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**RUSSIA IN THE CONTESTED NEIGHBOURHOOD:  
A NEOCLASSICAL REALIST APPROACH  
TO REGIONAL PRIMACY**

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## ABSTRACT

Under what conditions has Russia adopted assertive foreign policies towards neighbouring states in order to pursue regional primacy? Scholars usually map Russia's foreign policy according to theoretical approaches that are generated either from the individual, the state or the structural levels of analysis. However, each of them, taken individually, cannot account for Russia's foreign policy across space and time. This study analyses the complex interplay between causal factors by developing a neoclassical realist model of Russia's pursue of regional primacy in the contested neighbourhood with the EU.

This study employs fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) at a cross-case level and Process Tracing at within-case level. fsQCA aims to test the explanatory value of systemic conditions such as external pressure in the regional neighbourhood by other regional powers and membership of target states in a military alliance (i.e. NATO); and of domestic conditions such as Russia's status recognition by the West, and Russia's state capacity. This analysis is based on 27 cases of Russia's interaction with post-Soviet states between 1992 and 2015. Process Tracing is employed as a confirmatory method for within-case analysis.

The results of the study suggest that Russia was inclined to adopt assertive foreign policy instruments, particularly military intervention, if external pressure from other great powers in a neighbouring country was combined with Russia's high state capacity to mobilise resources. Due to NATO membership by neighbouring states, Russia resorted to coercive instruments rather than to direct use of force to maintain regional primacy. Finally, from the comparative process tracing, it emerged that, besides international security concerns and domestic constraints related to Russia's status recognition, the two violent conflicts of Nagorno-Karabakh and South Ossetia/Abkhazia in the 1990s, which were of equal threat to Russia's regional primacy in the South Caucasus, bore a different 'iconic significance' to Russia.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

A – Assertiveness

~A – non-Assertiveness

AA – Association Agreement

AL – Military Alliance

ArmSSR – Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic

AzSSR – Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic

C – State Capacity

CEPA – Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement

CFSP – Common Foreign and Security Policy

CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States

CSTO – Collective and Security Treaty Organisation

DCCG – Deviant Cases Consistency in Degree

DCCK – Deviant Cases Consistency in Kind

DCFTA – Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area

EaP – Eastern Partnership

EAEU – Eurasian Economic Union

ECHO – European Commission Humanitarian Office

EIDHR – European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights

ENP – European Neighbourhood Policy

EU – European Union

FPA – Foreign Policy Analysis

FSP – Food Security Program

fsQCA – fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis

GATT – General Agreement on Tariff and Trade

GSSR – Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic

IIK – Heidelberg Institute of International Conflict Research

IMF – International Monetary Fund

IR – International Relations (as discipline)

KBG – Komitet gosudarstvennoj bezopasnosti. The main security agency of the Soviet Union

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NGOs – Non-governmental organisations

OSCE – Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

PRI – Proportional Reduction for Inconsistency

P – External Pressure

PCA – Partnership and Cooperation Agreement

PESCO – Permanent Structured Cooperation

QCA – Qualitative Comparative Analysis

RoN – Relevance of Necessity

S – Status Recognition

SCO – Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

TACIS – Technical assistance to Commonwealth of Independent States

TRACECA – Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia

USSR – Union of Socialist Soviet Republics



## INTRODUCTION

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia has adopted various instruments in order to maintain regional primacy, both in the region where Russia's interests and the EU's interests have led to the generation of a 'contested neighbourhood' and in the near abroad in general:<sup>1</sup> some of these instruments have been more coercive while others have been more cooperative (for overviews, see Donaldson, Noguee, and Nadkarni 2014; Freire and Kanet 2012; Gorodetsky 2003). Recently, Russia has become increasingly assertive, and sometime even conflictual, towards other post-Soviet republics. Indeed, before Crimea, Russia engaged in a military confrontation with Georgia in 2008. In situations where a military confrontation proved too costly, Russia adopted hybrid strategies without resorting to a direct use of force (Ofitserov-Belskiy and Sushenstov 2018). Such strategies included attempts to destabilise the internal politics of the post-Soviet states through cyber-attacks on government websites as well as propaganda campaigns aimed at the community of the Russian World<sup>2</sup> (Winnerstig 2014); political pressure through the use of economic sanctions and the suspension of gas provision (Barkanov 2018, 44); military reinforcement in the *de facto* states – Transnistria since 1992, Nagorno-Karabakh after the cease-fire of 2020, Abkhazia and South Ossetia after the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 – and the establishment of new military bases in Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan (Konyshev and Sergunin 2018).

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<sup>1</sup> While 'contested neighbourhood' here refers to the post-Soviet Republics located between the EU and Russia – i.e. Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine – plus the three Baltic states, the term 'near abroad' (in Russian, ближнее зарубежье, *blizhneje zarubéž'je*) refers to the independent republics surrounding Russia established after the dissolution of the former Soviet Union. It is a synonym for 'post-Soviet space'.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'Russian World' (In Russian: русский мир, *russskiy mir*) mainly refers to the Russian diaspora living outside the Russian borders since the fall of Soviet Union. It is a defined transnational, transcontinental 'civilizational space', unified by the common religion of Russian Orthodoxy, by a common language and a common culture, a shared historical memory and shared views on the future of Russia. The Russian World's central principle maintains that Russia should be politically and geographically bigger than the Russian Federation (Suslov 2018). For an overview of the Russian World and Russian soft power see Laruelle, Marlene. 'The "Russian World" Russia's Soft Power and Geopolitical Imagination'. Center on Global Interests, May 2015.

Conversely, Russia has also encouraged more cooperative strategies through the implementation of security and economic spaces (Libman and Vinokurov 2012). Some of these attempts have been successful, such as the membership of Armenia, Belarus and some of the Central Asian states in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), the empowerment of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), and the foundation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)<sup>3</sup> (Vymyatnina and Antonova 2014). Others failed immediately, such as Russia's proposal for a 'new European security architecture' with the EU that should have replaced the Atlantic alliance (Lo 2009).

Due to Russia's increasing assertiveness toward its neighbours and beyond<sup>4</sup>, some scholars refer to a 'new Cold War' when describing Russia's attempts to undermine the values and interests of the West (Berryman 2018; Roberts 2017; Kanet 2008; Lucas 2008). Others consider Russia a 'balancing state' that is determined to make the world a multipolar system and carve out more room for its own contribution (Snetkov and Lanteigne 2015; Makarychev 2014; Makarychev and Morozov 2013; Tsygankov 2009).

With the aim of uncovering the main social and material conditions that explain the change and continuity in Russia's foreign policy<sup>5</sup>, scholars usually touch on three theoretical models of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), which are generated from the individual, the state and the systemic levels of analysis respectively (Morin and Paquin 2018, 53). Generally, we can group the existing explanations of Russia's foreign policy into four categories. The first category analyses the figure of the leader, especially the Russian president's perceptions and

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<sup>3</sup> The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation includes China as co-founder and India and Pakistan as members since 2017 (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation 2017)

<sup>4</sup> In the global arena, Russia has openly intervened in the Syrian conflict since 2015 on the side of Bashar al-Assad, supporting his regime financially and militarily. Russia's intervention has marked a sharp break from its hesitant role in the Greater Middle East after the collapse of the Soviet Union and prompted a review of its goals in the region (Casula 2015). Similarly, Russia is likely to use the current unstable conditions in Libya and its placement along Europe's southern border to increase its influence in the region (Neale 2018).

<sup>5</sup> In this dissertation, Russia's foreign policy specifically refers to Russia's decision-making and actions in the contested neighbourhood. At the same time, most theoretical arguments discussed below are valid also for Russia's foreign policy in general

beliefs. The second category emphasises the role of Russia's domestic conditions such as the regime type and the level of regime vulnerability. The third category points to ideas as the main driver of Russia's foreign policy. This approach holds that Russia's cultural dimensions, including its national identity, have an enormous effect on its international policies. Finally, the fourth approach sees geopolitical opportunities and constraints as the main drivers of Russia's foreign policy.

These approaches contribute enormously to the debate concerning the sources and motives of Russia's decision-making. However, taken individually, none of them provides a sufficient explanation for the *diverse* outcomes of Russia's foreign policy *across space and time* (see e.g. Götz 2016a: 3). As Andrey Tsygankov (2018, xv) observes: 'A large and complex country, Russia must be understood in terms of the complexity of theoretical approaches, tools and actors, geographic directions, and membership in global/regional organizations'. Although many scholars agree with this argument in principle, in practice few studies have offered integrated theoretical propositions or have attempted to assemble empirical evidence on the interaction between multiple factors. Some of them focus on Russia's strategy towards Europe as the main "significant other" in order to explain change and continuity in Russia's foreign policy (Kropatcheva 2012; Tsygankov 2012). Others address Russia's actions toward specific post-Soviet countries such as Ukraine (Bunce and Hozic 2016; Kuzio and D'Anieri 2018), the Baltic states (Götz 2017) and Georgia (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012). However, their causal inference is limited to specific cases and does not address Russia's foreign policy in the post-Soviet space on more general terms.

A more nuanced theoretical model that offers a valid combination of several factors is provided by Götz himself, who proposes a theoretical framework that combines the four individual explanations mentioned above (Götz 2016). However, his model has usually been applied selectively and has rarely if ever been developed using *all* of the four factors he

suggests.<sup>6</sup> One likely reason for this methodological choice is the difficulty in collecting data on Russian leaders' beliefs and perceptions, meaning researchers typically choose to examine official foreign policy documents as a proxy for the ideas of the Russian foreign policy executive. Nevertheless, these attempts to create a theoretical model for explaining Russia's foreign policy, and in particular its regional policy in the contested neighbourhood, are part of a larger theoretical debate on the necessity of combining different explanatory purposes to create an integrated model of states' foreign policies.

In recognition of this complexity, this study attempts to explain under what conditions regional powers pursue an assertive foreign policy in their neighbourhood rather than a cooperative one as a means to maintaining/pursuing regional primacy. To explore these conditions, the study examines why Russia has adopted an assertive foreign policy with some post-Soviet states and a more cooperative approach with others. To address this puzzle, the proposed research relies on the theory of neoclassical realism, which maintains that a state's foreign policy is shaped by the interplay of international and domestic variables (Rose 1998, 146). Within this rationale, I develop a theoretical framework of (assertive) regional primacy. The intensity of assertiveness may vary depending on the rationale according to which diplomatic, economic and military instruments are used. This study specifies assertive regional policy in three different categories: 'socialisation', aimed at the maintenance or modification of ideas through rational communication, bargaining and rhetorical actions; 'coercion', aimed at the maintenance or modification of interests through dissuasion and compellence; and 'intervention', aimed at the maintenance or modification of the domestic political structure of a foreign state through subversion and even military intervention.

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<sup>6</sup> Some studies have partially applied his model. Some, like Vsevolod Samokhvalov (2017), have stressed the combination between systemic and identity variables in Russia's Foreign Policy towards the Eastern neighbourhood shared with the EU and Central Asia shared with China. Others, like Lukas Mark (2018), have explained Russian nationalism as a legitimating device against external threats and domestic policy problems.

The main argument of this study is that the pattern of assertive foreign policy is expected to result from a complex interplay between the international and domestic variables discussed in the previous sections. Firstly, a country's foreign policy is mainly driven 'by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities' (Rose 1998, 146). In particular, I argue that the choice between the various instruments used by regional powers is driven by their interaction with other major powers in the shared neighbourhood. This interaction can take on different forms according to the level of interference of other regional powers in the shared neighbourhood: e.g. coexistence, competition, or antagonism (Schunz, Gstöhl, and Van Langenhove 2018). The level of interference is basically determined by the interplay between the foreign-policy orientation of smaller neighbouring states and the economic, diplomatic and military activities of other major powers (for similar arguments, see Götz 2016b; MacFarlane 2003, 126-127; Knudsen 1988, 15-19). The basic argument is that the higher the level of external interference, the more assertive a neighbourhood policy a regional power will adopt.

Secondly, this relationship is moderated by another systemic condition, namely whether the target state is a member of any defensive alliances. While the scholarly literature on alliances in International Relations (IR) has been unable to reach a consensus on whether alliances deter interstate conflicts (Fordham and Poast 2016; Gartzke and Poast 2018; Poast 2019), literature on Russia's foreign policy has widely discussed the role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) as a deterrence or even as a trigger for Russia's insecurity and consequent assertiveness in the post-Soviet space (Bugajski 2016; Götz 2017; Tsygankov 2018b).

Thirdly, systemic factors alone are not sufficient to address the diverse instruments a regional power has at its disposal to maintain regional primacy. Instead, they are moderated by two intervening conditions: the recognition of 'great power' status by other regional powers

and the local power's state capacity. This relationship is qualified as follows: a) if the regional power perceives a rejection of its 'special status' in the shared neighbourhood by other powers as an equal partner, frustration would incentivise the regional power to be more assertive with its neighbourhood; b) conversely, if the regional power perceives its 'special status' in the shared neighbourhood as being recognised by other powers, the regional power would be more inclined to use diplomatic instruments than to resort to more assertive policies against target neighbouring states.

Fourthly, in the dominant interaction in the shared neighbourhood, the regional power needs to have a high level of state capacity to act adequately upon systemic changes and to implement an effective foreign policy. Under low-state capacity, the regional power would either underbalance or would resort to soft-power instruments to attract target states instead of attacking them. From the combination of these conditions, I derive eight propositions that specify how systemic sources and domestic conditions are combined to shape the patterns of foreign policy instruments in the regional neighbourhood.

The empirical analysis of the dissertation is based on fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) for the cross-case exploratory level, and process tracing as a confirmatory within-case analysis (Beach and Rohlfing 2018, 11). This combination has been labelled *set-theoretic multimethod research* (Goertz and Mahoney 2012). Most studies in neoclassical realism adopt case-study approaches including qualitative methods, multimethod approaches, and historiography for studying foreign policy, grand strategy adjustments and systemic outcomes (for an overview, see e.g. Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, chap. 5). Although single case-studies in neoclassical realism, especially process tracing, have demonstrated the unique contribution of qualitative research in explaining the major empirical anomalies of international outcomes that quantitative methods lack, I argue that combining them with QCA, particularly fsQCA, possesses distinct advantages over alternative methods.

Firstly, the use of fsQCA as a cross-case research method increases the possibility of reaching a middle-range generalisability maintaining the strong case orientation of the study (Thomann and Maggetti 2017). Secondly, despite the importance of studying in-depth processes of states' decision-making on single cases, it is desirable first to analyse some common patterns across several cases by addressing the co-occurrence of various conditions in order to see which ones *have to be present* in tracing a causal mechanism. Thirdly, focusing on specific assertive policies in a fuzzy-set analysis allows for a fine-grained qualitative assessment of assertive outcomes over time and space that would either be lost in a quantitative analysis or be limited to one or two cases in a process-tracing method (see e.g. Mello 2014 and the discussion on 'military participation').

At the same time, set-theoretic multimethod research is built on the idea that causal analysis is strengthened when it integrates fsQCA results with follow-up case studies of purposefully selected cases. Like QCA, the general goal of process tracing is to find the necessary and sufficient conditions for an outcome and to explain how each term is related to the phenomenon of interests (Bennett and George 2005, chap. 10; Berg-Schlosser and Gisèle De Meur 2009). Nevertheless, while QCA looks at set-relational patterns across cases without automatically reflecting causation, process tracing can probe the causal mechanism between X and Y (Beach and Rohlfing 2018). Therefore, the implementation of the neoclassical realist theory of regional primacy through a set-theoretic multimethod research attempts both to predict and explain foreign policy outcomes, and to trace the mechanism by which Russia adopts a particular foreign policy instrument.

Regarding this study, the combination of fsQCA and process tracing has allowed me to investigate why one of the conjunctions of both systemic and domestic conditions has not been able to address some cases despite the cause and known scope conditions for non-intervention being present. By comparing one typical case – Nagorno-Karabakh 1994 – with

one deviant case – South Ossetia/Abkhazia 1993 – the process tracing allowed me first to trace where and why the theorised mechanism breaks down in the deviant case, and then to use these insights to inform the comparison of the deviant and typical case in order to uncover omitted causal and/or contextual conditions. From the comparative process tracing, it emerged that, besides international security concerns and domestic constraints related to Russia’s status recognition, the two violent conflicts which were of equal threat to Russia’s regional primacy in the South Caucasus bore a different ‘iconic significance’ to Russia.

While it is true that Russia’s control over the two political entities of South Ossetia and Abkhazia was also a way to institutionalise ‘the historical relationship of collaboration and protection which Russia has had especially with the Ossetians but also with the ethnically diversified population in Abkhazia’ (Rytövuori-Apunen 2019, 67), Russia never claimed to be the main protector of Karabakh Armenians when violence erupted in the Nagorno-Karabakh. At the same time, while South Ossetians and Abkhazians claim a historical connection with Russia, the majority of Karabakh people have no sense of affiliation with Russia, but rather with Armenia. Despite the fact that the concept of ‘iconic significance’ can be used in an *ad hoc* way to justify military intervention and can serve a ‘sphere-of-influence’ narrative, the construction of iconic geopolitical significance is not a top-down process of control; instead it is constituted by mutual recognition and is amplified both by the great power and by the smaller neighbouring entity.

This study is structured in seven chapters. Chapter 1 maps the various theoretical approaches, social and material conditions that analyse Russia’s foreign policy. By arguing that these explanations are not mutually exclusive, and that they should rather be interpreted as complementary, the chapter concludes by proposing an integrated model capable of addressing the interrelation of different factors.



Chapter 2 develops a neoclassical realist framework of regional primacy. The first section defines the scope conditions of power preponderance and geographic proximity, the following sections identify four sources of assertive foreign policy, ranging from systemic stimuli as external conditions to perception and policy implementation as domestic conditions. The approach conjoins factors that previous studies have identified as important in explaining Russia's foreign policy but whose *interaction* has gone largely unobserved in a comparative study.

Chapter 3 introduces the set-theoretic multimethod research design, which is based on fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) for the cross-case exploratory level, and process tracing as a confirmatory within-case analysis. The chapter first justifies set-theoretic multimethod research against the backdrop of prevalent methods in neoclassical realism by introducing the principles of both fsQCA and process tracing before going on to specify the operationalisation of systemic and intervening variables.

Chapter 4 examines Russia's foreign policy in the contested neighbourhood between 1992 and 2015 by using fsQCA. The first and second sections of this chapter present two separate fuzzy-set analyses – one for the outcome and another for the negated outcome – with a brief description of positive cases. The third section discusses the analytical findings and their theoretical implications for the integrated model and is followed by a concluding section.

Chapter 5 presents the analysis of the typical case of Russia's non-military intervention: Nagorno-Karabakh 1994. The introducing section discusses the criteria for selecting appropriate cases after the fsQCA. The first section designs a theory-driven process tracing of Russia's non-military intervention. The second section provides guidance for presenting the actual mechanisms of the typical case. The aim of this chapter is to unpack the mechanism that led Russia *not* to intervene in Azerbaijan when the separatist conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh erupted during the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Conversely, Chapter 6 analyses the deviant case, namely Russia's intervention in South Ossetia in 1992 and in Abkhazia in 1993 to settle the ethnic conflict with Georgia, the conjunction for intervention not being present. Following the same conceptualisation of the typical case, the aim of the process-tracing mechanism is to uncover omitted causal or contextual conditions that could address the outcome of intervention.

Chapter 7 concludes with some theoretical implications of the research for our understanding of Russia's foreign policy in the contested neighbourhood and for regional primacy in a world where regional integration, cooperation but also competition are growing. Finally, the Appendix provides replication data for the fuzzy-set analyses of Chapter 4.

# CHAPTER 1

## INDIVIDUAL EXPLANATIONS OF RUSSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

Scholars usually map Russia's foreign policy<sup>7</sup> according to several theoretical approaches of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), which are respectively generated from the individual, the state and the systemic levels of analysis. At the same time, each of these models lacks a comprehensive and detailed explanations of Moscow's external behaviour. With this aim, first, this chapter maps the existing literature on the main explanatory factors of Russia's foreign policy in four groups: the first explores world views of Russian presidents; the second emphasizes the character of the political regime of the post-Soviet Russia; the third focuses on the role of ideas and culture; and the fourth group examines the geopolitical imperatives of Russia.<sup>8</sup> The chapter, then, concludes by arguing that each of these explanations are not mutually exclusives, but they should be rather interpreted as being complimentary. In particular, when combined, they have the potential to elucidate our understanding of the evolution of Russia's foreign policy.

