected popular opinion about economic strategy, it is important to remember that efforts at economic integration following the collapse of the Soviet Union involved in large measure the withdrawal of the state from direct economic management (Robinson 1999:535). Without reliable replacement enforcement mechanisms in the economy, attempts at integration into the global economy, and with Western Europe in particular, did not lead to market-style economy as much as it did to oligarchy. The move also left Russia's economy vulnerable to shifts in global financial fortunes. The combination of weak state involvement and instability in the global market were large factors in the 1998 financial crisis (*Ibid*:533). There were many other factors involved in the 1998 crisis, but one important effect that emerged was the revived feeling among Russians that a strong hand was needed to stabilize and manage the economic situation to prevent another collapse.

As in the first war, the causes of the second Chechen conflict were only peripherally economic. The direct causes were the Chechen invasion of Dagestan and the series of apartment bombings referenced previously. These attacks gave Putin the domestic support he needed to invade Chechnya once again with the goal of territorial stability. This support was necessary, as the Russian people were not eager to become involved in the Caucasus after the disastrous first conflict. There was still a prevailing anti-Chechen sentiment among the Russian population, but it was coupled with a strong desire to forget the first war (Jack 2004:102). Though oil and natural gas pipelines had been expanded since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Chechnya was still of vital territorial interest for Russia's economic fortunes in the region. Russia also feared that the unrest in Chechnya preceded a more general upswing in Islamic terrorism in the region, a specter that it raised within two years to tie its fortunes in with those of the worldwide War on Terror (*Ibid*: 272).

As was discussed in the previous section, Putin succeeded in tying Russian efforts in Chechnya to a broader global effort. This allowed Russian leaders to negotiate with various international monetary agencies, the G8, NATO, and other organizations in order to strengthen its economic position. While Putin obviously had no foreknowledge of the events of 9/11 and thus could not have started the Chechen conflict with the goal of improving international economic ties, his potentially opportunistic use of the conflict to do just that shows the importance of economic factors in Russian foreign policy practices. The improved economic ties coincided with an increase in international market prices for natural resources, and Russia's economic fortunes rose right alongside. The increased economic prosperity enabled greater latitude in Chechnya as well as the burgeoning conflict with Georgia.

Georgia

Before the Rose Revolution in 2003, Russian-Georgian relations had reached a post-Soviet nadir. Problems included Russia's refusal to removed military bases from Georgian soil, the distribution of Russian passports to Abkhazians and South Ossetians within Georgia, Russia's suspicions that Georgia was providing a safe haven for Chechen fighters in the Pankisi Gorge, Georgian President Shevardnadze's declaration of Georgia's intent to join NATO, and Georgia's participation in the Baku-Ceylon oil pipeline that would bypass Russia completely (Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist 2009:309). These problems tie in with many key Russian values, including protection of "Russians" (by law, if not by ethnicity), worries about territorial integrity, defection to the West, and loss of economic stability. In this section I will focus primarily on the economic factors at play between Russia and Georgia.

Relations seemed to improve after the Rose Revolution, with both sides appearing to welcome the chance to move past previous conflicts and start anew. Much of Russia's new policy with Georgia in this period was aimed at strengthening economic ties. Russia increased investment in Georgia helped restructure Georgian debt and also provided energy and economic subsidies (*Ibid*:311). These actions, along with punitive Georgian action against Chechen bases and Russian assistance in the uprising in Adjara, marked the high point of Russian-Georgian cooperation. All too soon, the continued reluctance on Russia's part to remove military bases within Georgia and Georgia's determined push to join NATO and crackdown in South Ossetia brought an end to this civil period (*Ibid*.).

Russia's investment into Georgia's economy was an example of a wider policy to use its newfound economic success to influence politics in neighboring regions. Part of this strategy

involves loans and investment, as in Georgia, to foster closer ties and interdependence between Russia and its neighbors. Russia continues this policy even in the current economic recession, having offered loans to Belarus, Mongolia, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine (Trenin 2009:17). Though much more controversial internationally than loans, the withholding of energy exports has also been used to increase Russia's power and influence in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and beyond.

Russia's role as a major supplier of oil and natural gas for many countries in Europe and Asia gives it leverage in negotiating with those countries, leverage that Russia exploits in ways that bring it into conflict with Western powers and neighboring countries alike. Before the Rose Revolution, Russia imposed harsher power contract terms for Georgia than for other states in an attempt to bring Georgian policy more in line with Russian interests (Jack 2004:267). Similar efforts have been undertaken since then in Ukraine, the Czech Republic, and the Baltic states, among others.

Several countries adversely affected by Russia's energy dominance attempted to subvert that influence with the construction of the Baku-Ceylon pipeline, and Georgia joined that effort to bring Caspian oil to the West without involving Russia (Asmus 2010:9). To Russia, this appeared as a move to threaten not only Russian economic stability, but also a sign of Georgia's increasing preference to look to the West rather than to Russia for its future prosperity. Any increase in Georgian prosperity and success was seen as a threat to Russia's role in the region (*Ibid*:217). The actual war in 2008 erupted from a multitude of causes, but the long-standing disagreements between Tblisi and Moscow evolved from Georgia's desire to integrate with the West both economically and politically, and Russia's stubborn refusal to

allow such a move. Disagreements and ethnic conflict in South Ossetia were the trigger for the war, but the foundation was laid by the fundamental difference between the two nation's views of Georgia's future (*Ibid*:216).

Conclusions

Economic issues have factored strongly into Russian decision making throughout its history, but they have taken on a new importance in the post-Soviet world. No longer can Russia hide its economic shortcomings while depending on mutually assured destruction and arms buildup to remain relevant on the world stage. With the descent from superpower status to existence as one moderately influential power among many, Russia must rely in large measure on economic success to regain its place as a "Great Power", it that is truly its goal. Despite other avenues and investment projects, most of Russia's resurgent economic strength stems from reliance on natural resource exports.

Oil played a part in both the Chechen and Georgian conflicts, even if only in terms of pipeline locations and control over oil production and sale to various interested nations on Russia's periphery and beyond. As has been demonstrated, however, economic reasons alone do not explain Russia's involvement in its post-Soviet adventurism in the Caucasus. Like the other theories studied in this paper, economic enabling explains some facets of Russian behavior, but does not offer a fully testable set of conditions or motivations that could be used to systematically examine Russian policymaking.

Overall Conclusions

With the exception of historical continuity, none of these theories attempt to explain the whole of Russian decision making, even if only foreign policy is considered. Even historical

continuity is a limited approach, as it by nature offers very weak predictive power as it draws from the entire scope of hundreds of years of Russian history. Though each theory is limited in its usefulness, using both a domestic and foreign conflict can improve our understanding of each and the areas of policy to which they can be applied. The influence from each theory points out the difficulty in pinning Russian behaviors easily on realist, constructivist, or other simply qualified motivations. The interplay of historic, cultural, regional, ethnic, and other factors precludes defining Russian policy with any one theory studied here, and potentially with any one theory currently in existence.

Winston Churchill once said, “I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma: but perhaps there is a key. That key is Russian national interest.” Such a key is both elusive and changing. Theories may illuminate one or more facets of that national interest, but when Russia itself seems unsure of its future, perhaps the best theorists are those that expect to be surprised.

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