### 1.1 Human Agency: Decision-Makers' Worldview

The decision-maker level of explanation holds that Russia's foreign policy can be directly attributed to the figure of the Russian president. The logical conclusion of the decision-makers account is that a state foreign policy might have been very different, if another individual had

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<sup>7</sup> In this dissertation, Russia's foreign policy specifically refers to Russia's decision-making and actions in the post-Soviet space. At the same time, most theoretical arguments discussed below are valid also for Russia's foreign policy in general

<sup>8</sup> This review of Russia's foreign policy's sources and outcomes draws mainly on the article by Götz, Elias in 'Putin, the State, and War: The Causes of Russia's Near Abroad Assertion Revisited\*+'. *International Studies Review* 19, no. 2 (June 2016): 228–53. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viw009>. At the same time, the review does not cover important theories such as global (post-)structuralism, petropolitics, and feminist theories. For a detailed-study on these sources in Russia's foreign policy, see Morozov, Viatcheslav. 2015. *Russia's Postcolonial Identity: A Subaltern Empire in a Eurocentric World*. Palgrave Macmillan. <http://b-ok.org/book/2523271/05ccd4> (February 23, 2018); Weber, Yuval. 2018. 'Petropolitics'. In *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*, Routledge, 99–119; Williams, Kimberly A. 2012. *Imagining Russia: Making Feminist Sense of American Nationalism in U.S.-Russian Relations*. SUNY Press.

been in power (Jervis 2013). The understanding of Russia's foreign policy along with leaders' features has been tackled according to different theoretical and methodological tools: some scholars base their arguments on leader's personality and affective characteristics; others focus on leader's belief system and operational code shaped by past experiences; finally, a third group is interested in leader's (mis)perceptions of external threats. In the next sections, I describe each of the mentioned explanations and how they are often intertwined in their application to Russian presidents.

### ***1.1.1 Personality***

Political leaders' emotional dimensions are defined as the most personal variables of FPA. As a consequence, some scholars consider this aspect as having an irrelevant or marginal effect for the FPA. Others suggest that, thanks to social psychology and neuroscience, emotions generated by leaders' perceptions have distinct effects on cognition, perception, memory, and consequently on strategic choices (Duelfer and Dyson 2011).

In the early 1990s, when Boris Yeltsin came to power as the first elected president of the Russian Federation, he had an enormous concentration of formal power due to few institutional constraints (Treisman 2012). These loose constraints have often tested Yeltsin's commitment to democratic procedure and institutions as he demanded total loyalty to him within his inner circle as well as political institutions and media (Breslauer 2002, 35). However, his paternalistic attitude extended differently beyond Russia's borders. Indeed, Yeltsin's primary aim in foreign policy, like that of Gorbachev's before him, was to create a non-threatening external environment that would be conducive to his country's internal economic and political development (Donaldson 2000, 288). This concentration on domestic peculiarities, together with relative shortcomings in military strength, produced a foreign policy of accommodation in relations with states beyond the borders of the former Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR) (Zevelev 1996).

The appointment of Vladimir Putin by Yeltsin in 1999 as his successor opened a new chapter of leadership for Russia's foreign policy. Angus Roxburgh and Allen Lynch demonstrate how a complex interplay of Russia's post-Soviet circumstances and the particular path of Putin's personality such as suspicion and concern of external dangers have influenced his choices of preserving Russia's leadership in central Eurasia (A. C. Lynch 2011; Roxburgh 2013). Others have addressed Putin's imperial-ambitions as the main source of Russia's recent assertion (Brzezinski 2014; Bukkvoll 2016). Although such argument is very popular among liberal policy makers, it does not help scholars to address diverse decisions under Putin's administrations, such as the accommodating policy towards the presence of the US military in Central Asia soon after the 9/11 attack within a partnership of common fight against terrorism (see also Kropatcheva 2012; Tsygankov 2005a). In order to fill this gap, Fiona Hill and Clifford Gaddy map a detailed Putin's personality and claim that Russia's foreign policy is the product of Putin's *several* identities combination (Hill and Gaddy 2015). According to Hill and Gaddy, Putin's aim to build a Russian zone of influence in Eurasia is based on his belief in Russian exceptionalism in the background of a long dark history that has turned the Russian population to be ready for the worst. Moreover, Putin believes in a strong state but, at the same time, he stresses his connections to 'ordinary' Russians and distance himself from Moscow's resented elites. Finally, Putin's outsider status and his pragmatism have enabled him to reject the central tenets of Communism and to limitedly embrace capitalism. However, due to personal connections and political pressure of post-Soviet business practice, Putin got the oligarchs under control through coercion, blackmail, and manipulation (Hill and Gaddy 2015, 143–66).

The interregnum of Dmitriy Medvedev from 2008 until 2012 encouraged expectations of a shift toward more liberal policy in the domestic realm as well as a closer engagement with the West and the international community (Treisman 2012, 139–46). During his presidency,

he certainly appeared open to promoting a more pluralistic public debate about Russia's future and hinted at the possibility that the government would embark upon a new period of perestroika (Hill and Gaddy 2015, 129). However, because of internal institutional constraints already set up by Putin before leaving the presidency as well as external circumstances, we have observed a great gap between Medvedev's rhetoric and the government's record (Treisman 2012, 123–62). The Russo-Georgian war in 2008 and Medvedev recalling to Russia's duty to protect threatened ethnic fellows are evident examples of the continuative assertive policy toward the near abroad, which was previously initiated by Putin (Bunce and Hozic 2016; Götz 2016; Kropatcheva 2012; Kuzio and D'Anieri 2018; Lo 2015; Mouritzen and Wivel 2012; Tsygankov 2013).

### ***1.1.2 Belief Systems***

According to the theory of cognitive consistency, individuals' belief system is shaped by their earliest experiences (Andrianopoulos 1991). The more experience individuals acquire, the stronger their belief system; the more established their insights and the more their reactions will be automatic and averse to adapting to changing situations (Hermann 1980).

Several leaders denied that the profound changes that shook the USSR would resolutely change international relations. However, during the 1990s, some leaders were still unable to shake off the prism of the Cold War from their policy tool-kit (Chollet and Goldgeier 2003; Malici and Malici 2005). The Soviet past under the Stalinist and post-Stalinist administrative culture has profoundly shaped Yeltsin's conception of the kind of leadership Russia needed. Yeltsin was strongly convinced of the necessity for Russia of having 'a patriarch' in charge of strong command instead of the application of rule of law (Breslauer 2000, 47). In this respect, he was partially the victim of his own success in destroying the communist system, for he ruled as a president suffering for the lack of coordination within the established apparatus and with other governmental actors (Jensen 1999). Moreover, the

excessive importance attached by him to personal relations with foreign leaders often made him change or contradict his country's long-standing position after an international meeting (Yeltsin and Fitzpatrick 2000).

A different argument is applied to Vladimir Putin and its position on Russia's foreign policy. As stated by Fiona Hill (2014a): '[He] is the product of his own environment—a man whose past experiences have informed his present outlook and world view'. Indeed, Putin's past in the KGB<sup>9</sup> can be defined as the main past experience that has influenced his vision of the Russian state as well as of Russia's place in the world (Treisman 2012). When Putin was a KGB agent placed in Dresden at the end of the 1980s, he witnessed protests and street violence and developed a very negative view of the consequences of the rise of political opposition movements. Consequently, when he looks at the developments in Ukraine and the protests on Kiev's Maidan Square as well as the previous Colour revolutions in the post-Soviet space or the movements of the Arab spring, he looks at them through the lens of his experience in Dresden and East Germany (Hill 2014b).

Conversely, trained as a lawyer, Medvedev had executive experience as Law professor from 1990 until 1999, chairman of Gazprom's board of directors and chief of Putin's presidential staff (Treisman 2012, 123–62). He was widely viewed as a liberal, though he was not only a protégé of Putin but subject to the influence of the most popular leader of the nation (Donaldson, Noguee, and Nadkarni 2014, 14). Given that Medvedev lacked the background in the security services that characterised so many of Putin's associates, and that he made the modernisation of Russia through the economic development in cooperation with the West one of the main priorities, some observers anticipated a more 'pro-Western' orientation under the new president, which were soon belied (Who is Mr. Medvedev? 2008).

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<sup>9</sup> *Komitet gosudarstvennoj bezopasnosti*, The main security agency for the Soviet Union from 1954 until its break-up in 1991.

### ***1.1.3 Perceptions***

The literature on perceptions is based on the premise that there is *always* a gap between real world and perceived world (Gold 1978). In particular, political leaders react to the perceived world and not to reality itself (Hall and Yarhi-Milo 2012). Despite the fact that reconstructing the decision-makers' perceptions is risky from the methodological point of view because it is highly specific, Robert Jervis in his book *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (2017) suggests that leaders perceive the world within the same bias according to misperceptions and attributions bias.<sup>10</sup> Both these approaches may prove useful in analysing Russia's political leaders' decision-making.

In the early years of his administration, Yeltsin strongly relied on Western financial and political support of other countries' aid agencies, along with international institutions like the World Bank and International Financial Corporation (Talbot 2018). This was necessary since Yeltsin perceives that the accumulating costs of his revolutionary strategy might come back to haunt him unless he obtained external aids. Toward this aim, Yeltsin undervalued Western intentions; thus, he retreated remaining troops from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics; he drastically reduced Russian armaments, cutting strategic nuclear warhead. Moreover, he agreed on a peaceful division of the Black Sea Fleet and helped to negotiate the denuclearisation of Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. In the face of that, Russia followed a policy seeking 'the greatest possible degree of integration' based on the principle of 'strictly voluntary participation and reciprocity.' (Yeltsin and Fitzpatrick 1995, 164–67). However, the perpetual irritant of NATO enlargement to Eastern Europe as well as NATO first post-Cold war military operations – air strike against Serb revanchists – pushed Yeltsin and his internal

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<sup>10</sup> The first concept refers to 'the gap between the world as it actually exists and the world as it exists in the mind of perceiver' (Duelfer and Dyson 2011). One of the most common form of misperception is to overestimate the hostility of one's rival falling in the famous security dilemma (Jervis 2017). The second concept refers to the common use of 'attributing intrinsic motivations strictly to the unfriendly actions of others' (Morin and Paquin 2018, 88).



circle to cede to the internal pressure from the Eurasianist military, which were more suspicious about US-Russia relations; and thus to show a less remissive Russia in the post-Cold War system (Checkel 1997).

Differently, the analysis of Putin's international strategy according to his assessment of threats can be divided in two periods: the first refers to the two mandates between 2000 and 2008, and the second refers to the mandate since 2012 until present. According to Andrey P. Tsygankov (2005a), in his early administrations, Putin aspired to be recognised by the West 'as a leader of a (normal) great power, not merely the head of a market economy'. As a consequence, Putin's attention was not only devolved in contrasting US unipolarity, but he was particularly concerned with world's instability derived from terrorism, the access to new economic opportunities besides the Euro-Atlantic area, and the necessity for Russia to engage economically and strategically with the West (Tsygankov 2005a, 142–46; Zevelev 2002). Things changed in his third mandate from 2012, although signs were already clear since August 2008, when Putin assessed external threats to the Russian Federation coming basically from three dimensions: threats to territorial integrity, threats to state sovereignty caused by falling behind in economic development, and threats to national identity caused by Western political influence. Within this framework, some scholars argued that the current crisis in Ukraine as well as other frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space are the product of Putin's zero-sum attitude (Hill 2014a; McFaul, Sestanovich, and Mearsheimer 2014).

Finally, although Medvedev did not appear to have the 'zero-sum' attitude of his predecessor, in the first months of his presidency, he sounded very much like his realist mentor (McFaul, Sestanovich, and Mearsheimer 2014): he supported the Russian military intervention into Georgia and coined a strikingly realist term, 'sphere of privileged interests' to assert Russia's hegemony in former Soviet territory. This gap between an initial liberal rhetoric and a more realist decision-making has been attached to external actions, like Europe's relative

unity over Georgia, the impact of the global financial crisis and a resurgent US following Barack Obama's election, which have radically changed the external context of Russian policymaking and, consequently, leaders' perceptions of external threats (Tichý, 2017).

By analysing the individual level of analysis, it is understandable why assertive foreign policy and, sometime, consequent military conflicts are more frequent than the theory of rational choice would recommend (Bueno de Mesquita and [et al.] 2003; Fearon 1995). Indeed, given the centralised structure and personalised nature of Russian politics, it is not misleading to imagine that Russian leaders' worldview assume great importance in Russia's foreign policy. However, foreign policy does not always depend on leaders' personality, their cognitive bias and their perceptions, especially when worldview of leaders is widely shared in the society they are acting. For instance, while Russians may have been disappointed with Yeltsin's accommodating foreign policy with the West (Breslauer 2000; Donaldson 2000; Malcolm et al. 1996), across Russian political elites as well as general public, there is a strong consensus on Putin's as well as on Medvedev's foreign policy (Lynch 2011). Such widened internal support may suggest that individual's actions can also be predetermined by institutional constrains and domestic political dimension.

## **1.2 Domestic Political Dimension: Regime Survival**

Domestic political explanations hold that Russia's internal political evolution influence its relations with the West and the near abroad (Light and Cadier 2015, pt. II; Lo 2015; Malcolm et al. 1996). Specifically, the *authoritarian* nature of the Russian regime is the main source of Moscow's regional policy (Barkanov 2014). The logical conclusion behind this explanation is that being Russia more liberal and democratic, its foreign policy would be different. Such approach derives from the liberal tradition of IR, according to which domestic political dimensions are the main drivers of a state's foreign policy (Moravcsik 1997a). In the case of Russia, two basic variants appear to be relevant. The first holds that Russia's relations with

the post-Soviet space is affected by Russia's fear of democratic contagion. The second claims that the Kremlin tries to divert public attention from domestic failures by creating external crises. Both variants assume the imperative of regime survival and national sovereignty as the main interests in Russia's foreign policy (Cohen 2007).

### ***1.2.1 Fear of Democratic Spillover***

The first explanation claims that Russia acts as a negative external actor in the process of democratisation of other post-Soviet republics (Cohen 2007). Being Russia itself an autocratic state, it has the interest to actively resist or undermines regional democratic promotion (Tolstrup 2015; Ambrosio 2009; Tolstrup 2009)<sup>11</sup>. The reason behind authoritarian promotion abroad is avoiding a 'spill-over-effect' around the region, and consequently at home. This fascinating perspective draws on regime security theory, according to which the primary security threats facing 'weak states' originate primarily from internal, domestic sources. (Ambrosio 2009, chap. 2). Admittedly, Russia is still incapable to deal with critical demographic as well as social and economic vulnerabilities, which can represent an internal 'insecurity dilemma' for its regime survival (Cohen 2007)<sup>12</sup>. Within this respect, Russia's main goal is to counteract the diffusion process, according to which authoritarian regimes come under increasing pressure from the proliferation of democracies within their geographic

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<sup>11</sup> However, the support for authoritarian persistence does not concern only authoritarian regimes. Indeed, the literature on external negative actors draws from the anomalies of democratisation theory, i.e. liberal democratic states may intervene negatively in the internal affairs of developing states. See, for instance, the US intervention in several Latin American countries during the 1960s and 1970s. US authorities were, for example, deeply involved in promoting the military coups against socialist governments in Brazil (1964) and Chile (1973–1974). The result was reinstatement of authoritarianism and with that an effective rollback of the democratic achievements. On external actors in regime changes, see Huntington, Samuel P. 2012. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late 20th Century*. University of Oklahoma Press; Tolstrup, Jakob. 2009. 'Studying a Negative External Actor: Russia's Management of Stability and Instability in the "Near Abroad"'. *Democratization* 16(5): 922–44; Muller, Edward N. 1985. 'Dependent Economic Development, Aid Dependence on the United States, and Democratic Breakdown in the Third World'. *International Studies Quarterly* 29(4): 445–69.

<sup>12</sup> Insecurity dilemma is defined as 'an internal condition based on the contradiction between societal and state power'. Jackson, Richard. 2007. 'Regime Security'. In *Contemporary Security Studies*, ed. Alan Collins.

proximity (Jackson 2007)<sup>13</sup>. Several scholars see Russia's intervention in Ukraine in 2014 as a product of domestic considerations in preventing a similar regime change at home in Russia (Gel'man 2016; Kramer 2014; B. D. Taylor 2014). In support of this argument Russia has indeed previously taken similar actions. For instance, in the context of colour revolutions between 2005 and 2008, Russia has adopted several tools in order to achieve authoritarian resistance both internally and externally. Firstly, Russia has adopted a law to undermine the ability of foreign non-governmental organisations (NGOs) within Russia to oppose the Kremlin (Ambrosio 2009, 12). Secondly, Russia has redefined the problem of external democracy promotion to its advantage by providing an alternative vision to Western-led liberal democracy, i.e. a *sovereign* democracy (in Russian 'суверенная демократия', *suverennoyaya demokratya*) (Ambrosio 2007); or by promoting more multilateralism under international law rather than under US-led unilateralism (Averre 2007). Thirdly, Russia bolstered autocratic regimes in several post-Soviet states by stabilising the current regime, like Lukashenka in Belarus (Makarychev and Morozov 2013), or by legitimising regime changes through political, economic and even military means, like in Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova during elections (Vanderhill 2013).

Because of regime security and leaders' concern over diffusion process, autocracies act jointly with the main interest in the extinction and reversal of the wave of democratisation (Tolstrup 2015). This is the main reason why autocracies are incentivised to cooperate among themselves rather than to compete. It is a sort of 'inverted' democratic peace theory, where

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<sup>13</sup> History is rich with examples of such diffusion processes, and there is plenty of evidence showing that autocrats truly fear such developments and do their utmost to shore up against them (Herd 2005). On the effect of geographic proximity on democracy proliferation see also Gora, Magdalena, and Katarzyna Zielinska. 2011. *Democracy, State and Society. European Integration in Central and Eastern Europe*. Jagiellonian University Press. <http://libra.ibuk.pl/book/40901> (May 21, 2018). Whitehead, Laurence. 2001. *Three International Dimensions of Democratization*. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/0199243751.001.0001/acprof-9780199243754-chapter-1> (December 4, 2018); Brinks, Daniel, and Michael Coppedge. 2006. 'Diffusion Is No Illusion: Neighbor Emulation in the Third Wave of Democracy'. *Comparative Political Studies* 39(4): 463–89.

autocracies are less likely to engage in military conflict with other autocracies. In this regard, Russia has been very active in protecting itself and other post-Soviet states from regional democratic trends through the establishment of international organisations like the SCO, whose members are very concerned with state sovereignty and non-interference from great powers (Silitski 2010). In this way, any attempts of democratisation will be opposed by local autocratic regimes and, simultaneously, such opposition will also resonate at the intergovernmental level.

### ***1.2.2 Diversionary Theory of War***

A second argument with domestic political explanations holds that ‘Russian leaders use foreign policy as a tool to buttress domestic support and to foster a perception that Russia is surrounded by enemies at a time when its democratic legitimacy is deteriorating’ (Clunan 2018). This general argument comes from the diversionary theory of war according to which, leaders use force abroad in order to divert public’s attention from domestic failure or to increase their domestic political support (Cohen 2007). Although the causal logic in the diversionary war literature can be diverse (Tarar 2006; Richards et al. 1993; Levy 2011), two types are suitable for analysing Russia’s assertion in the near abroad: the phenomenon of ‘rally around the flag’ and the rallying lever. The logic of ‘rally around the flag’ assumes that *external* dramatic events can create a temporary effect that rallies the country’s population around its government leaders (Chiozza and Goemans 2003). During the Russo-Georgian war, Russia used the conflict with Georgia as an instrument in its broader strategy of keeping political tensions with the US and Europe at its preferred level in times of profound economic unrest. Although some scholars suggest that such tensions benefit the Russian political incumbent domestically at the cost of provoking a rupture in relations with the West (Mueller 1985), others claim that there is an optimal range of tension with the West that Russia tries to maintain, realising that its population is both motivated and unified by the presence of an

external threat (Filippov 2009, 1827). Independently of the causal explanation, if international crises actually increase the rate of support, government leaders could be tempted to generate them deliberately.

The rallying lever argument hypothesizes that leaders feeling insecure about their leadership positions may be tempted *to provoke* hostility with external groups in order to trigger a ‘rally’ effect and thereby bolster their own support within the group (Filippov 2009). Accordingly, Russia’s foreign policy did not grow more aggressive in response to U.S. influences in the post-Soviet space or to leaders’ misperceptions; it rather changed as a result of Russian internal political dynamics. After Putin announced that he would run for a third presidential term, disapproval of voter fraud quickly morphed into discontent with Putin’s return to the Kremlin –the so-called ‘Bolotnaya Square protests’ in 2011. In an effort to mobilise his electoral base and discredit the opposition, Putin recast the West as an enemy to national security (Levy and Thompson 2010, 99–104).

In both hypotheses, the Kremlin gains support for its campaigns against external enemies through a massive use of national and international media (Vlasenko 2015), which at the same time make citizens active part of it and not only a mere target for manipulation (Golovchenko, Hartmann, and Adler-Nissen 2018). Putin’s ebbing approval ratings surged by about 20% points especially among people who consume more state-controlled media (Darczewska 2014). Such consensus of Russian popular opinion is driven by its stability-centric nature, which plays a crucial role in the rise and persistence of electoral authoritarianism in Russia (Hale 2018).

The imperatives of regime survival offer valid arguments for addressing Russia’s foreign policy; nevertheless, they suffer from some limitations. Firstly, one of the weaknesses of democracy spill-over-effect argument is that it does not explain why Russia has opposed *also* authoritarian regimes in the post-Soviet space: e.g. to the role that Russia played in

overthrowing Kurmanbek Bakiyev during the Tulip revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2008 (Matovski 2018), or the coercive diplomacy against Lukaschenka under Putin's administration (Blank 2010).<sup>14</sup> At the same time, it fails to account for Russia's collaboration with democratic regimes: e.g., Russia's close relationship with Nikol Pashinyan, who came to power in Armenia after a civil mobilisation against corruption (Kuleszewicz 2016). It seems that Russia's support for external regimes is stronger if the latter are deemed crucial for strategic purposes rather than for their regime type (Osborn and Pinchuk 2018). Russian government's interventions are meant first to avert external threats to its own rule – be they regional diffusion processes, competing legitimisation claims or regional power dynamics (Whitehead 2015); and to strengthen control over other post-Soviet states (Levitsky and Way 2010, cf.). Secondly, the argument according to which the Kremlin creates external crises to divert attention from internal failures tend to exaggerate Russia's political and economic problems (Way 2016). Although Putin's running for his third term in 2012 was welcomed with anti-government protests, there is no real signal that the public discontent poses a significant challenge to the Kremlin in short and medium term (Odinius and Kuntz 2015).<sup>15</sup> This argument holds true for three reasons: there is no real strong and organised political opposition to the Kremlin; Russia can count on coercive means to suppress domestic opposition (Shapovalova and Zarembo 2011); and, Russia's power legitimacy is provided through the maintenance of the political order in opposition to fear of instability and violent regime changes (Mark 2018, 95). Thirdly, Russia's foreign policy has become more assertive not in response to domestic economic problems, but rather when economic recovery has bolstered leadership's popularity since 2004

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<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Rosa and Cuppuleri (2020) demonstrated that, in the case of Russia, the probability of conflict is higher in the case of democratic or mixed dyads and lower when non-democratic dyads are considered. Accordingly, Moscow's military behaviour seems to contradict the dominant literature that affirms that democratic dyads are less conflict-prone than non-democratic or mixed dyads.

<sup>15</sup> After the pandemic outbreak from covid 19 that has harshly affected Russia, many experts have speculated on Putin's regime survival, especially within the simultaneous economic crisis of the oil market shock. Twigg, Judy, and Gunter Deuber. 2020. 'Russia and the Covid-19 Pandemic'. Russian Analytical Digest (RAD) 251: 19 p.

(Smyth 2014). At the same time, it should be noted that Russia's internal problems may escalate rather than disappear in the long-term even if Russia adopts an assertive foreign policy (Holmes 2010). Finally, Russian leaders have not always responded to domestic pressure and low political legitimacy with assertive foreign policy: e.g. although Yeltsin's late administration had a very low legitimacy due to the close economic default in 1998, Russia accommodated several times crises in the post-Soviet space through diplomatic instruments, such as the dispute over the Kerch Strait with Ukraine. Rather than always pursuing aggressive foreign policy to limit regime-security concerns, Russia may adopt other solutions of power consolidations by weakening radical opponents (Reddaway 2018). These limitations aim not to discredit the regime survival imperatives in the case of Russia. Russia's continued interventions in the near abroad may develop into a diversionary conflict (like that in Eastern Ukraine) because of the institutional structure of Russia and the enormous concentration of power in the hands of the Kremlin. However, the impact of internal conditions alone appears to be flattering.

### **1.3 The Role of Ideas: Constructivist Studies of Russia's Foreign Policy**

The third group of explanations holds that a state's cultural dimension has an enormous effect on its international policies (Hopf 2002). The theoretical framework draws on social-constructivism, which focuses on the social construction of reality and the influence of culture and ideas on states choices (Lapid and Kratochwil 1996; Katzenstein 1996). Challenging the idea that a state's interests exist by themselves, constructivists argue that interpretation of these interests are shaped by a state's identities (Wendt 1992). This section briefly presents four ideational factors that are of most interest to Russia's foreign policy including (competing) identity discourse; status recognition, the use of international norms, and strategic culture.



### ***1.3.1 Identity discourse(s)***

Constructivist studies of Russia's foreign policy focus mainly on the process of identity and interest construction by examining different interpretations of Russian identity vis-à-vis Russia's Others (Zevelev 2016; White and Feklyunina 2014; Kuchins and Zevelev 2012; Ray 2012; Berg and Ehin 2009; Hopf 1994, 2002, 2005, 2016; Neumann 1995). Scholars generally agree that, despite its different identity discourses, Russia views Europe and the West more in general as its main point of reference (Morozov 2015; A. P. Tsygankov 2013). As argued by Inver Neumann (1995, 1) 'the idea of Europe is the main "Other" in relation to which the idea of Russia is defined'. However, identity is not a fixed concept, but it changes according to societal discourses. Thus, to different discourses of national identity settled by domestic contestation correspond different national interests, and consequently, different foreign policies (White and Feklyunina 2014; Hopf 2002).

Scholars usually individuate three competing identity discourses in post-Soviet Russia that influence relations with the near abroad: westerniser (liberal), statist (centrist/realist), and civilisationalist (nationalist) (Kuchins and Zevelev 2012). All of them think about Russia as a great power, but they disagree on the *nature* of great power that Russia represents (White and Feklyunina 2014, 25). After a short liberal trend in the immediate fall of the Soviet Union, identity discourse shifted to a more pragmatic statism in order to re-establish hegemony in the post-Soviet space and counterbalance external powers (Clunan 2014a, 285). Recently, the civilisationalist discourse has been adopted by the Kremlin in order to justify more coercive actions in the post-Soviet space like in the Baltic states (Berg and Ehin 2009) as well as in Ukraine (Kuzio and D'Anieri 2018). In particular, Russia's action in Crimea is understood as a consequence of Kremlin's securitisation of Russia's identity as main national interest to be defended by globalisation and spread of non-compatible Western values. In his Crimea's speech, Putin clearly stated: 'we have every reason to assume that the infamous policy

management of containment [against Russia], led in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, continue today' (Putin 2014).

### ***1.3.2 Status Aspiration***

Probably, the most well-developed theme within the ideational argument is Russia's engagement with the idea of great power-ness and Russia's hunt for status recognition (Smith 2014; Urnov 2014). Accordingly, Russia's actions reflect the kind of recognition that Russia obtains from its significant Other(s), namely peer great powers. Consequently, the less recognition Russia obtains in the international arena, the more assertive it will be with its neighbours to re-establish legitimacy (Forsberg 2014; Larson and Shevchenko 2014, 2010). Russia's latest interventions in the post-Soviet space are, thus, the consequence of Russia's unsuccessful attempts to secure its recognition as great power (Neumann 2008). In a related manner, Anne L. Clunan (2009b) argues that Russia's resurgence in international politics is a product of history and status recognition, which 'has far outweighed political purpose and practicality' (Clunan 2009b, 16). Differently, Andrey P. Tsygankov (2012) focuses on honour rather than status. Accordingly, Russia's major shift in foreign policy – from cooperation to a defensive reaction and assertiveness – depends on the varying extent to which the significant other recognises or rejects Russia's understanding of honour and its interest coming from these understandings (Tsygankov 2012). Within these lens, the Russo-Georgian war as well as Russia's actions in Ukraine are seen as a consequence of challenging Russia's status as great power (Barkanov 2014; Clunan 2014b). Conversely, Russia's concession to the US of establishing military bases in Kirghizstan in early 2000s for a common fight against terrorism is a proof of major powers collaboration when an equal treatment is ensured (Nalbandov 2016). In support of this argument, scholars often bring Russia's a close economic and security partnership with China in Central Asia in the framework of common global security agenda

as an example of successful regional cooperation based on recognition of mutual interests (Samokhvalov 2017).

### **1.3.3 Norms**

As great power, Russia is strongly engaged with the promotion and implementation of international norms, which are understood as ‘the expectations of appropriate behaviour shared by a community’ (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). While in the early 1990s, Russia was mainly complying to Western norms (*norm taker*), recently Russia comes as promoter of new, or at least different, international norms (*norm giver*) (Krickovic and Weber 2018). In this regard, scholars have individuated Russia’s double standards with salient international norms such as sovereignty, humanitarian intervention and responsibility to protect (Deyermond 2016; Snetkov and Lanteigne 2015). The promotion of a ‘sovereign democracy’ by the Kremlin in the mid-2000s has highlighted the clash between Russia and the West about the link between sovereignty and democracy (Ziegler 2012). However, Russia’s understanding of democracy varies depending on *whose* sovereignty it is at stake. Ruth Deyermond (2016) claims Russia has a Westphalian<sup>16</sup> understanding of democracy regarding itself and countries *outside* the post-Soviet space. On the other hand, Russia’s understanding of sovereignty regarding near abroad states is porous and it is strongly subjected to a vertical power relations between the ‘small neighbouring state’ and the patron state (Deyermond 2016). The same has been argued regarding humanitarian intervention and right to protect. Russia has raised vocal criticism against Western approach in Libya and Syria (Snetkov and Lanteigne 2015). At the same time, the right to protect has been claimed in South Ossetia (2008) and Crimea and Eastern Ukraine (2014) in support for Russia’s own action (Baranovsky and Mateiko 2016;

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<sup>16</sup> The Westphalian world order refers to the peace of Westphalia in 1648, which ended the Thirty Years’ War. Despite the IR narrative on this event and the consequence account for world order has being criticised as a myth (Osiander 2001), it is still seen as the benchmark for the emergence of the modern system of sovereign states (Falk 2002).

Sakwa 2015 ). The core argument behind it is that Russia is a unique self-sufficient civilisation and Russian intellectuals should liberate themselves ‘from the ideological stereotypes of Western science’ by adopting norms in line with Russia’s past legacy (Vinogradov 2006).

### ***1.3.4 Strategic culture***

The concept of strategic culture holds that collective ideas shared by government’s elites about war and the use of force have an impact on foreign and defensive policies (Snyder 1977; Johnston 1995). Accordingly, the reasoning behind Russia’s offensive behaviour in the post-Soviet space is driven by the Soviet and Russian past strategic legacy, in particular its strategic culture about the sense of encirclement from enemies (Ermath 2009; Glenn, Howlett, and Poore 2004; Heikka 2000). This argument is similar to that of leaders’ perception; nevertheless, while the previous regards mainly experience and personality of Russian presidents, the concept of strategic culture refers a larger part of the foreign policy executive and political elites of the Russian federation.

During the Cold War, the Soviet ‘operational code’ could be summarised as the Hobbesian instinct of ‘who wins over whom’ (in Russian, ‘кто кого’ *kto kogo*) (Leites 2012). Focusing on the more recent case of Ukraine, Mette Skak (2016) proposes a nuanced analysis of post-Soviet Russian strategic culture by claiming that the *chekisty*<sup>17</sup> (in Russian, ‘чекисты’) misperception of Maidan protest in Kiev as another colour revolution instigated by the US drives Russia’s intervention in Ukraine (Skak 2016). Skak’s argument matches Gray’s (1999) point about the spread of *chekisty* strategic culture in recent Russian elite’s discourse not only in its intervention in Ukraine, but also in its past reactions to other colour revolutions around the post-Soviet space. Similarly, Dmitry Adamsky (2018) explores the impact of strategic

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<sup>17</sup> The figure of contemporary *chekisty* is a former member from the Soviet-era secret service (*Čeka*, in Russian, ‘чека’), who were promoted to high positions after the collapse of the Soviet Union. They are usually promoter of a statist foreign policy with the aim to counterbalance US global dominance. Thus, scholars usually includes within the groups of realist identity discourses.

culture on the post-Soviet conceptualisation of deterrence and offers a strong cultural explanation of Russian ‘cross domain coercion’, namely the combination of military and non-military forms of influence in the near abroad. He demonstrates how strategic concepts of post-Soviet Russia evolve through three practical fields – nuclear deterrence, conventional weapons deterrence and cyber deterrence – in order to increase strategic stability (Adamsky 2018, 53–57).

With the development of IR constructivism, a growing number of Russia’s scholars have provided nuanced explanations of Russia’s foreign policy. However, the role of ideational factors in constructing and defending Russia’s national interests suffers from a threefold limitation. Firstly, although there is plenty of explanations on national identities shift from liberal ideas to statism/civilisationalism and its consequent impact on status recognition, international norms and strategic culture, social-constructivism does not provide a comprehensive explanation of the underlying reasons for such shift (Mark 2018, 84; Götz 2016, 10). Scholars have introduced the problems by accounting for internal factors like the shock therapy of the 1990s (Hopf 2005), or for external factors like enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and Western promotion of regime changes in the post-Soviet space (Mazloomi, Yeoh, and Karim 2018a). Others have framed the unique Russian identity from the sense of being a great power to the distinct civilisation (Zevelev 2016). However, there is no systematic account for addressing *how* and *why* these factors have contributed to the surface of one identity discourse rather than another. More generally, constructivists have ‘failed so far to specify the conditions under which specific ideas are selected and influence policies while others fall by the wayside’ (Risse-Kappen 1994, 187). In a similar manner, the constructivist methodological toolkit, such as discourse analysis, is of little help in looking at the reasons why certain dominant articulations of national identity have been so stable over several centuries (Neumann 1995). At same time, little has been done to

discover why to a certain ideology follows little actions. For instance, Elias Götz (2017) finds that although already under Primakov in the late 1990s, assertive chekisty culture as well as statist ideology were on stage, yet Russia has been more assertive since 2004 and not before. All these arguments demonstrate how identity discourse at the domestic level may not always have a direct link on Russia's foreign policy. Secondly, respect and status are very important for Russia as top leaders consistently assert that Russia must be treated as an equal great power by other states. As a consequence, much of the resentment of NATO's expansion eastward derives not so much from an existential security threat posed by the admission of new member states, but because NATO did not take Russian interests seriously in the 1990s (Pouliot, 2010; Tsygankov, 2012). However, Russia's assertive actions in the post-Soviet space in order to re-establish regional legitimacy and to gain status of great power's influence from the West have been unsuccessful. In particular, military actions against Georgia (and later Ukraine) seem to have reduced, not increased, Russia's status among Western policymakers (Miliband 2008). Finally, although these studies recognise the role of material factors, such as economic relations or power balance, in Russia's identity construction and contestation, they do not consider the mutual reinforcement of ideational and material factors on Russia's foreign policy. Drawing on post-structuralist approaches of IR, Viatcheslav Morozov challenges this view by arguing that Russia's ambiguous position toward the West and the near abroad not only reflects the legacy of Russia's imperial past and its dominance in the immediate neighbourhood but also its economic dependence on Europe, by perpetuating the condition of 'subaltern empire' (Morozov 2015, 78). Similarly, William C. Wohlforth (2001: 216, 221, 223) claims that it was the specific external context that had shaped the Russian identity and not vice versa – that Russia's identity had led to specific geopolitics. In a follow-up piece, Wohlforth argues that conflicts about status do not come from domestic developments, but

they rather depend on material capabilities and on polarity that characterises the system (2009: 39).

## 1.4 Geopolitical Imperatives: Structural Opportunities and Constrains

The fourth section holds that Russia's foreign policy has little to do with domestic peculiar features of Russian regime or national culture; it rather sees geopolitical opportunities and constrains at the centre of Moscow's actions. This reasoning draws on realist literature, which assumes the ever-present threat that other states will use force to harm or conquer them.<sup>18</sup> Specifically, realist theories argue that the international system is anarchic, meaning that it lacks a global government and remains state-centric (Waltz 1959). Within this structure, states are presented as rational actors because they make strategic calculations (Fearon 1995).<sup>19</sup> Realist schools offer two separate arguments to explain Russia's foreign policy: the first suggests that Russia takes advantage of its superior material capabilities in order to coerce its neighbours; the second holds that Russia's assertion in the near abroad is aimed to counterbalance external threats. While the first derives from offensive realism, the second is based on defensive realism.

### 1.4.1 *Offensive Realism*

The first argument finds Russia's assertion as a function of its relative power, namely its growing material capabilities (Kanet 2007).<sup>20</sup> This argument draws on offensive realism,

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<sup>18</sup> For a review on Realism and Foreign Policy Analysis see Wohlforth, William C. 'Realism and Foreign Policy'. In *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases*, edited by Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield, and Tim Dunne. Oxford University Press, 2012. <http://www.oxfordpoliticstrove.com/view/10.1093/hepl/9780198708902.001.0001/hepl-9780198708902-chapter-2>. And Wivel, Anders. 'Realism in Foreign Policy Analysis'. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, 26 September 2017. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.475>.

<sup>19</sup> The rationalist paradigm covers a vast range of theoretical approaches. For an overview, see Morin, Jean-Frédéric, and Jonathan Paquin. 'How Does Rationality Apply to FPA What Are Its Limitations?' In *Foreign Policy Analysis - A Toolbox*, 217–54. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Although realist scholars agree that Russia is searching for more power, they disagree on the concept of power, which has been elusive and debated within realism. I here mainly refer to material capabilities, such as economic, financial and military resources, compared to those of other super powers. However, realists have

which claims that states tend to increase their relative power position because of survival imperatives in the anarchic system. It follows that the more power a state has relative to others, the greater its chance of survival (Lieber 2005). Specifically, great powers not only aim to gain relative power, but also to secure hegemony for security and survival. Toward that aim, great powers do not even hesitate to pursue expansionist policies, especially in the regional system, when it serves their hegemonic interest (Mearsheimer 2001, 37).

Taking advantage of the rising of its material capabilities, Russia has attempted to increase its influence and prestige with all available means. On the one hand, rising prices of energy and natural resources has greatly strengthen Russian economy and has given Russia bargaining power and even political leverage vis-à-vis its trading partners in the post-Soviet space (Oldberg 2007). In particular, having energy supremacy, Russia has exerted geopolitical power through the sale of its vast energy resources and selected strategies to channel them to partners. Although its gradual acceptance of the regulatory and market principles promoted by the EU, Russia still uses its energy stock as power leverage in its ‘hybrid-warfare’ (Siddi 2018; Seely 2017; Jonsson and Seely 2015). Indeed, energy transformed Russia’s fortunes after its economic decline so much that in the 2003 Energy Strategy, Russia’s natural resources are claimed as a fundamental element of Moscow’s diplomacy (Perović and Orttung 2009). This has been true for neighbouring countries, such as Georgia, Ukraine and Belarus, which has been blackmailed of energy cut from Russia if certain geo-strategic and internal issues were not solved in favour of Russia (Haines 2015). On the other hand, by exploiting geopolitical opportunities, Russia has not hesitated to adopt expansionist policies against smaller and weaker states in order to enhances its chances of survival in the anarchic system (for a similar argument see Kleinschmidt 2018; Karagiannis 2013). Within these lens, Russia’s actions in

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also gradually included other forms of power, which go beyond its material understanding. For a review see Kropatcheva, Elena. ‘Power and National Security’. In *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*, edited by Andrei P. Tsygankov, 49–50. Routledge, 2018.



the post-Soviet space are not seen in function of unfavourable Western-led regime changes as well as Russia's willingness to affirm its civilisational supremacy, but they are analysed as measure to secure Russia's regional hegemony and to contrast the security system promoted by competing great powers (Götz 2015).

#### ***1.4.2 Defensive Realism***

Presented as separate argument, the second component of realist explanations holds that Russia's assertion in the near abroad is a function of external threats. In the Russian case, external threats come from neighbours' willingness to build closer ties with Western institutions like the EU, NATO as well as from political, economic and military activity of external great powers in what is perceived as Russia's legitimate sphere of influence. Accordingly, the closer the political ties between small neighbouring states and external great powers, the more likely Russia will react assertively (Götz 2016a; MacFarlane 2003, 2016). Therefore, the final aim of Russia is to gain greater control over neighbours to counterbalance foreign powers influence. This line of reasoning draws on defensive realism, which holds that states tend to balance against dangerous concentration of power near their borders. This happens because the international system only provides incentives for balancing behaviour and not for power maximisation, as offensive realists claim (Walt 1990; Waltz 1979). Therefore, it is a common position among scholars from the defensive perspective that Russia's intervention in neighbouring states is pursued in order to avoid close ties with external great powers as well as sponsored-institutions and post-Soviet states. Within this perspective, by enlarging a historical inimical organisation, such as NATO, into countries that Russia once controlled, the West (lead by the US) is a threat to Russian national interests in the post-Soviet space (Trenin 2014). In a similar fashion, Russia's actions in Georgia in 2008 (Asmus 2009) as well as Russia's intervention in Ukraine (Mearsheimer 2014a) were aimed at counterbalance the American presence in the region.

Although realist perspectives are very popular both among Western and Russian scholars,<sup>21</sup> especially because of the open Westphalian nature of Kremlin's security doctrine, they suffer from both empirical and theoretical limitations. Empirically, we can trace four main shortcomings. First, when addressing Russian assertion in the post-Soviet space as an imperialist policy or as a function of external pressure from other great powers, the argument lacks a fine grained analysis of Russia's threat perception that may variate (Toal 2017, 25–54). Currently, Western states and international institutions represent Russia's major concern in most of its national security documents ('The Foreign Policy Concept Of The Russian Federation' 2000; 2008; 2013; 2016); at the same time, there is little (hostile) reference to China. This appears paradoxical within realist literature since China has already entered the economic space of Central Asia; nevertheless, Russia has not opposed it as has done with the European Union (EU) Association Agreement in Eastern Europe (Samokhvalov 2017, 36). Similarly, Russia has previously collaborated with external great powers operating in the post-Soviet space. As Nalbandov (2016, 196) stated: 'Russia was not merely indifferent but actually accommodating of NATO's presence in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan during their operations in Iraq and Afghanistan in the early 2000s. It even proposed that NATO troops use one of its airports in Ulyanovsk as a transit facility for extraction of nonlethal cargo and personnel from Afghanistan, but this was never implemented.' Second, under external pressure, Russia has not always responded assertively. A pivotal example remains the NATO enlargement eastwards initiated in the 1990s. At that time, Russia warned the West of 'tremendous consequences' following NATO membership of former Soviet republics, such as the Baltic states. However, to assertive rhetoric followed little or no action from Russia. To explain

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<sup>21</sup> Among prominent Russian realist works, see Karaganov, Sergey. 'The New Cold War and the Emerging Greater Eurasia'. *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 9, no. 2 (July 2018): 85–93.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.euras.2018.07.002>.

Karaganov, Sergey, and Dmitry Suslov. 'A New World Order: A View from Russia', n.d., 24; Lukyanov, Fyodor. 'Putin's Foreign Policy'. *Foreign Affairs*, 18 April 2016. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2016-04-18/putins-foreign-policy>.

restrained response of Russia under serious external pressure, some scholars have pointed to the salience of individual post-Soviet states for Russia's national identity (e.g. the Baltics never truly viewed as Russian own, while Ukraine is considered the heart of ancient birthplace of Russian statehood) (Nalbandov 2016). Others scholars analyse internal weaknesses as main drivers of Russia's lack of action in the post-Soviet space (Götz 2017, 8–12; Allison 2013, 253). In any case, the argument of external threats alone does not seem to account for the deviant cases. Third, realist approaches fail to address the variance of Russia's foreign policy. Russia applied custom-made foreign policy designs in each specific post-Soviet country, which reveals its commitment to multidimensional engagement in the near abroad. Indeed, if the rationale was to take advantage of superior material capabilities, why has Russia annexed Crimea and not South-Ossetia and Abkhazia, as well as Transnistria? Why has Russia meddled in Georgia and Eastern Ukraine in order to protect ethnic Russians from nationalist governments and has not intervened in Northern Kazakhstan? The geopolitical explanation fails to provide an exhaustive answer to *why* and *when* Russia has adopted some foreign-policy tools rather than others. Fourth, structural arguments rely on a selective approach to history, paying little attention to events between Russia and other post-Soviet republics, which are tackled with superficiality. At the same time, geopolitical explanations ignore domestic factors not only in Russia but also in the neighbouring countries. A leading author of this line of reasoning is the Ukraine-expert Taras Kuzio, who in a recent work *The Sources of Russia's Great Power Politics: Ukraine and the Challenge to the European Order*, co-authored with Paul D'Anieri, claims that issues as nationalism and regionalism in Ukraine as well as other post-Soviet republics tend to be dealt superficially when addressing Russia's decision-making (Kuzio and D'Anieri 2018, chap. 1).

From a theoretical point of view, the primary aim of structural theories is to explain the outcome of states' interactions rather than foreign policy *per se*. Nevertheless, the structure

of the international system is an important component in defining the parameters within which foreign policy options are debated, shaping states' opportunities and constraints, and making certain policy options appealing and others simply unthinkable (Morin and Paquin 2018, chap. 9). However, structural realist approaches fail to explicate the *causal process* through which systemic variables affect leaders' decision-making; and, second, by arguing that it is the system as a whole that dictates states' behaviour, they fail to explain change in the international system because the only possible source of change is the system itself (Hurst 2005; Moravcsik 1997).

## **1.5 Toward an Integrated Model**

This chapter has demonstrated that existing theories provide valid arguments for explaining Russia's foreign policy by individuating various sources of influences and causal conditions. However, these approaches suffer from a number of limitations that make each of them individually insufficient to account for several outcomes as well as multi-causality of Russia's decision-making since the end of the Cold War. I have argued that worldviews of leaders as well as the domestic characteristics of Russia can provide only a limited understanding of Russia's foreign policy either because they focus on the personal characteristics of Russian presidents that are so idiosyncratic that they cannot be replicated in subsequent research, or because they excessively emphasise the authoritarian character of the Russian regime by largely neglecting external forces. Similarly, the ideational explanation poses national identity construction as the main source behind Moscow's action. However, the role played by ideas and culture without looking at states' material capabilities and the systemic characteristics provides little evidence for explaining changes in Russia's foreign policy. At the same time, the literature on geopolitical imperatives is heavily focused on structural factors, thus leaving the state dimension in a 'black box'. Indeed, systemic approaches can explain major shifts in

international politics and regional orders, but are unable to account for specific decision-making outcomes within particular.

As a result, each of these approaches fails to address important aspects of Russia's foreign policy outcomes and how they change over time. In general, each of them focuses on *one* main source driving Russia's foreign policy, omitting or even neglecting possible interaction with the other factors. Regarding single-cause explanations of Russia's foreign policy, Elias Götzt (2016a, 14) observes:

All of them fail (to varying degrees) to account for the possible interaction between different causes. In addition, and partly as a result of this, they have difficulties to explain the development of Russia's near abroad policy over time; difficulties to clarify the reasons for the differences and similarities in Russia's policies vis-a-vis individual post-Soviet states; and difficulties to identify the causal process linking the sources of Russia's near abroad assertion with Moscow's behaviour.

The implication of Götzt's observation is that individual causal factors of Russia's foreign policy are distinct in theory, yet they tend to overlap in practice.

Those attempts to create a theoretical model for explaining Russia's foreign policy are part of a broader theoretical debate about combining two or more perspectives for explaining the same event. Some scholars claim that, although there might be several explanations for the same event, they should be analysed separately (G. T. Allison and Zelikow 1999). This argument relies on the assumption that different approaches are competing to dominate the field of study. They are seen as 'an archipelago of theoretical islands, which communicate little with one another and the outside world' (Morin and Paquin 2018, 342). The four specific explanations presented in this chapter have followed this rationale to explain Moscow's actions in the post-Soviet Space. Others think that explanatory purposes should be made compatible rather than competitive (Glenn 2009). This kind of approach, which is known under several names such as analytical eclecticism (Eun 2012; Sil and Katzenstein 2010)

theoretical synthesis (Kosaka 2017) or multi-causal framework (Schafer 2003), underpins the theoretical approach utilised in this study.

The adoption of an integrative perspective has both benefits and potential limitations. On the one hand, combining different theoretical and analytical elements can contribute to middle range theories that are able to explain clearly defined situations without entering into detailed real world descriptions (historicism) nor into general theories that do not consider some cases' specificities (structuralism). On the other hand, the eclectic approach entails the risk of falling into the spiral of 'everything matters' without determining the relative pertinence of one independent variable compared to another for the case study (Rosenau 1980). Nonetheless, given the complexity of social dynamics, integrated models represent an undeniable advantage when it comes to understanding a state's foreign policy and the world of politics in general.

Making several theories compatible in a synthetic and integrated framework should help explain both the processes behind the development of Russia's foreign policy, and a variety of outcomes (from open conflict to regional integration). This middle-range theory should also accommodate overlapping security mechanisms (both conflict and cooperation) and be flexible enough to incorporate state and structural factors. An integrated model that satisfy all the above requirements is Neoclassical Realism. As I argue in the next chapter, this theory allows individual level, state level and structural level factors to be integrated. In addition, by identifying the contextual variables, Neoclassical Realism can determine the relative importance of some factors compared to others. Finally, by combining different level of explanations, Neoclassical Realism will help me to theorise both the processes and the outcomes of Russia's foreign policy.

## CHAPTER 2

# ASSERTIVE REGIONAL PRIMACY: A NEOCLASSICAL REALIST APPROACH

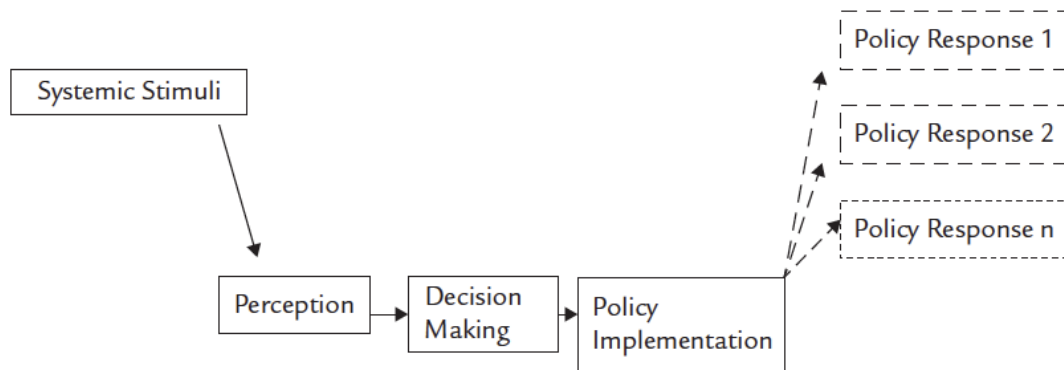
Based on the preceding discussion about the limitations of existing theories in explaining Russia's foreign policy, this chapter develops a theoretical framework of regional primacy and the propositions to be evaluated in the following comparative case study. I have argued that in order to explain Russia's foreign policy in the contested neighbourhood, an integrated framework needs to be developed that: 1) helps explain both the conditions behind the development of a variety of assertive outcomes over time and space (from rational communication to military intervention); 2) is flexible enough to incorporate state and systemic factors; 3) and accommodates overlapping both material and ideational sources.

This chapter develops such framework on the basis of Neoclassical Realism as it meets all the criteria summarised above. Neoclassical Realism is a theoretically informed synthesis to IR that emphasizes the realist-based role of a state in the international system as the main driver of foreign policy, but *also* acknowledges the importance of the intervening variables at the domestic level (Rose 1998, 146). Neoclassical Realism has developed from the necessity to address the limitations of structural realist balance-of-power theories, which, first, were more apt to explain the international outcomes of states' interaction rather than *behaviour* of states in foreign policy (Waltz 1979; 1986; see also Elman 1996; Mouritzen 1998a: 5–6; Kaarbo 2003; Wivel 2002a; Devlen and Özdamar 2009; Morin and Paquin 2018, 316); and second, have implied that states necessarily respond as fluidly and mechanically to changing international circumstances (Sterling-Folker 1997). To address these limitations, Neoclassical Realism acknowledges that the impact of structure can be better assessed at the national level through a series of intervening variables (see Figure 2.1).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> On this point, scholars recognise that there might be a strain between ideal types of Neoclassical Realism, where systemic stimuli are presented as an independent variable starting the process of decision-

Figure 2.1: The Types I and II Neoclassical Realist Model of Foreign Policy (Rispmann et al. 2016, 31)



This chapter is structured as follows. In the first section, by using insights from structural realist theories and geopolitics, I define the scope conditions of power preponderance and geographic proximity. Such conceptualisation is functional to identify the assertive regional policy as a typology. I then present my theory for the conditions under which assertive regional policy manifests itself. In doing that, it should be noted that no factor is assumed to be *individually* sufficient to cause an assertive regional policy. Instead, it is assumed that specific combinations of conditions are *jointly sufficient* to bring about the expected outcome.<sup>23</sup>

I identify four sources of assertive foreign policy ranging from systemic stimuli as external condition to perception and policy implementation as domestic conditions. Together they weave a neoclassical realist model of regional primacy (Type II in Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016). The approach conjoins factors that previous studies have identified as important in explaining specifically Russia’s foreign policy but whose *interaction* has gone largely unobserved on a comparative study. Hence, the framework developed here reflects

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making; and the empirical analysis of the ‘real world’, where systemic stimuli are quite often interrelated with domestic variables. Therefore, while I draw my model on neoclassical realist theory of foreign policy (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, 29–31; 183–88), as it should be clearer later, the model presented in this chapter is operationalised on the base of concurrent presence and/or absence of both systemic stimuli and state factors.

<sup>23</sup> In methodological terms, this implies that a condition is properly conceived as an INUS condition, that is, ‘an insufficient but necessary part of a condition, which is itself unnecessary but sufficient for the result’ (Mackie 1965). A more detailed explanation of sufficiency and necessity will be provided in Chapter 3.



recent efforts to move away from studies that investigate purely monocausal effects presented in the previous chapter and instead combine the analysis of systemic and domestic conditions (both material and ideational) (Kuzio and D'anieri 2018; Götz 2017; Samokhvalov 2017; Bunce and Hozic 2016; Kropatcheva 2012; Mouritzen and Wivel 2012; Tsygankov 2012)<sup>24</sup>.

## **2.1 Systemic Incentives and Constrains of a 'Regional Neighbourhood'**

The concept of relative power is considered the corner stone of the realist school in IR. Whereas realism includes different broad theoretical approaches; they are all united in the predominant focus on exogenous factors: a state's position in the international system vis-à-vis other states and the conditions of that system itself.<sup>25</sup> The international system is qualified as an anarchic world, where finite resources and uncertainty about each other's intentions and capabilities are the main features. The lack of a superior entity regulating the system makes states worry about their relative power vis-à-vis other states (Waltz 1979).

The relative power of the state and its distribution in the system are important features because they influence states' ability to survive in the international system (for a discussion on these assumptions, see Grieco 1997; Gilpin 1996). Yet, the concept of power has been mostly elusive and is strongly debated even within the realist school (Barnett and Duvall 2005). Without diving into the whole theoretical debate, it is reasonable to state that power involves material capabilities, a relationship to others and the ability to influence others'

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<sup>24</sup> Individual variables, such as leaders' worldview, and other domestic variables such as regime vulnerability are left out of this preliminary investigation. I am conscious that this decision implies an enormous simplification of the model; yet, this omission produces a parsimonious model easier to manage. Moreover, several scholars have shown that in specific case, Russia's assertive policy in the post-Soviet space was present already in the 1990s under another presidency (Jewett 1AD; Porter and Saivetz 1994) and across various support index of the Russian government (Treisman 2011).

<sup>25</sup> For overviews on Realism and its different sub-schools see Kropatcheva, Elena. 2018. 'Power and National Security'. In Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy, ed. Andrei P. Tsygankov. Routledge, 43–59; Wivel, Anders. 2017. 'Realism in Foreign Policy Analysis'. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics. <http://oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-475> (December 5, 2018); Wohlforth, William C. 2012. 'Realism and Foreign Policy'. In Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases, eds. Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield, and Tim Dunne. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oxfordpoliticstrove.com/view/10.1093/hepl/9780198708902.001.0001/hepl-9780198708902-chapter-2> (June 5, 2018).

policies by a combination of hard and soft power means (Baldwin 2012; see also Cox and Jacobson 1974, 3). Therefore, although the international system is assumed to be anarchic, relative power is one of the constraints that influence the interaction capacity among states (Buzan 1993). The dominant position which states acquire in the process of relative distribution of power within an anarchic world system defines their hegemonic position of a great power (Waltz 1979, 131). The assumptions on primacy derive from the offensive realist theory, according to which the international system gives states possessing great capabilities strong incentives for power maximisation and expansion (Mearsheimer 2001). Accordingly, states might act offensively in order to further maximise their capabilities because this maximises their chance of survival if an attack from other states happens. Being expansion the best way to survive in an anarchic system, states will struggle to achieve a hegemonic position in their part of the world. Within the debate on the balance of power, the rise of a hegemon brings stability, while its decline endangers the world order, and may ‘ultimately lead to war’ (Gilpin 2008).<sup>26</sup>

A second constraint that influences the interaction capacity among states, whose importance has often been downplayed, is geography. In this sense, geography is usually not identified as a key component of the neorealist enterprise as it is not part of structure (for a similar critique, see Mouritzen and Wivel 2006, chap. 2). However, Neoclassical Realism recognises geography as one of the possible ‘structural modifiers’, i.e., factors that ‘can modify the effect of the system’s structure – namely, its anarchic ordering principle and the relative distribution of capabilities – on the parameters of strategic interactions and the likely

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<sup>26</sup> By contrast, defensive realists claim that states would renounce expansion because it is too costly, but that they would rather seek to preserve their position (Walt 1990; Wohlforth 1993). While defensive realists posit that states achieve security by creating a balance of power among great states so that direct conflict would be counterproductive, offensive realists posit that states achieve security by creating an imbalance of power to their own advantage (Layne 1998).

external behaviours of individual units' (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, 40).<sup>27</sup> Geographic proximity is relevant for the capacity and the legitimacy of power projection. Importantly, this does not mean that it is impossible to project (military) power over long distances. It simply means that all else being equal, it will always be easier to project power capabilities (and a likely military attack) in a neighbouring country than one that is far away (Reiter 2006; Bruce 2005, 12–15; Senese 1996, 2005; Mitchell and Prins 1999; Vasquez 1995; Bremer 1992). This happens mainly because of the costs and difficulties of winning wars on other continents even for great powers (Boulding 2012; Wivel 2017). It is more likely that power preponderance can be translated into primacy *in the region* where the great power is geographically located rather than on a global scale. At the same time, scholars have also demonstrated that great powers projecting their influence onto proximate regions rather than onto remote ones often are not simply pushed by need of territorial expansion but they may refer to a legitimate position as hegemon in the region deriving also from a 'habitual experience' of borders protection and security arrangements (Rytövuori-Apunen 2019, 37). Therefore, geography is not only a major constrain of international structure, but is also a geopolitical tool for legitimising the presence in the region.

If regional primacy depends also on geographic proximity, which implies the *capability* and *legitimacy* of power projection toward neighbouring countries, how can the regional neighbourhood be conceptualised as such? Intuitively, the immediate neighbourhood of a great power starts just beyond national borders. However, the notion of regional neighbourhood is not just a matter of geography, but it includes also historical legacies and practices, which can be, of course, highly contested according to the various 'imagined

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<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, in the larger realist literature, geography still plays a marginal role in assessing the ability for states to project power. Indeed, except for Walt's contribution on the balance-of-threat theory, where he argues that the capacity to project power supposedly declines with distance (Walt, 1987, pp. 23–24), most structuralist theories do not consider the salient environment where the units of the systems (states) are bounded (Hans Mouritzen and Wivel 2012, 34).

geopolitics’ on the privileges and duties of certain powers in the region such as historical responsibility or ethnic affiliations (on critical geopolitics, see e.g. Toal 2017, chap. 1). Certainly, the bigger influence a great power has, the larger its regional neighbourhood. At the same time, not all neighbourhoods are considered equal: some of them may be framed as central for historical and strategic reasons; while others may be considered as peripheral and, consequently, no particular value is attached to them (Simão 2016, 213). Finally, a regional neighbourhood must be differentiated from the regional sub-system (see e.g. Noble 2008; Kerr 1965; Binder 1958). While the two concepts could apparently overlap as they present similar characteristics such as geographic proximity and regular interactions among the actors of the regional context, they differ *substantially* from each other on the object of study. As part of the structural neorealist literature, a regional sub-system is a component of the larger international system with systemic properties of its own (Thompson 1973). In this case, the focus is how the actors interact with each other *within* the regional sub-system rather than on the global scale – e.g. the Middle East, South-East Asia. Conversely, in a regional neighbourhood, the analysis stays at the interstate level, where the focus of the study is one of the actors’ actions within it – in this dissertation, great powers’ influence on its salient environment (see e.g. Mouritzen and Wivel 2012, 36–39; Schunz, Gstöhl, and Van Langenhove 2018).<sup>28</sup>

## **2.2 A Typology of Regional Primacy: a Range of (Assertive) Foreign Policy Instruments**

When great powers aspire to purchase or maintain regional primacy, they can choose from a vast range of instruments for exerting influence on neighbouring states (Bugajski 2004; Götz

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<sup>28</sup> To state it clearer by using a metaphor: the regional subsystem implies a systemic level of analysis – i.e. looking at a specific area of a forest from above – where the structural incentives (anarchy and polarity) of the international system are replicated within the regional dimension. Conversely, the regional neighbourhood implies an interstate level of analysis – i.e. the forest looked from one internal element such as an old big tree – where ‘the challenges the unit seeks or faces are likely to originate mostly from this specific environment’ (Hans Mouritzen and Wivel 2012, 34).

2016a, 2017; Lanoszka 2016; Kramer 2014; Tolstrup 2009). Instruments are often used as references for reporting variations in foreign policy over time, domains or space. To some extent, the emphasis on instruments reflects the actual decision-making process as decision-makers are often under pressure to react swiftly to external changes. Instruments may range from diplomacy and economy to military force or, in the words of Joseph Nye (2005), ‘from soft power to hard power’. However, the distinction is not always clear as both soft (meant as non-military instrument) and hard power instruments can be used interchangeably for maintaining an assertive stance in the region, which is functional for regional primacy (see e.g., Bechev 2017; Byman and Waxman 2002; George 1991; Schelling 1990; Baldwin 1985; Wayman, Singer, and Goertz 1983). Given the ambiguity of the term, we cannot avoid to pose the question of how to define assertiveness in IR.

The concept of assertiveness originated from behavioural science. Initially, behavioural and social psychologists have shaped different theories and conceptualisation of assertiveness as a relational concept that always refers to an interaction between different actors, and with this they have conditioned different approaches to studying it. Some of most important conceptualisations has been provided by Keithia Wilson and Cynthia Gallois, which define assertiveness as ‘the ability to determine the behaviour of others in accord with one’s own wishes’(1993, 21). In contrast to this unilateral feature of assertiveness, Robert E. Alberti and Michael L. Emmons (2008: 41) stress a more mutual approach by addressing the assertive behaviour as an act to negotiate respect, to ask for fair play and to leave room for compromise. When it comes to IR scholarship, assertiveness still keeps this intrinsic ambiguity of the concept (Lee 2013); nevertheless, scholar have been focusing more on its unilateral feature (see e.g. Böller and Herr 2019; Böller and Müller 2018). Kevin Narizny (2007, 11), who provides one of the earlier definitions, describes it as a state’s ‘willingness *to pay the costs* [emphasis added], whatever they may be, of following a particular strategy.’ Here, it is evident

how the mutual approach of assertiveness is gradually replaced by the perspective of ‘getting what you want’ at any costs, which may include the direct use of force. Drawing on recent Chinese diplomacy, Alastair Iain Johnston (2013: 10) similarly defines assertiveness as an act that ‘explicitly threatens *to impose costs* [emphasis added] on another actor that are clearly higher than before.’ Such definitions suggest that being assertive implies that states do not remain hesitant or reluctant in front of external threats;<sup>29</sup> rather they make use of several *initiatives* to impose certain policies on neighbouring states. Within this framework, assertiveness can be understood as the opposite pole of soft power, which usually refers to the capacity of attraction or persuasion of states to change a subject’s preference rather than using coercion or payment (Nye 2005, 5–11). With these definitions in mind, I suggest that a great power would use (a range of) assertive instruments toward neighbouring states in order *to impose* to them certain policies rather than cooperating with them or attracting them for certain economic and political advantages.

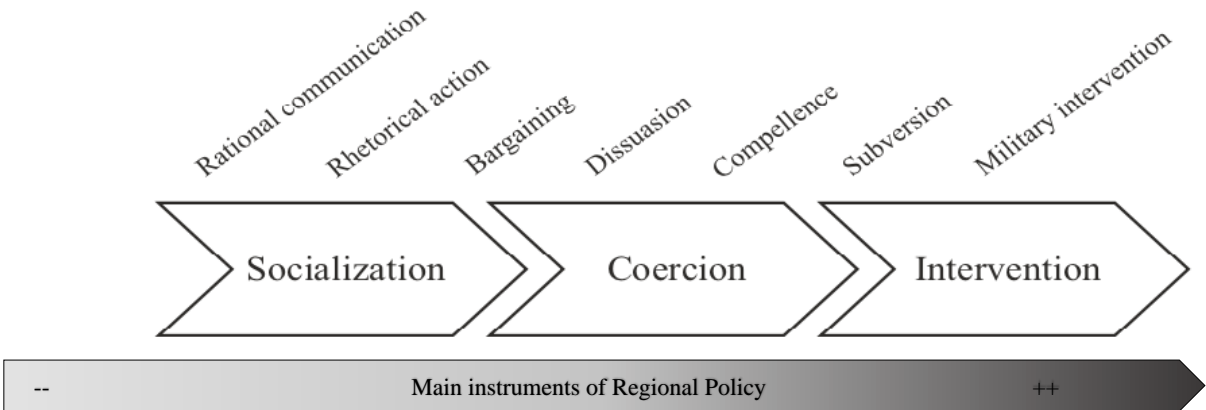
The intensity of assertiveness may vary depending on the rationale according to which diplomatic, economic and military instruments are used. According to Morin and Paquin (2018, 32), there are usually three categories of using foreign policy instruments in a continuum of assertiveness. The first is ‘socialisation’, which targets the maintenance or modification of *beliefs*, values and ideas of the counterpart through rational communication, rhetorical actions and bargaining. Socialisation is not just a lack-of-force instrument for weak small states, but it is constantly used also by great powers: e.g. public rebuke at the United Nations generally assembly; or show-off of military arsenal through military parades at festivity days, etc. At the same time, it should be recognised that rhetorical communication and actions, no matter how effective they are in foreign policy outcomes, are the least assertive

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<sup>29</sup> On reluctance, see Destradi, Sandra. 2018. ‘Reluctant Powers? Rising Powers’ Contributions to Regional Crisis Management’. *Third World Quarterly* 39(12): 2222–39.

of all instruments available. The second category is ‘coercion’, which targets the maintenance or modification of *interests* through dissuasion and compellence. Coercive measures may entail a vast array of instruments that derive from different processes and have distinct impacts. However, they are all designed to influence how a target state behaves by modifying the way its interests are calculated, without directly intervening in foreign territory. Alexander Lanoszka (2016) recurs to the concept of ‘hybrid warfare’ to indicate a strategy involving both mainly irregular military means aimed ‘to expose and exploit a target’s vulnerabilities at lower level of violence. For instance, Russia has often used gas delivery as a leverage to influence neighbouring states or has supported agitators in order to create dissent and discord within a target state with a unfriendly regime to Moscow. Another instance of coercive type is coercive diplomacy: it differs from sanctions because its logic rests on the threat to use force or the actual use of limited violence (Bowen 2017). Finally, the third instrument is ‘intervention’, which targets the maintenance or modification of the *domestic political structure* of a foreign state through subversion (by strategically supporting dissident groups) and even military actions (direct use of force). Certainly it is difficult to separate one instrument from another across a whole foreign policy decision-making as such instruments are not mutually exclusive and can overlap in reality. However, if we understand them as a continuum of assertiveness (from pure rhetoric to actual military force) we can trace an increasing path of intensity (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2: Foreign policy instruments to reach regional primacy (adapted from Morin and Paquin 2018)



### 2.3 Sources of Regional Primacy: a Neoclassical Realist Theory

In the previous chapter, I have presented how single conditions, ranging from systemic stimuli to domestic factors, have been used to explain Russia's assertiveness toward neighbouring states. At the same time, I have argued that such conditions are not individually sufficient for explaining the expected assertiveness. Indeed, scholars have often observed how monocausal explanations reveal shortcomings of theoretical expectations as well as limitations of empirical analyses in explaining states' external behaviour. Therefore, we presently have no systemic theory for explaining under what conditions or combination of conditions great powers pursue assertive foreign policy to reach a regional primacy. In this section, I therefore identify potential conditions that may influence the assertive foreign policy outcome.

At the most general level, I argue that single conditions are part of a sufficient conjunction that may explain the causal complexity of assertive regional primacy. If this is the case, how shall we proceed in specifying the causal conjunctions as such and describing the role of each condition in the integrated model? The neoclassical realist school has generated useful integrated frameworks that can be applied systematically to state foreign and security policies (see Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, chap. 6 for examples). As Gideon Rose (1998, 146) writes, neoclassical realists 'argue that the scope and ambition of a country's foreign policy is driven first and foremost by its place in the international system and specifically by its relative material power capabilities. This is why they are realist.' They argue further, however, that the impact of such power capabilities on foreign policy is indirect and complex, because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level. This is why they are neoclassical. This added layer of theoretical complexity offers the potential for added explanatory utility and determinacy, providing a more satisfying and useful approach for state behaviour without ending in a 'everything matters' spiral (Eun 2012; Moravcsik 2003) or *ad hoc* selection (Wivel 2017). To avoid such biases, it is crucial to



develop models that specify *where* and *under what conditions* variables should intervene. I first identify the four relevant conditions, and second, I laid out the sequence of such to produce a specific prediction of assertive regional primacy.

## **2.4 Systemic condition (I): External Pressure in the shared regional neighbourhood**

A vast array of independent and intermediate variables can explain an assertive foreign policy. Consistent with the neoclassical realist school, I prioritise a state's security environment. I start from the assumption that a great power's neighbourhood can be the neighbourhood of more than one aspiring regional leader (Schunz, Gstöhl, and Van Langenhove 2018); thus, I focus on external pressure of other great powers in the shared neighbourhood as one of the main systemic stimuli (Götz 2017, 2). How can the interaction between two great powers in the shared neighbourhood push or prevent the local great power to adopt assertive instruments toward neighbour states to purchase regional primacy? In an international system which is characterised by the lack of a central authority, states adopt self-help mechanisms to maximize their own relative power. In the words of Mearsheimer (2001, 35), 'great powers recognize that the best way to ensure their security is to achieve primacy *now* [emphasis added], thus eliminating any possibility of a challenge by another great power'. Since great powers have the interest to create and maintain a sphere of influence around their borders for the pursuit of regional primacy, any external 'interference' from other great powers without a mutual consent is considered as an attempt to undermine others' regional primacy. As stressed by Mearsheimer (2001, 41), 'regional hegemons do not want peers'.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> This assumptions need to be nuanced, however: although increased external pressure, and thus multipolarity, comes with higher power symmetry, higher levels of interdependence may nonetheless incite actors to cooperate in a context of 'interpolarity'. On interolarity, see Grevi, Giovanni. 2009. 'The Interpolar World: A New Scenario'. European Union Institute for Security Studies. <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/interpolar-world-new-scenario> (June 18, 2019). Therefore, although Neoclassical Realism prioritise systemic conditions for foreign policy outcome, external pressure should not be deemed as necessary for the assertive regional policy to happen. On necessity in methodology of social science, see Chapter 3.

I argue that the level of external pressure is basically determined by the interplay between the foreign-policy orientation of smaller neighbouring states and the activities of *other* great powers in the regional neighbourhood (for similar arguments, see Götz 2016b; MacFarlane 2003, 126-127; Knudsen 1988, 15–19). Such activities may include diplomatic pressure, as well as economic agreements or even partnership for military reforms. As I will specify in Chapter 3, a way to measure external interference promoted by other great powers acting in the shared neighbourhood could entail region-building projects. According to Tanja A. Börzel (2012), a region-building project can be defined as the process of constructing ‘closer economic, political, security and socio-cultural linkages between states and societies that are geographically proximate’ (Börzel 2012: 255). By including region-building projects, it is possible to stress the double dimension of external pressure that, on the one hand, emphasises the actions of external great powers; on the other, it recognises the role of small states in regional security decision-making (Archer et al., 2014).

In a condition of power preponderance and geographic proximity, a great power faces strong systemic incentives to establish a sphere of influence around their national border. However, if a small neighbour is close to enter into a region-building project sponsored by another great power, this means that the risk of external pressure is quite high and that the local great power would use all available means (including force) with the aim of impeding neighbouring states to tie with extra-regional powers. Conversely, when small regional states have aligned their foreign policy with the local great power or are not interested into external projects, the latter would use cooperative instruments toward the small neighbour in order to maintain the regional primacy. Importantly though, this may not mean that super power is always a fully-fledged ally of the neighbouring state, but that their relationship would simply be one of overlapping interests. Therefore, building on neoclassical realist literature, I argue that assertive regional foreign policy toward neighbouring states is a response to variations of

one of the several systemic stimuli – namely, external great powers’ pressure in the shared neighbourhood altering local great power’s position. According to this assumption, the higher the external pressure in a contest of regional competition, the more assertive the local great power will be.

The systemic nature of the this argument is consistent with the core of neorealist thinking (Onea 2012, 156).<sup>31</sup> Condition of external pressure draws upon the assumption that great powers, like all states of the international system, can be treated as rational and unitary actors responding according to similar trends to systemic stimuli. Such assumption is common to most structural theories of IR. However, its usefulness has been questioned (see e.g. Moravcsik 1997). Firstly, states may not necessarily respond as fluidly and mechanically to changing international circumstances as structural realists expect ‘due to faulty perceptions of systemic stimuli, decision-making procedures that fall short of the rationality standard, or obstacles to policy implementation caused by a failure to mobilize societal resources’ (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, chap. 1). Secondly, the conflation of states and individual policymakers’ interests is a fundamental impediment to advancing our understanding of world politics. This happens because human decision-makers are not interchangeable with the generic rational of ‘utility maximisers’ since individual decision-makers may have different perceptions of external sources (Eun 2012). Third, because of domestic political/economic circumstances, states cannot always extract or mobilise the domestic resources required to respond efficiently to systemic imperatives (Christensen 1996, 3–10). Hence, I expect external pressure respectively to be part of a *combination* of conditions that is jointly sufficient for assertive foreign policy. This implies that the independent variable

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<sup>31</sup>This argument does not imply that other factors, such as economic considerations or ethnic and religious disputes, are irrelevant. Rather, the argument here is that the pursuit of regional primacy is a key component of the neighbourhood policies of great powers, and that the choice of tactics and tools through which regional primacy is pursued depends mainly on the level of external interference.

of external pressure is an INUS condition for assertive foreign policy, that is, ‘an *insufficient* but *necessary* part of a condition, which is itself *unnecessary* but *sufficient* for the result’ (Mackie 1965, 245 original emphasis).

## **2.5 Systemic Condition (II): Military Alliance**

What has emerged from the section on external pressure is that midrange theories in the neoclassical realist tradition recognise that, at times, structural variables can be determinate. However, sometimes, they are not, because states often have not significant power to overcome structural constraints, or the constraints themselves are insufficiently binding. Specifically, under condition of external pressure in the shared neighbourhood, another condition may determine a great power’s willingness ‘to pay the costs’ of its assertive foreign policy. If a neighbouring state is member of a military alliance, the local great power will refrain from using direct use of force entailed in a military intervention and accept a degree of restraint (Knudsen 1988, 17; see also Huth 1988; Cuppuleri and Rosa, forthcoming). This theoretical assumption is based on Stephen Walt’s balance-of-threat theory according to which states tend to respond to shifts in the level of external threat, which is a composite of other states’ aggregate power, offensive military capabilities, proximity, and perceived intent.

Literature on alliances in IR is quite vast as they represent the main driver of international politics (see e.g., Poast 2019; Walt 1990). At the same time, the scholarly literature has been unable to reach a consensus whether alliances deter interstate conflicts (Gartzke and Poast 2018; Fordham and Poast 2016). While some scholars argue that alliances formed to help in time of need deter the onset of militarised conflicts between contracting states, others posit that alliances are likely to cause conflict due to the logic of the security dilemma (Kenwick, Vasquez, and Powers 2015). Conversely, others have demonstrated that alliance ties reduce the likelihood of the onset of militarised conflict (Kim, Woo, and Lee 2019). Focusing on defensive alliance, scholars have demonstrated that the formation of such

defensive pacts serve as a costly signal that provides *ex ante* information to potential challengers that the state target is likely to receive assistance from its allies in the event of military conflict (Fang, Johnson, and Leeds 2014; Johnson and Leeds 2011; Leeds 2003; Morrow 1991). That is, a target's defensive alliance credibly reveals that if a great power wants to maintain regional primacy by using force, it will likely face a negative consequence due to the higher costs of involving other states from the defensive alliance. Conversely, if neighbouring states are not part of any defensive pacts that follow the logic of external balancing against the local great power, the latter would not refrain from using military force. Therefore, the presence or absence of a military alliance of a target state is a systemic condition deriving from the level of external threat that *moderates* the a great power's regional policy (Gotz 2016b).

## **2.6 Intervening Condition (I): Status recognition**

Neoclassical Realism is concerned how to integrate systemic-oriented approach with more attention to what is *within* the state. Here, I identify the critical intervening domestic conditions that might affect a state's calculation about assertive foreign policy. When relative power and the international structure allow for a range of possible foreign policy instruments, the variables that ought to determine the ultimate choice of strategy are: the state's perception of threat and ability to organisationally manage its state capacity to respond adequately.

One important set of intervening conditions concerns the perception of decision-makers executives regarding the international system and the role of their nation-state within it (Kunz and Saltzman 2012). Ripsman et al. (2016) label decision-makers of a state as the foreign policy executive, which include 'the president, prime minister, or dictator, and key cabinet members, ministers, and advisors charged with the conduct of foreign and defence policies' (Ripsman et al. 2016, 61). Focusing on the foreign policy executive rather than on the whole state machinery allows me to address the issue of the conflation between states and

individual decision-makers' interest. In the latter case, perception may prove to be an important indicator for specifying a certain foreign policy (Wohlforth 1987).

Perception identifies a wide range of cognitive and socio-psychological constraints on how the foreign policy executive processes information in crisis situations or in a long-term path. These models emphasise emotions, operational codes, norms and identities of the foreign policy executive.<sup>32</sup> In this stage of the research, I focus on the need of the foreign policy executive to have a self-defined social status as an equal great power in world politics respected by its significant partners (i.e. other great powers sharing the regional neighbourhood). The main argument behind this choice is that the denial from peer states of self-defined social status as an influential and equal power in the shared neighbourhood pushes the local great power to react angrily against neighbour states through the use of assertive actions and rhetoric in order to maintain the existing status quo. At the same time, recognising the status of the peer states does not necessarily mean to passively accepting that the counterpart achieves power maximisation. It rather implies the possibility of letting the counterpart to sit at the table of decisions and to consider their requests (Ikenberry 2011, 452). In social psychology, Social Identity Theory argues that social groups strive for a positively distinctive identity in a social community, and it offers hypotheses concerning the identity management strategies to enhance groups' relative position (Hogg and Abrams 1988; Tajfel and Turner 1979). Drawing on such argument, scholars in IR define status as a state's ranking on attributes, especially material attributes like wealth and military capability. For instance, Paul, Larson and Wohlforth (2014a, 8) define status in IR as 'as collective beliefs about a given state's ranking on valued attributes (wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, socio-political organization, and diplomatic clout)'. Other scholars emphasise the

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<sup>32</sup>For a review on the role of decision-makers and of culture in Foreign Policy Analysis, see Morin, Jean-Frédéric, and Jonathan Paquin. 2018. *Foreign Policy Analysis - A Toolbox* | Jean-Frédéric Morin | Palgrave Macmillan. Palgrave Macmillan. [//www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9783319610023](https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9783319610023) (November 12, 2018), chap. 3, chap.8.

social nature of status (Duque 2018). Accordingly, status does not exist *per se*, and it is not subjected only to state's attributes (material or ideational), but it is subject to the *acknowledgement* of this self-defined rank by other states through the evaluative dimension of social respect (Sasley 2011, Wolf 2011; Taylor and Brown, 1988). Such ontology draws on Weber's definition of status as 'an effective claim to *social esteem* [emphasis added] in terms of positive or negative privileges' (M. Weber, Roth, and Wittich 1978, 305). Members of high status groups share dense relations among themselves and relatively sparse relations with outsiders (1978, 932). As a consequence, a state's social esteem of its status is based in part on interpretation of the behaviour and speech by a reference group, one that is similar but slightly superior, namely a 'significant other' (Brown and Haeger 1999; Neumann 1995). Thus, a judgment from peer states may leave the local great power either satisfied or dissatisfied with its status in the international arena.

Within these assumptions, it becomes clear that obtaining status recognition constitutes an important feature for a great power's strategic interests being recognised (Wood 2013): this includes a strong position in international negotiations, in legitimating national interests, and a robust legitimacy basis for 'soft power'. Moreover, status aspiration may originate either from the attributes deemed relevant for possessing the great power status compared to other states (e.g. nuclear weapons) or from historical origins in the domestic discourse of the nation (e.g. imperial legacy or values promotion) (Clunan 2009; Larson and Shevchenko 2010). Some scholars even include a distinctive idea of national self, or a system of nationally held meaningful beliefs, to the historical basis of status aspiration (Tsygankov 2014). Without entering the whole debate on status in IR (see, e.g. Duque 2018, 579), it is reasonable to assert that although great powers' capability contributed to the monopolisation of resources, status is also a matter of recognised legitimacy and conventions — norms that determine the lifestyle corresponding to a given identity or the club's rules of membership — that allow great powers

to access to privileges and legitimacy.<sup>33</sup> While high status involves privileges, low status brings disadvantage (Mattern and Zarakol 2016); thus, states make great efforts to enhance their social status in the international community in front of their significant others (for a similar argument, see also Juneau 2015).

Within the model of regional primacy, status recognition defines whether a great power would react assertively towards a small neighbouring states even in presence of systemic threats. In front of relevant regional changes, great powers involved in the regional security architecture give extreme importance to the recognition of international status. If social status in a specific situation is denied when its approval is important for maintaining self-esteem, states may react emotionally by turning to increased hostility (Isbell, Ottati, and Burns 2006). Anger often leads to offensive actions and rhetoric tendencies against the significant other. The emotion of anger is often elicited by the perception of injustice or illegitimacy, thus the offensive behaviour (which is often *post-hoc* rationalised) is finalised to restore power and status (Shaver et al. 1987). In this scenario, status-recognition is about hierarchy in a reminiscent zero-sum game that may lead to status conflicts (Forsberg 2014b). The neighbourhood surrounding a great power thus plays a pivotal role in maintaining or enhancing the recognition of status from peer states. This happens not only for material and strategic reasons as seen in the previous sections (e.g. access to and control over transport infrastructure, military installation and communication routes on the territory of neighbouring countries), but also for stressing the identity connection of a ‘common glorious past’ or ‘common suffering’ with neighbouring states (Laruelle 2015; Tsygankov 2013, chap. 4). The ideational factor connecting the great power and the neighbouring state is functional to legitimise the leading role of the great power in its sphere of influence (Casula 2014; Costa

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<sup>33</sup> Although conceptually different, status in IR is often related to soft power, which is understood the practice of attractive other states and influencing their decisions (on soft power, see Nye 2005).



Buranelli 2017; Trenin 2009). Any political and military strategy in the regional neighbourhood without consulting the local great power would be perceived as a denial of social status triggering frustration and anger that may turn in offensive actions. This may include militarily intervention against a weaker power, preventing the other state from achieving particular goals or acting as a spoiler against collective efforts to restore regional stability (Larson and Shevchenko 2014c). Conversely, even in front of relevant systemic changes, if the great power perceives a status recognition by being involved in the main security and economic activities of the shared neighbourhood, the great power has still options to choose a non-assertive policy behaviour in order not to spoil strategic partnership, which are deemed valuable.

Notwithstanding the importance of ideational factors in specifying a foreign policy, the role of status recognition (and indirectly the strength of an ingroup identity) has its limitations. Some scholars point that the mistrust and frustration toward peer states is not necessarily reflected by aggressive behaviour (Brewer 2000). It follows that identities are variables, which cannot be isolated from their material and ideational environment (as in this case). At the same time, conflict emerging from status competition do not necessarily repair status recognition; on the contrary, it maintains mutual distrusts and an increasing impermeability from elites states (Forsberg 2014b). Other factors, such as external sources as well as domestic constrains, should co-occur as a great power adopts an assertive strategy as consequence of unrecognised status. In general terms, I expect that status recognition to be an INUS condition for assertive foreign policy toward neighbouring states.

## **2.7 Intervening condition (II): State Capacity**

Following the criticism against rationalist assumptions of presenting the state as unitary actor, the second component of domestic conditions used in the neoclassical realist model of assertive foreign policy looks at *the ability* to implement a decision, namely state capacity.

Such ability is closely related to the larger framework of state-society relation that can affect whether state leaders have the power to extract, mobilise, and harness the nation's power in order to implement certain policies (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, 71). Strictly speaking about the neoclassical realist model of Ripsman et al., the concept of state capacity is a domestic condition that lies between the decision-making process and the actual policy implementation (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, 31).

By including domestic institutional conditions, neoclassical scholars have focused on the degree of structural autonomy of the foreign policy executive in democratic regimes (Ripsman 2002) or capital and technological constraints of nuclear powers (Narang 2014, 41). Others have posited an important role for weak domestic institutions (Friedberg 2000), regime vulnerability (Schweller 2004), or extractive capacity of state institutions vis-à-vis society regardless of state regime (Taliaferro 2006) to explain the likelihood that a state can effectively balance against external threats. These and other remarkable academic works recognise the critical role played by domestic institutional variables; nevertheless, the concept of state capacity and its influence on foreign policy are still highly debated (for overviews, see Cingolani 2013; Hendrix 2010). According to DeRouen et al. (2010, 334) state capacity is a term that has been used extensively referring to state power, but often without a firm definition. Similarly, Zakaria and Christensen draw a distinction between 'national power'—which encompasses the economic, technological, and human resources within society—and 'state power' (or national political power)—which is a function of national power and state strength and reflects the state's ability to mobilise those resources in support of policy (Christensen 1996, 14–22; Zakaria 1999). For the purpose of this research, as it pertains to the use of assertive instruments in foreign policy, I will mainly focus on state capacity understood as state-society relations rather than power capability. Such conceptualisation includes

indicators like coercive capacity, extractive capacity, and administrative capacity. Although the three dimensions are presented separately, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive.<sup>34</sup>

According to the coercive dimension, a state capacity entails the ‘state’s ability to deter or repel challenges to its authority with force’ (Hendrix 2010b, 274). Similarly, Michael Mann (1993: 59) understands state capacity as ‘the ability of the state to penetrate society, its territories and realize its objectives’. Both these definitions are strongly rooted in the Weberian tradition of modern states according to which the state ‘[...] claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a given territory’ (M. Weber, Gerth, and Mills 1958, 212). Scholars using the coercive dimension usually operationalise it through the military expenditure (Jones, Bremer, and Singer 1996) and state repression (Fearon and Laitin 2003). According to Tilly (1975, 40), the extractive capacity is the ability to ‘build an apparatus which effectively drew the necessary resources from the local population and checked the population’s efforts to resist the extraction of resources’. On the one hand, one of the key means by which governments finance their activity is to increase the tax revenue (Campbell 1993; Cheibub 1998; Levi 1988; Tilly 1975). A successful tax extraction is achieved when the state has operative control over its territory coupled with a competent bureaucracy (see e.g. Easter 2002).<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, state’s incentives and abilities to extract revenue from society have also addressed states’ dependence on the export of certain natural resources commodities, such as oil and gas (Chaudhry 1989; Karl 1997; M. L. Ross 1999). In both cases,

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<sup>34</sup> Regarding policy implementation, coercive, extractive and administrative capacity are generally intertwined in the early literature (for example in Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol 2008), and consider state intervention power as higher capacity (see legacy of Weber in the text). For similar arguments on the choices of state capacity dimension on conflict outcomes, please see Hendrix, Cullen S. ‘Measuring State Capacity: Theoretical and Empirical Implications for the Study of Civil Conflict’. *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 3 (May 2010): 273–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343310361838>. And White, David. ‘State Capacity and Regime Resilience in Putin’s Russia’. *International Political Science Review* 39, no. 1 (January 2018): 130–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512117694481>.

<sup>35</sup> Direct measures of extractive capacity are attractive, though not without theoretical and empirical pitfalls. Recent research on economic growth indicates states may be capable of extracting revenue without resorting to direct taxation (Isham et al. 2005)

all these abilities depend in turn on the existence of effective policy-making and governing capacities. This condition leads us to the third dimension of state capacity, namely administrative. The emphasis on administrative capacity is consistent with the literature on political development, which holds that state capacity is characterised by professionalisation of the state bureaucracy and the autonomy of government. Accordingly, Skocpol (1985, 9) defines state capacity as whether a state is able to ‘implement official goals, especially over the actual or potential opposition of powerful social groups or in the face of recalcitrant socioeconomic circumstances’.

Because of the complexity of the term, several sources have adopted a multi-dimension measure by looking specifically at the state fragility index.<sup>36</sup> Drawing on the state capacity literature, I argue a *strong* state will react effectively to external changes as it presents control over military capability and personnel; a stable and autonomous government; and a consistent fiscal capacity. This may imply the timely and effectively use of force, included military interventions. This line of reasoning is based on the observation that well-functioning states tend to act in a unitary fashion when it comes to great economic and military matters that affect the country’s security (Dueck 2009; Krasner 1978). Conversely, *weak* states present different level of constrains in all three dimensions, undermining their ability to answer as unitary actors and in name of national interests to systemic threats. Because of internal constrains on military, extractive and autonomy dimensions, the state may opt for less coercive responses even if threats are rising. This scenario produces under-balancing responses even when systemic constrains would expect states to answer quickly and effectively (Schweller 2004; Zakaria 1999). Admittedly, given the problems of conceptualising and measuring state capacity, even the most accurate fragility index would be left with the paradoxical task of

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<sup>36</sup> For this purpose several sources of information were compiled within the state fragility literature, such as the State Failure Index (Polity IV); the State Fragility Index, the Index of State Weakness, the Fragility Index (from Country Indicators for Foreign Policy), the Failed State Index, Failure of Task Force, Forecast of State Failure.

having to measure implementation capacity without being truly able to look at implementation results whenever other factors exist. At the same time, unitary strong states may decide not to recur to direct intervention into a foreign state as they could meet other impediments, such as institutional constraints or political preferences (James Patrick, Park Johann, and Choi Seung-Whan 2006; Mello 2012; Mousseau 1998; Oneal et al. 1996; Rasler and Thompson 2011). Conversely, in front of a tangible outside threat high state capacity may force the weak state to extract resources needed for hard power projection (Becker et al. 2016). Hence, I expect state capacity to be an INUS condition for assertive foreign policy toward neighbouring states.

## **2.8 Integrated Model of Regional Primacy**

From the previous sections, it has been argued how the single conditions should be part of a larger conjunction in order to address the regional policy outcome. Yet, how do these conditions interact to bring about the foreign policy outcome? The pattern of assertive foreign policy is expected to result from a complex interplay between the international and domestic variables discussed in the previous sections. At the same time, the combinations of such conditions allow us to differentiate a regional policy according to the three kind of instruments exposed above – socialisation, coercion, and (military) intervention. The Figure 2.3 presents eight paths that stem from the combinations of the four conditions. From this model, I derive the propositions, which are displayed in Table 2.1.

Great powers are expected to adopt an assertive foreign policy behaviour against neighbour states when they consider the external pressure exerted by other great powers in the shared neighbourhood a significant threat to their national interests. At the same time, the presence of a military alliance in which the great power is not a member represents an important *moderating* condition among the range of assertive instruments. If the neighbouring state having a dispute with the great power is member of a defensive military alliance, a great power would refrain to intervene militarily in order to avoid any escalation. Nevertheless, to

maintain the regional policy, the great power would adopt coercive or rhetoric instruments (i.e. socialisation). Such outcomes are embodied in Pattern 1, 2, 3, and 4 in Figure 2.3.

The difference between paths leading to coercion and those to socialisation is then given by the presence or absence of status recognition as well as of state capacity. In particular, when the great power perceives that it is not treated equally by other great powers that operate in the shared neighbourhood, the great power could recur to coercive instruments against neighbour states in order to maintain its regional primacy and its status in the global arena. At the same time, such scenario is feasible in presence of high state capacity by the great power in order to implement certain decisions. Conversely, when great power is internally weak, it would recur to less assertive instruments that would not exceed rhetorical actions. A specular outcome is observed when great powers experience as certain recognition of their status in the international arena (Pattern 1 and 2). This does not want to disclaim the importance of perception and ideology in states' decision-making path. As we have seen, declining or emerging middle powers are very sensitive to the official recognition of their status as well as the account for their values especially when regional primacy is at stake (Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth 2014b; Larson and Shevchenko 2014a). However, idea about themselves and how such ideology affects the way states see the world cannot be detached by the 'world out there' (Barkin 2003). If the threat is perceived as real and imminent, a recognition of mutual status as super power and of values is not sufficient for great powers not to react assertively. In this regard, scholars from Neoclassical Realism introduces the concept of permissive or restrictive strategic environment, which refers to the imminence and magnitude of threats and opportunities that states face. As Ripsman et al. (2016, 52) state:

All things being equal, the more imminent the threat or opportunity and the more dangerous the threat (or the more enticing the opportunity) the more restrictive the state's

strategic environment is. Conversely, the more remote the threat or opportunity and the less intense the threat or opportunity, the more permissive the strategic environment is.

Therefore, in a condition of external pressure, which can represent a more or less imminent threat, as well as in presence of a military defensive alliance, which constrains the use of military force, the great power has a restricted range of instruments to adopt unless the great power is ready to put up with escalation and third parties involvement. In such strategic environment, the policy outcome implemented by the great power – either coercion or socialisation – would depend by the kind of perception of foreign policy executive as well as by the extraction capacity.

On the right side, the absence of a military alliance would give great powers more space for decision-making in using any assertive instruments, military force included. A (military) intervention, which is the most assertive instrument of the range available for states, would occur, however, in combination with the presence of high state capacity of the great power (Path 5 and 7). Again the intervening factor of status perception complements rather than contradicts with the condition of state capacity. If pivotal national interests are at stake, like territorial integrity, the great power could adopt military intervention even status recognition of peer states in the international arena. This was the case of the first Chechen war (1994-1996), when Russia fought a guerrilla warfare against Chechen separatists despite Russia's disastrous economic conditions after the fall of Soviet Union (Rezvani 2014, 873).

Finally, under the presence of status recognition from peer states, the great power may refrain from using military intervention first because it has more space of manoeuvring to make its voice being heard, and second because the use of force would damage its reputation on the global arena. This is, of course, an ideal picture as it does not incorporate every possible explanatory variable (such as those under the absence of external pressure); however, it has the potential to integrate more than one domestic conditions with systemic factors. The

schematic integrated model depicted in Figure 2.3, a theory of regional primacy, not only illustrates the pathways for *why* states might adopt particular foreign policy instruments, but it also provides the conditions under which such instruments might change.

Across this chapter I have explained how relationships among all four conditions are all contributing to the outcome in a regime of complex causality. In this model, power imbalance and geographic proximity are part of the scope condition that provides a great power with *the opportunity* to pursue regional policy. In this regard, I have underlined how geographic proximity provides a sort of legitimacy in justifying a modern form of ‘great powerness’ towards small states of the regional neighbourhood. On the other side, all four conditions (external pressure; alliance; status recognition; and state capacity) tell us *how* great powers pursue such regional primacy, specifying to what extent are they assertive.

So far I have outlined the theoretical framework for analysing regional policy and have formulated propositions to specify how systemic sources and domestic conditions are combined to shape the patterns of foreign policy instruments in the regional neighbourhood. It is important to note that propositions formulated above are not full-fledged hypotheses understood in the vast majority of applied quantitative methods, but they are rather directional expectations on the role of each condition single-handed as well as on the causal complexity of their conjunctions (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 296–304). The next chapter presents the research design and the methods used in the dissertation and elaborates on how they guide the usage of these propositions in the empirical research. Table 2.1 summarises the theoretical directional expectations formulated throughout this chapter.



Figure 2.3: A neoclassical realist model of regional policy

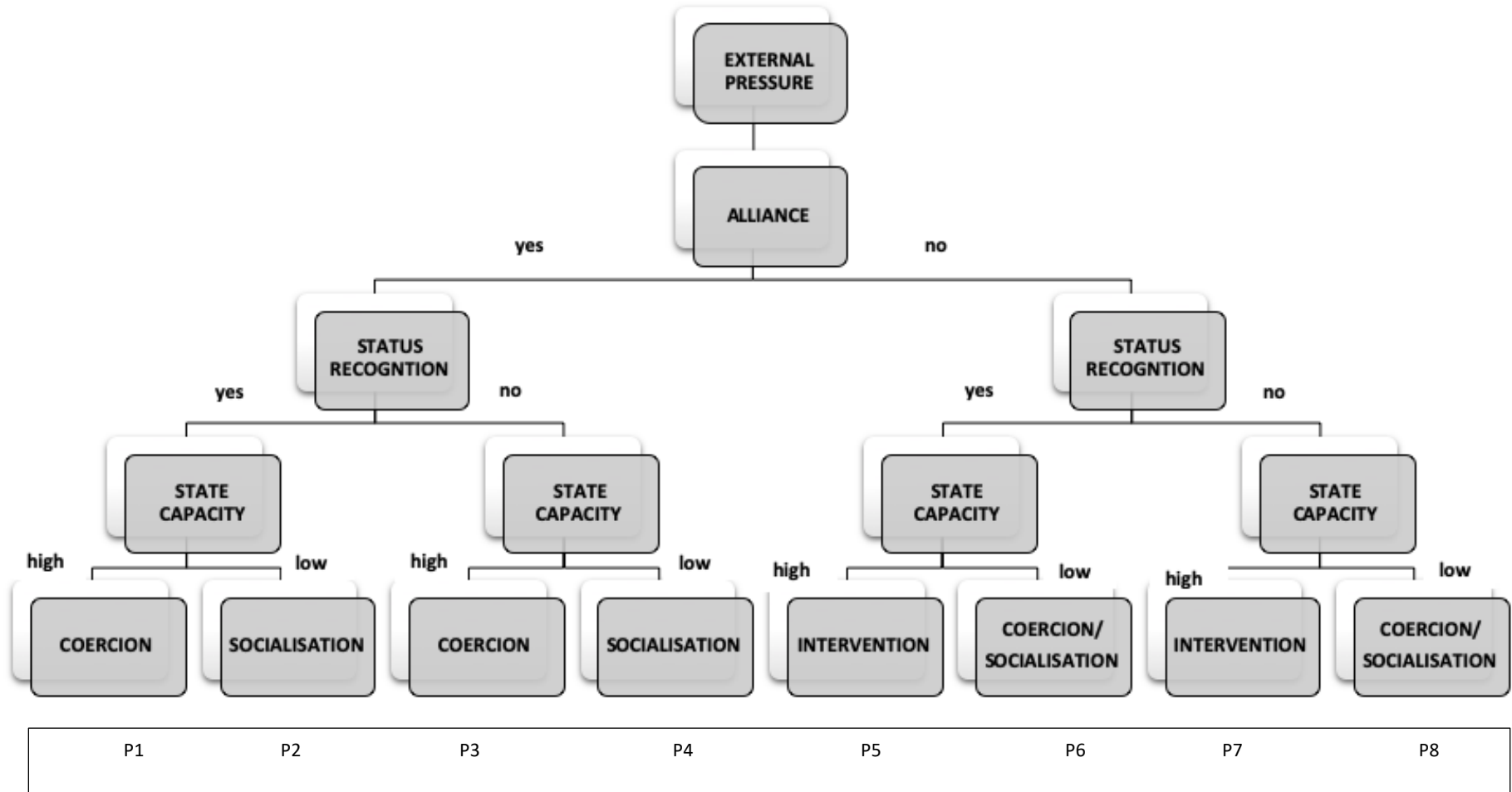


Table 2.1: Propositions on foreign policy outcomes

Integrated Model	Pattern	Propositions
	Pattern 1	P <sub>1</sub> COERCION is brought about a combination external pressure, the membership of a target into a military alliance, the presence of status recognition by peer states and a high state capacity
	Pattern 2	P <sub>2</sub> SOCIALISATION is brought about a combination external pressure, the membership of a target into a military alliance, the presence of status recognition by peer states and a low state capacity
	Pattern 3	P <sub>3</sub> COERCION is brought about a combination external pressure, the membership of a target into a military alliance, the absence of status recognition by peer states and a high state capacity
	Pattern 4	P <sub>4</sub> SOCIALISATION is brought about a combination external pressure, the membership of a target into a military alliance, the absence of status recognition by peer states and a low state capacity
	Pattern 5	P <sub>5</sub> COERCION is brought about a combination external pressure, the non-membership of a target into a military alliance, the presence of status recognition by peer states and a high state capacity
	Pattern 6	P <sub>6</sub> COERCION/SOCIALISATION is brought about a combination external pressure, the absence of a military alliance for a target state, the presence of status recognition by peer states and a low state capacity
	Pattern 7	P <sub>7</sub> INTERVENTION is brought about a combination of external pressure, the absence of military alliance for a target state, the absence of status recognition, and a high state capacity
	Pattern 8	P <sub>8</sub> COERCION/SOCIALISATION is brought about a combination of external pressure, the absence of military alliance for a target state, the absence of status recognition, and a low state capacity

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN**

The empirical analysis of the neoclassical realist model is based on fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) for the cross-case exploratory level, and Process Tracing as a confirmatory within-case analysis (Beach and Rohlfing 2018, 11). Their combination has been labelled *set-theoretic multimethod research* (Goertz and Mahoney 2012) In the next subsections, first, I justify the methodological choice of a set-theoretic approach against the backdrop of prevalent methods in Neoclassical Realism. Second, because of the relative novelty of the approach, especially in the field of IR, I briefly introduce the core principles and specific terminology of fsQCA. Third, I introduce the choice for one-case analysis through process tracing. Finally, I specify the analytical procedure, including the operationalisation of the systemic and intervening conditions described in the theoretical model by focusing on Russia's foreign policy in the contested neighbourhood.

Most studies in Neoclassical Realism adopt case-study approaches including qualitative methods, multimethod methods, and historiography for studying foreign policy, grand strategy adjustments and systemic outcomes (for overview, see e.g. Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, chap. 5). Works in this tradition emphasise the historical circumstances and decision-making process in specific countries which were sometimes found to be at odds with the generalisations suggested by quantitative researchers in comparative Foreign Policy Analysis (Kaarbo 2003). Although qualitative case-studies in Neoclassical Realism have demonstrated the unique contribution of qualitative research in explaining great empirical anomalies of international outcomes that quantitative methods (especially grounded on Waltz's balance-of-power theory) were not able to explain, some general criticism of case-study approaches persists. First, small-N studies have to deal with the problem of 'many variables, small number of cases', which raises the question of whether identification of causal

paths with few cases is reliable (see e.g., Collier 1993; Kroglund and Michel 2015). However, if scholars are running a research with a strong case orientation like that one exposed in this dissertation, probabilistic techniques make little sense. Conversely, the use of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) as research method increases the possibility to reach a middle-range generalisability (Thomann and Maggetti 2017). Second, Neoclassical Realism assumes the prior effect of systemic stimuli in the decision-making process to a state's foreign policy (Kropatcheva 2018). Within such process, the intervening variables are implied *to follow up* the systemic stimuli according to peculiar domestic features. Small-N studies and within-case analysis such as process tracing have applied their causal mechanisms according to this theoretical reasoning. However, systemic stimuli may not always be the primary source for a specific decision being taken by a foreign policy executive, but rather a co-occurring factor (see, e.g. Morin and Paquin 2018).<sup>37</sup> Hence, despite the importance of studying in-dept processes of states' decision making on single cases, it is desirable to analyse some commonalities across several cases by addressing the co-occurrence of various conditions. This is not to say that we should neglect the within-in case analysis; it rather suggests that multi-method research yields added inferential value compared to the application of one of the methods alone (Schneider and Rohlfing 2013a).

Given this research aim, it is held that QCA, particularly fsQCA, possesses distinct assets over alternative comparative methods for addressing mentioned challenges. Specifically in the analysis of states' external behaviour using Neoclassical Realism, QCA presents several advantages. First, in its explanatory use, QCA can address research questions that entail an interest in the causes of a given effect, and include one or more aspects of complex causation (Thomann and Maggetti 2017). This epistemological assumption matches methodological

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<sup>37</sup> Such issue has been also addressed by T.V Paul and Steven Lobell during the conference 'Past, Present and Future of International Order' May 6, 2019, University of Copenhagen, Department of Political Science

presumptions of Neoclassical Realism. Second, since QCA attends to configurations of conditions rather than net effects of individual variables, it is particularly amenable to the application of Neoclassical Realism and the study of international outcomes, where it is rare that an outcome can be attributed to a single cause. Third, focusing on specific assertive policies in a fuzzy-set analysis allows for a fine grained qualitative assessment of assertive outcomes over time and space (see e.g. Mello 2014 and the discussion on ‘military participation’). This contrasts with aggregate data-sets on conflict involvement that usually comprise a range of different phenomena under the label ‘military intervention’, ‘violence’, ‘use of force’.<sup>38</sup> Finally, QCA is particularly suited for multi-method approaches. Inferences with QCA can be complemented through its combination with qualitative within-case studies and process tracing (Beach and Rohlfing 2018; Mikkelsen 2017; Schneider and Rohlfing 2013) as well as with statistical techniques (Cooper and Glaesser 2016; Eliason and Stryker 2009; Greckhamer, Misangyi, and Fiss, 2013).

### 3.1 Principles and Practices of QCA

Despite the mentioned advantages of QCA compared to qualitative case-study, scholars should bear in mind that QCA is not part of standard quantitative methods either, as the principles and practices of the latter cannot be meaningfully applied to set-theoretic methods for several reasons. Firstly, QCA expresses causal relations in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. As a consequence, set-theoretic scholars embrace *equifinality*, *conjunctural causation*, and *causal asymmetry*. Equifinality recognises that the same outcome may be generated by different configurations of conditions (Schneider and Wagemann 2012; cf. Ragin 2008). Conjunctural causation concerns the idea that configurations of conditions

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<sup>38</sup> See the most frequently used data-set on military intervention: Militarized Interstate Disputes ([www.correlatesofwar.org](http://www.correlatesofwar.org)), International Crisis Behavior ([sites.duke.edu/icbdata/](http://sites.duke.edu/icbdata/)), Armed Conflict Dataset ([www.prio.no/cscw](http://www.prio.no/cscw)) and International Military Intervention ([www.icpsr.umich.edu](http://www.icpsr.umich.edu)), Uppsala Conflict Data Program (<https://ucdp.uu.se>)

can be jointly necessary and/or sufficient, whereas their constituent parts might be neither necessary nor sufficient for an outcome (Mahoney 2008). In methodological terms, the first refers to INUS, namely ‘an *insufficient* but *necessary* part of a condition, which is itself *unnecessary* but sufficient for the result’ (Mackie 1965, 245 original emphasis). The second refers to SUIN, namely ‘a *sufficient* but *unnecessary* part of a factor that is *insufficient* but *necessary* for an outcome’ (Mahoney, Kimball, and Koivu 2009, 129 original emphasis). Causal asymmetry implies that an identified relationship between a condition or combination of conditions and the outcome (Y) does not mean that the inverse relationship must also be true neither that the same relationship is valid for the non-outcome ( $\sim Y$ ). By contrast, in multivariate statistical research each model allows for only one inference and adopts symmetric notion, namely, the explanation of Y automatically implies the explanation of  $\sim Y$ .

Secondly, in order to find relations among sets, QCA translates raw data (e.g. numerical, ordinal and categorical concepts) into measurable conditions. In the fuzzy-set variant of QCA, cases are allowed to have gradations of membership between ‘0’ and ‘1’ to be used in the coding and thus allows for a more fine-grained and information-rich analysis (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 13). It has to be stressed that fuzzy set analysis requires careful calibration of the data (Ragin 2000, 150). This means that neither continuous nor ordinal scales are easily translated into fuzzy sets, because the researcher needs to define *theoretically meaningful qualitative thresholds* of what counts as full membership (1) and full non-membership (0) as well as the ‘breakpoint’ (0.5) understood as a ‘neutral’ value constituting a case that is neither in nor out of the set. In set-relational methodologies, some of the variation in the data is conceptually irrelevant. It is important that these points do not necessarily correspond to the lowest, highest, and mean value of a continuous dataset (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 30). Using the relatively simple and basically ordinal ranking of the fuzzy-set value scheme makes it easier to define these steps qualitatively, but

still the calibration of measurements beyond a simple ordering has to be kept in mind when operationalizing the independent and dependent variables. Calibration of data into a fuzzy-set membership can be conducted according to various procedures. In this study that implies medium-N cases analysis, values are assigned mostly on the basis of substantive conceptual and theoretical knowledge, and empirical evidence (Ragin 2000, 150).<sup>39</sup>

Thirdly, once concepts have been calibrated into a fuzzy-set membership set, QCA allows to assess whether a single condition or a configuration of several conditions are necessary and/or sufficient for an outcome through the use of ‘consistency’ and ‘coverage’ indicators (Ragin 2006). In formal terms, consistency is calculated as the degree to which a subset relation exists between instances of a condition X and the outcome Y. If X is equal or less than the value of Y, than X is a sufficient condition for Y. Conversely, if X is equal or more than the value of Y, than X is a necessary condition for the outcome. Coverage refers to the size of the area in set covered by a condition X. The smaller the area covered by X is, the smaller its empirical importance as a sufficient condition (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 60).

Fourthly, in order to check for sufficiency, QCA aims at a causal interpretation by making use of truth tables. That is, each conditional configuration (combination of values of the independent variables) present in the dataset is represented as one row together with the associated value of the dependent variable. Their goal is to establish *qualitative differences* between those cases that are (more) in the set and those that are (more) out of the set according to a necessity/sufficiency relation. The fuzzy-set truth table represents a multidimensional vector space with  $2^k$  corners, where k relates to the number of conditions, and each corner of the resulting property space signifies a distinct combination of conditions, represented by a

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<sup>39</sup>Other coding procedures are the ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ methods of calibration (Ragin, 2008: 85–105), which become relevant only when quantitative data is to be used in a fuzzy-set analysis.

separate row in the truth table. Based on the consistency scores a cut-off point is determined to separate rows above a certain consistency, which are kept for the logical remainder of the truth table procedure, from those with a lower consistency that are excluded from the procedure (Ragin, 2008: 135). The truth table is analysed and reduced with procedures of combinatorial logic to arrive at a solution term specifying a conservative, parsimonious or intermediate combination of necessary and sufficient causes for the presence or the absence of the outcome to be explained (Ragin 1987, 86–99). These solutions terms differ in the treatment of logical reminders. Conservative solution is the most complex solution since it does not make any assumptions beyond the empirical cases. Parsimonious solution does incorporate logical reminders but it does not assess their plausibility allows the researcher to specify how logical reminders are to be treated, based on explicit expectations about the causal relationship. By convention, QCA solutions terms are expressed by making use of Boolean algebra, which comprise several basic operators. Boolean Algebra originates from the work of George Boole, a 19th century British mathematician and logician, who developed an algebra for variables that occur in only two possible values: true (present) or false (absent).

Finally, in QCA, explanatory and outcome conditions are stated in capital letters, whereas a tilde [ $\sim$ ] refers to a logical NOT, as in the negation or absence of a condition. Multiplication [ $*$ ] refers to a logical AND, or the combination of conditions, whereas addition [ $+$ ] indicates a logical OR, as in alternative pathways. Finally, arrows express the relationship between one or several explanatory conditions and the outcome. Accordingly, a right-hand arrow [ $\rightarrow$ ] refers to a sufficient condition, while a left-hand arrow indicates a [ $\leftarrow$ ] necessary condition (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, chap. 2). There are two main set relations: a *logical AND*, or combination of conditions, refers to the minimum membership value in the respective conditions; while a *logical OR* indicates alternative conditions and refers to the maximum of the respective membership values.



Importantly, QCA as well as other set relational patterns across cases do not *automatically* reflect causation. Then, it is preferred to complement cross-case techniques with within-case analysis, such as process tracing (Beach and Rohlfing 2018, 5).

### 3.2 Within-Case Analysis: Process Tracing

As previously mentioned, the combination of fsQCA analysis and case studies has been labelled *set-theoretic multimethod research* (Goertz and Mahoney 2012).<sup>40</sup> Set-theoretic multimethod research is built on the idea that causal analysis is strengthened when it integrates a truth table analysis with follow-up case studies of purposefully selected cases. Like QCA, the general goal of process tracing is to find the necessary and sufficient conditions for an outcome and to explain how each term is related to the phenomenon of interests (Bennett and George 2005, chap. 10; Berg-Schlosser and Gisèle De Meur 2009). At the same time, process tracing differs from QCA in the object of research. As within-case study method, process tracing traces a process that links a cause (or conjunction of causes [X]) with an outcome [Y] in order to generate an inference about causal mechanism (Gerring 2008). The causal mechanism is composed by *entities* engaging in *activities* that transmit causal forces to the outcome (Machamer, Darden, and Craver 2000). Like QCA, process tracing traces an asymmetrical relationship, meaning that the causal mechanism between X and Y is not necessarily related to causal mechanism between X and the non-occurrence of Y or between the absence of X and the non-occurrence of Y.

Case selection for process tracing has been elaborated recently in the evolving literature on set-theoretic multi-method research (Beach and Rohlfing 2018; Schneider and Rohlfing 2013; Ragin and Schneider 2011). In this dissertation, I take an exploratory approach to the cross-level through the use of QCA, and a confirmatory approach to the within-case level through the use of process tracing in order to probe the mechanism linking X and Y

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<sup>40</sup> In this dissertation process tracing' and 'case studies' are used as synonyms.

(Beach and Pedersen 2013, chap. 3; Rohlfing 2012, chap. 1), a research design that is depicted in Figure 3.1. In particular, I am interested in the question of whether conjunctions trigger one or multiple, possible interrelated mechanisms. A mechanism-centred approach to process tracing assumes to choose as a typical case at least one that is a member of the sufficient term and the outcome (Beach and Rohlfing 2018, 16). The adoption of process tracing as the overarching method for researching a post-QCA within-case analysis involves five stages that include the selection of the process tracing matching theoretical and methodological aims of the research; a consistent conceptualisation and operationalisation of component parts of the mechanism; evidence collections, types of causal inference, and case selection.

The selection of one of the three main variants of process tracing – theory-testing, theory-building and outcome explanation – has important methodological implications for how the mechanism is understood. Theory-testing process tracing involves the deductive testing of whether a generalisable mechanism is present in a single case (Beach and Pedersen 2013, 14–16). Alternatively, theory-building is an inductive form of process tracing as the researcher uses empirical observations to detect a plausible hypothetical causal mechanism whereby X is linked with Y (Beach and Pedersen 2013, 16–18). Finally, outcome explanation aims to craft a minimally sufficient explanation of a particular outcome (Beach and Pedersen 2013, 19–21).

As the ambition of a post-QCA process tracing is to go beyond correlations and to open up the black box of causality in order to provide within-case evidence of causal relationships whereby X contributes to producing Y (Beach and Pedersen 2013, 11), the theory-testing variant has been adopted. In contrast to mechanism-centred process tracing, when the primary aim is to find theories on the sufficient determinants of an outcome, a more instrumental understanding of process tracing is justifiable after conducting a fsQCA. Here, the emphasis lies on a structured empirical test of whether there is evidence suggesting that a hypothesized

causal mechanism derived from the previous QCA analysis exists between the found conjunction and the outcome.

When studying mechanism, we are (usually) able to isolate the workings of individual causes through the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the process, enabling us to analytically distinguish whether a particular mechanism at the evidential level was present irrespective of other causes also being present. This means that it is important for us to be very careful in specifying that PT only provides us with evidence of the workings of the mechanism we are tracing, not other mechanisms. An in-depth analysis of the isolated effects of these causes and how they operate together will be better specified in the within-case analysis after the QCA is conducted.

In designing empirical tests, process tracing scholars suggest to state clearly what types of evidence we should expect to see if a hypothesized part of a mechanism exists (Beach and Pedersen 2013, 100). Among the four distinguishable types of evidence in process tracing analysis, which include account, trace, sequence and pattern evidence, I will mainly rely on account and trace evidence (Beach and Pedersen 2013). While the first refers to empirical evidence that is collected mainly through archival research (among others), the latter is evidence that can be used purely by its mere existence. In the context of IR and of FPA, these could be events such as summits, meetings, or actions such as sanctions, embargoes, or interventions.

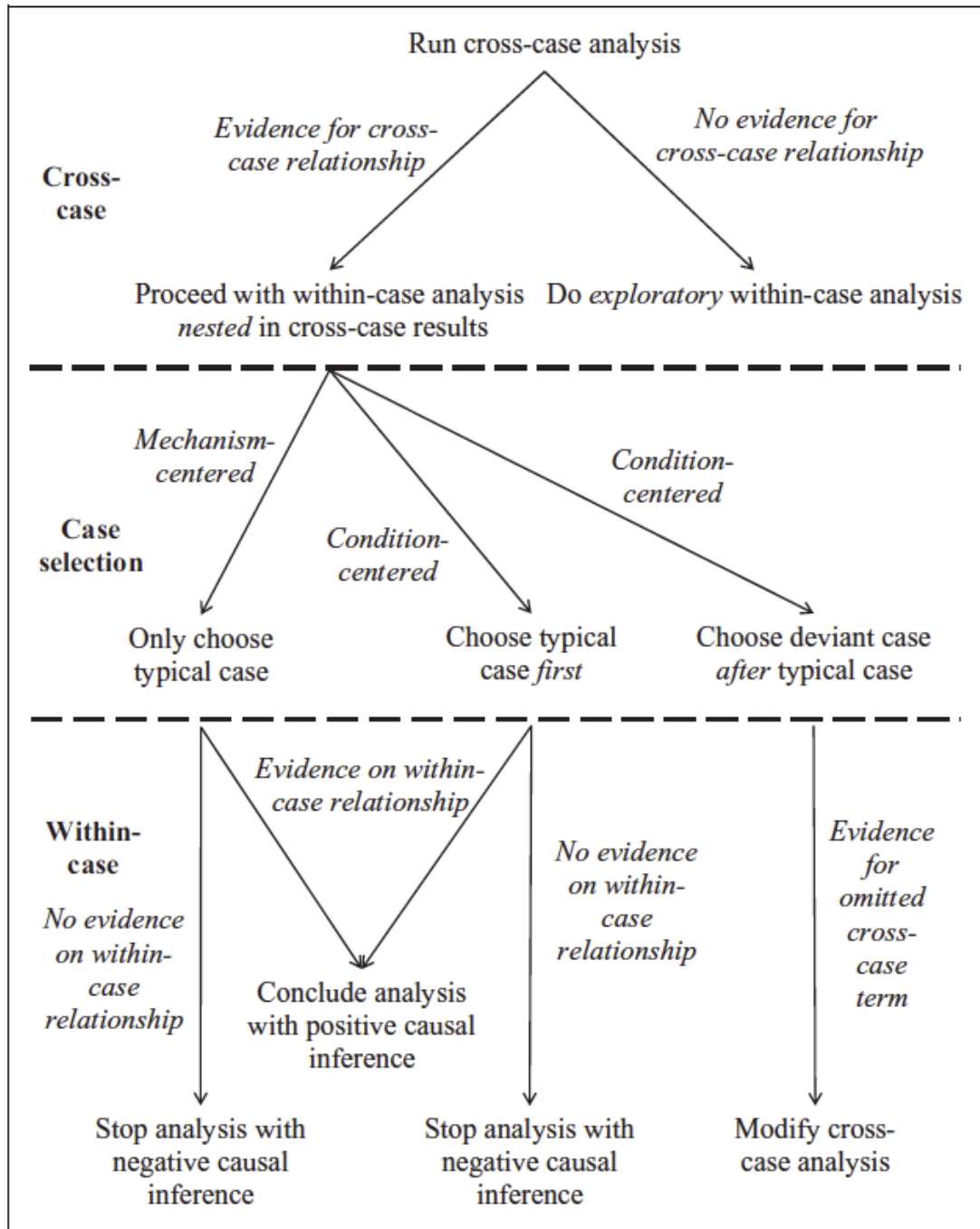
When translated into process tracing of mechanisms, after making evidential predictions for each part of the mechanism, process tracing scholars evaluate their certainty and uniqueness of finding the evidence based on theoretical and empirical knowledge. In other words, we search for an analytic template that enables us asking (and hopefully answering) a central research question: What is the probability that our main hypothesis about mechanism components is correct, given that we searched for and found certain kind of evidence? Using

Bayesian logic, process tracing researchers are encouraged to answer this question by explicitly specifying quantities such as the prior probability their hypothesis is correct given only their background information, and the likelihood of observing each piece of evidence in a world where their main hypothesis is true (Bennett and Checkel 2015, 276–98; Fairfield and Charman 2017). At the same time, despite the fact that Bayesian approach and PT represent a new frontier of qualitative research methods and are widely used among political scientists, scholars have also conducted a systematic evaluation of the trade-offs and limitations of the Bayesian approach in practice (Zaks 2020). Without diving in the whole debate on the methodological questions and corresponding issues that should be resolved yet, the logic of Bayesian inference is that new empirical evidence updates our confidence regarding the validity of theories (or hypotheses), and this updating depends upon how unique this empirical evidence is to the hypothesis (Beach and Pedersen 2013).

Essentially, different pieces of evidence are classified and graded on the basis of their supposed inferential power or ‘probative value’, which corresponds to the likely ratio between uniqueness and certainty of the prediction (Van Evera 1997, 31–34). The classification along these two dimensions results in four ideal-typical types of tests: straw-in-the-wind, hoop, smoking gun, and doubly decisive. The simplest type of test is straw-in-the-wind as it mainly aims to increase the plausibility of a given hypothesis (or cast doubts against it) as the researcher employs a basic and non-exhaustive assessment of the evidence. Hoop tests involve predictions that are certain but not unique. Smoking-gun test are the minimum test for accepting causal inference. They are highly unique but have low or no certainty in their predictions. Thus, as Beach and Petersen (2013, 104) state: ‘passage strongly confirms a hypothesis, but failure does not strongly undermine it’. Doubly decisive tests require the researcher to undertake multiple tests, which together may strongly support a hypothesis. However, in real- world social science research, it is also almost impossible to formulate

predictions in such a manner given the difficulty of finding and gaining access to the type of empirical evidence that would enable doubly decisive tests.

Figure 3.1: Set-theoretic multimethod research starting with cross-case analysis (QCA) and followed by a within-case analysis



Source: Beach, Derek, and Ingo Rohlfsing. 2018. 'Integrating Cross-Case Analyses and Process Tracing in Set-Theoretic Research: Strategies and Parameters of Debate'. *Sociological Methods & Research* 47(1): 3–36.

In tailoring the process tracing mechanism for this study, it became clear that submitting the collected evidence to the more ambitious tests namely the smoking-gun and the doubly decisive were discarded as being unrealistic. Such decision has been taken after considering the inevitable difficulties in accessing strategic documents of the Kremlin's military actions for dealing with the frozen conflicts in the early nineties. At the same time, the hoop test has also been deemed not practicable as arranging interviews with enough key informants proved challenging. Thus, the straw-in-the-wind test has been selected as the only test can could be both feasible and produce reasonable results within the established time. While I recognise that such result implies a weaker causal inference as it does not make claims about other causes of the outcome, the choice of this strategy accomplishes its task of confirming or disconfirming evidence of the theorized mechanism linking a given cause with an outcome (for a similar argument, see Beach 2018; Collier 2011; Smith 2019).

### **3.3 Case selection: Russia's 'Political Conflicts' in the Contested Neighbourhood**

The case of Russia captures the idea of a great power contained in the theoretical model where preponderance of power and geographic proximity play a pivotal role. First, Russia holds most military facilities and infrastructure from the Soviet past, and has inherited the permanent seat at the UN Security Council providing Russia with an enormous material and prestigious superiority compared to other former states of the Soviet Union. Second, geographic proximity plays a pivotal role in Russia's foreign policy in the post-Soviet space as the biggest former Soviet country holds the longest national border in the world that enables it to reach both the European as well the Asian continent. When the Belovezh Accords in December 1991 established the break of Soviet Union in fifteen sovereign states, security around Russia's borders came to depend on the collaboration among friendly and predictable neighbours. However, such predictions remained soon unfulfilled as Russia not only had to maintain its

status as great power in the regional neighbourhood, but it also struggled to hold together its territorial unity (Rezvani 2014).

Within this framework, the political situation following the disintegration of Soviet Union left Russia with a profound security dilemma concerning ‘the kind of arrangements needed in order to maintain stability outside Russia’s formal borders and the matter how to prevent the new states along its borders from joining another military bloc – NATO – which Russia sees as its traditional security threat’ (Rytövuori-Apunen 2019, 10). Although the post-Cold War international architecture has ruled out the direct intervention on other former Soviet subjects (at least, to some extent), Russia has been cultivating its tradition of vertical power through ‘diplomacy and foreign policy which traditionally serve to promote stability and continuity’ (Rytövuori-Apunen 2019, 5).<sup>41</sup> Gradually, Russia claimed a wider influence in the post-Soviet space on the basis of national security reasons including the right to protect ethnic Russians living as a minority that suddenly found themselves beyond the national borders (Suslov 2018). At the same time, control over the post-Soviet space is functional for Russia’s own stability. Among other things, if surrounded by a stable ring of friendly states with a firm control over domestic politics, Russia would be able to keep economic order and political stability at home (Hutcheson and Petersson 2016). By contrast, instability in the post-Soviet space is likely to contaminate Russia, in a sort of a ‘domino effect’ (see e.g., the ‘Colour Revolutions’). Therefore, Russia seeks to create the conditions for a multilevel stability in its regional neighbourhood encompassing regional and national levels (Ambrosio 2007; Tolstrup 2009).

For these and other strategic reasons, Russia has repeatedly stated in several official documents the political ambition of representing a regional leader with global projection (see,

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<sup>41</sup> Interestingly, Helena Rytövuori-Apunen in her volume *Power and Conflict in Russia’s Borderlands: The Post-Soviet Geopolitics of Dispute Resolution*. I.B. Tauris. (2019.), refers to the Russian word ‘государство’, *gosudarstvo* (literally the sphere of sovereign) to address Russia’s vertical domain of power in which the intervention on other sovereign states is legitimized by the modern form of ‘great powerness’ (p.203).

for instance, its membership in international organisations such as EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, NATO-Russia Council, SCO, Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and the BRICS. However, the internal struggles concerning the severe demographic decreasing, a lag-behind technology and a detachment from a Western-liberal development model among others strongly affect the capacity of Russia of achieving a great power status among peers (see e.g. Alexeev and Weber 2013). Therefore, Russia's activities in the post-Soviet space are aimed at several purposes: on the one hand, Russia attempts to maintain a privileged position in the region given by its superior material capability as well as by historical connections with the region; on the other hand, by maintaining its presence in the post-Soviet space, Russia strives to enhance its international prestige as great power and, thus, participate to the post-Cold War security structure (Clunan 2014; Larson and Shevchenko 2014b).

Because of the tensions between Russia's interest in the regions and the horizontal nature of Western normative international values, it is not surprising that the management of the near abroad, especially of the contested neighbourhood with the EU, has become source of disaccord between Russia and the Western states over the position that Russia should assume in the post-Soviet space. What mostly strikingly emerges from this disaccord is a contrasting visions of normative rules and practices of the international community. While Russia has consistently emphasised that it follows the rule of the international norms such as sovereignty, territorial integrity and right to protect, its interpretation of these rules has been frequently disputed by Western states (Kurowska 2014; Makarychev 2014). This was most evident in recent Russia's annexation of Crimea and meddling in Eastern Ukraine which have been framed as expansionist acts against international law, whereas Russia still claims to have acted in conformity with international norms (Kleinschmidt 2018; Kuzio and D'Anieri 2018; Payne and Foster 2017). The extreme diverse position on international norms among these



actors has urged scholars to include a more comprehensive interpretation which help us to see a more complex normative dimension of Russia's foreign policy (Ambrosio 2008; Kurowska 2014; Romanova 2016; Tsygankov 2005b).

At the same time, across more than two decades, Russia has maintained a sort of continuity in its practices and action in the post-Soviet space – maintain a sort of regional hegemony – yet each policy outcome had its own peculiarities given by different context and relations with other states. To avoid simple projections of continuity which fails to understand how Russia's policies emerged in interaction with other states, this study compares 27 cases of policy responses from Russia towards individual states or group of states of the contested neighbourhood across more than two decades – 1992- 2015.<sup>42</sup> Considered countries from contested neighbourhood include Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Ukraine.<sup>43</sup> Central Asian states are left outside from this preliminary investigation as it would include the participation of *other* great powers interacting with their respective neighbourhood: e.g. China, India, Turkey and Iran. Admittedly, this imply an enormous simplification of my model but this omission produces a parsimonious model easier to manage. Finally, despite the fact that the three Baltic states are members of the EU and of NATO, thus, they can hardly be conceived as 'contested neighbours', they have two main commonalities with the other post-Soviet countries that make them relevant for this research: first, they were part of the USSR; second, all of them share national borders with Russia.

### **3.4 Outcome: Russia's Foreign Policy in the Contested Neighbourhood**

This section presents one of the possible operationalisations of assertiveness as foreign policy outcome. An ideal alternative to measure how assertiveness (outcome A) implemented in a continuum of foreign policy instruments – from socialisation, coercion, to intervention – is to

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<sup>42</sup> This time frame has been chosen because of data availability (see section 3.1.4 on State Capacity)

<sup>43</sup> Data used for this study are available in Appendix A

look at the intensity of violence. The Heidelberg Institute of International Conflict Research (in German, Heidelberger Institut für Internationale Konfliktforschung, HIIK) develops an ideal five-levels scale according to the use of violence in a political conflict: <sup>44</sup> dispute (1), non-violent crisis (2), violent crisis (3), limited war (4), war (5). The HIIK project issues a yearly conflict barometer on a global scale differentiating political conflicts according to several indicators beside violence intensity: from state and non-state participants to conflict item. As most of political conflicts started just before or soon after the collapse of Soviet Union, I have considered the year of their beginning and the year of conflicts escalation across my time frame (if any). This decisions has been made to compare Russia's policies on the same political conflict yet in different times. Importantly, as the HIIK project measures only assertive foreign policy instruments, I have added e cases of Russia's non-assertive foreign policy (the so-called negated outcome, ~Y) through the concept of multilateral cooperation that entails membership into regional integration projects sponsored by local great power. Besides that, as the HIIK project has gone through several updating, I have compared HIIK conflicts barometers with other sources since some political conflicts are defined differently across years or have not been fully reported.<sup>45</sup>

I argue that each of the levels of violence indicated in the HIIK conflict barometer can be assigned to one or more categories of assertive foreign policy instruments (A) depending on the agency of Russia (see Figure 3.2). If socialisation mainly refers to the transfer of ideas from one actor to another (Schimmelfennig 2016), rhetorical exchange between leaders would

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<sup>44</sup> According to the HIIK, a political conflict 'is a *positional difference* between at least two assertive and directly involved actors regarding values relevant to a society (the conflict items) which is carried out using observable and interrelated conflict measures that lie outside established regulatory procedures and threaten core state functions, the international order, or hold the prospect of doing so'. For more info on measurement of violence in a political conflict, see the Methodology of the HIIK in the Codebook 2018 at webpage <https://hiik.de/hiik/methodology/?lang=en>

<sup>45</sup> For instance, what is initially labelled as 'Russia-Baltics' (in German, Baltikum) dispute on Russian minority in 1992 and 1993 as well as NATO membership, it is later divided across Estonia and Latvia. See, Previous Versions of Conflict Barometer at <https://hiik.de/conflict-barometer/bisherige-ausgaben/?lang=en>

be widely diffused in order to spread ideas. For instance, in a dispute, which entails an assertive use of socialisation, a rhetorical exchange between leaders is based *on holding out* the prospect of violence toward neighbouring states.<sup>46</sup> At the same time, disputes may be fought not only through verbal rhetoric but also through actions: e.g. international prestige can be consciously fuelled by military parades. Of course, the show off of military purchases has a more symbolic than strategic function; nevertheless, they can have a real impact to disseminate ideas about military power abroad (Fordham 2011). Unlike socialisation that involves mainly ideas exchanges, coercion is meant *to influence* how a target state behaves without directly intervening on its territory (Sechser 2010; Baldwin 1985). The term is very broad and can include a vast array of instruments that are derived from different processes and have different impacts. From HIIK data set, a non-violent crisis (2) is fully consistent with the definition of coercion. A non-violent crisis holds a more outspoken *threat of violence* from decision-makers (e.g. in the form of an ultimatum, in positioning troops on the border; or in the imposition of economic sanctions) (Bugajski 2004, 31–49; Kramer 2014, 4–15; Tolstrup 2009). Conversely, the category of intervention is understood as *an incursion* in domestic affairs of a target state to bring about internal structural change. This category includes a variety of outcomes that entail an actual use of force through subversion by supporting dissident groups with military facilities; through stabilisation of regime by supporting a weak ruling power; and, most extremely, through a direct military intervention (see, e.g. Blackstock 1964).

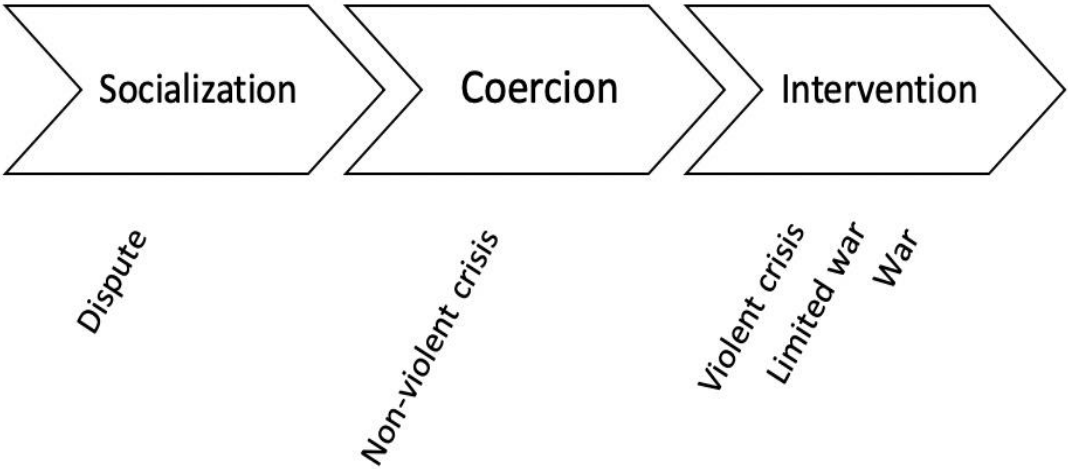
The HIIK divides the category of intervention into three levels: ‘violent crisis’ (3), ‘limited war’ (4) and ‘war’ (5). Although a violent crisis will not necessarily lead to a military intervention, which differs in terms of the use of violence on a larger scale evolving into limited wars or wars, I deduce that it implies the decision to use *limited* force to impose a

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<sup>46</sup> This conceptual clarification has been provided by academic staff of the HIIK at time of my research design.

strategy to a target state, and accordingly, it entails a kind of intervention. Therefore, the central criterion to distinguish whether a foreign policy outcome is rather in the fuzzy-set of assertiveness (receive a fuzzy score above 0.5), or whether it is situated rather outside the fuzzy-set of assertiveness (receive a fuzzy score below 0.5) is the presence or absence of *imposing* certain policy to neighbouring countries.

Figure 3.2: Assertive Foreign Policy Instruments according to the level of violence from HIIK project



The dimension of imposition ranges from the maximum of violence – intervention (fuzzy score 1.0) to the total absence of it – referring mainly multilateral cooperation (fuzzy score 0.0). In Figure 3.3, I consider 17 ‘political conflicts’ from the HIIK database, plus 10 cases of non-assertive foreign policy of Russia interacting with the countries of the contested neighbourhood between 1992 and 2015. As mentioned in the conceptualisation of assertiveness, I considered socialisation the least assertive response; thus I have calibrated the value ‘dispute’ (1) in the violence scale as slightly below the cross-over point (0.5) by assigning it a value of 0.4. Such threshold has been chosen in order to make distinction between substantially different foreign policy instruments: on the one hand, rhetorical communication and actions, which has very low leverage for imposing certain policies; on the other coercion and intervention. Finally, I have calibrated ‘non-violent crisis’ as coerciveness

and, thus, I have assigned it a value of 0.8, namely not-fully assertive but mostly in the set of assertiveness.

Most of political conflicts are coded in the HIIK as ‘interstate’ conflict (e.g. Russia – Ukraine); however, for the purpose of my study that considers Russia’s ‘management’ of the contested neighbourhood, I have also included intrastate political conflicts that refer to secessionist movements emerging from the dissolution of the Soviet Union developing into *frozen conflicts* – Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan, Transnistria from Moldova, and, more recently Donbass region from Ukraine – or triggering domestic political conflicts (e.g. Latvia-Russian minority; Ukraine-Russia-backed opposition). The reason for including frozen conflicts is that Russia is the central external actor and mediator in all the peace processes of frozen conflicts, yet at the same time its military presence and political involvement also make it a party to the conflicts (Rytövuori-Apunen 2019). Since frozen conflicts appeared in the early 1990s, Moscow has used them as a leverage to influence domestic and external developments in the affected states (Zürcher 2007; Ofitserov-Belskiy, Sushenstov 2018). At the same time, Russian policy had to adapt to the specifics of each case. Rather than following a revisionist masterplan, Moscow has been pursuing ‘selective revisionism’ governed by its own interests (Delcour and Wolczuk 2016; Fischer 2016). Indeed, while Russia has positioned peace-keeping forces on the ground of other sovereign states as it happened in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as in Transnistria at the beginning of the 1990s (thus, involving a *direct* intervention) Russia could not do the same in the Nagorno-Karabakh where Armenian troops were established until the new ceasefire signed in 2020. The same can be true for Russia’s influence on domestic political decisions in several post-Soviet countries. Russia has been accused of meddling into Baltic countries’ internal decision by supporting Russian minority (Winnerstig 2014) as well as by

backing filo-Russian candidates in Ukraine back in 2004 as well as in Moldova 2006 (Korosteleva 2010; Kuzio 2005).

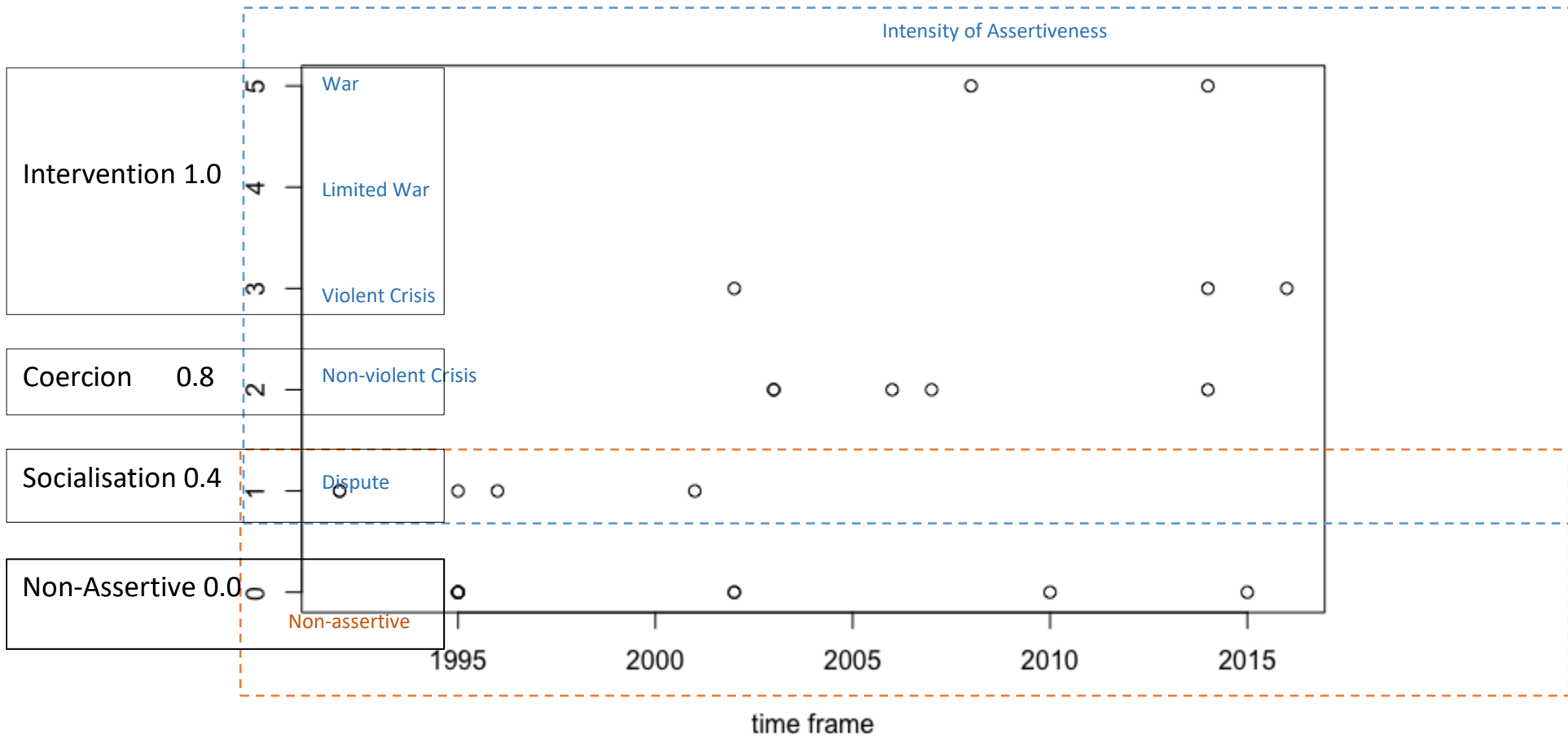
### **3.5 Explanatory Conditions: Operationalisation and Data**

As mentioned in the Chapter 2, a way to measure external activities promoted by other great powers acting in the shared neighbourhood could entail the prospects of neighbouring states to join region-building projects.<sup>47</sup> The great power that shares the common neighbourhood with Russia is mainly the EU; however, some qualifications are needed. First, unlike other ‘great neighbours’ of Russia that are mainly nation states – such as China and Turkey – the EU can be defined a regional organisation aimed at promoting economic and political integration rather than a nation state in the modern sense of the concept; yet the EU can mimic statehood property including possessing and exerting power on other states and international institutions (Langenhove 2013) as well as funding a proper army – e.g. the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) (Duke 2019; Matlary 2019). Second, Russia’s posture toward the EU and its regional policy is highly influenced by a negative attitude toward the NATO, which is the current main security instrument of Western states. Although NATO is clearly a separated entity from the EU with security and military defence aims rather than economic and political integration, Russia has often carried a contradictory and ambiguous

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<sup>47</sup> The adoption of this definition reduces the scope of the research mainly to the end of the Cold War, where the former area of the Soviet Union, the South-East Asian regions, and Latin American countries joined the global trend toward ever regionalism. Although regionalism and regionalisation studies point to great powers’ willingness to engage in regional cooperation project and (sometimes) integration (Buzan and Wæver 2003), the ideal type of region-building project is here functional to the neorealist assumptions, namely, region-building is a vehicle to achieving external actors’ interests in, and domination over, a region.

Figure 3.3: Cases distribution of Russia's assertiveness between 1992 and 2015



attitude toward NATO and the EU, especially when relationship with the latter deteriorates. On the one hand, criticising NATO for provocative expansion policy toward former-Soviet states, Russia has tried to promote an active cooperation with the EU, distinguishing between ‘the good West’ (the EU) and ‘the bad West’ (NATO). On the other hand, on the pick of crises like in Georgia 2008 and Ukraine 2014, the fact that a ‘Cold war’ rhetoric of ‘us’ against ‘them’ is used indistinctly in reference to the EU and NATO is a clear indication that Russia perceives both region-building projects of the EU as ‘armful’ to Russia’s strategic interests in the region (Zaslavskaya 2016). Therefore, although the main focus of the study is Russia-EU relations in the common neighbourhood, not addressing the NATO ‘interference’ when speaking about EU regional project would be misleading as the two are correlated in Russia’s perception of a Euro-Atlantic pressure on in the common neighbourhood.

The management of the common neighbourhood is, thus, the most controversial and structural issue between Russia and the EU (Busygina 2017; Trenin 2005). Scholars usually track four main trends of the EU engaging with the common neighbourhood, which are summarised in Table 3.1 (see, e.g. Gstöhl and Schunz 2018). First, after the Soviet Union ceased to exist, an enormous political, economic and social vacuum was left behind, which urged for assistance in all respects. In this context, the EU launched TACIS-Programme (Technical assistance to Commonwealth of Independent States) in 1992, which included also Russia. The main object of TACIS was to enhance the transition process to market economy and democratic societies in newly emerging independent states. The basic framework of TACIS as well as the whole EU relationship with Eastern neighbourhood was set out by a bilateral Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA). The first PCAs were signed with Ukraine, Russia and Moldova in 1994, followed by Caucasian republics and some of Central Asian countries in 1995. At the same time, these PCAs presented some differences according to the signing country: for instance, only Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia expressed their aim



of EU membership; Armenia favoured convergence, while Azerbaijan and Belarus had no overt act of membership ambitions, yet they wanted a close economic relationship with the EU (Butorina 2011). Despite significant EU's financial assistance to Eastern neighbours, deeper regional integration projects failed either due to the lack of adequate procedures and regulations within the EU (Allison 2008; Delcour 2011; Wirminghaus 2012), or due to post-Soviet states resistance to engage in reintegration, underpinned by fears of diminishing their newly won sovereignty (Vinokurov and Libman 2012).

A different story regards the Baltic states that since their independence from the Soviet Union were eager to join the EU. Indeed, they signed the Baltic Free Trade Area in 1994 that was created to help in preparing the countries for their accession to the EU. By then, the Baltic states had also applied for the membership into NATO. The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in the early 2004 and the Eastern Partnership (EaP) in 2009 – the Eastern dimension of the ENP, represent respectively the second and third phase of EU's relations with the common neighbourhood. After the enlargement of the EU (as well as NATO) to the Central and Eastern European countries in 2004, the EU reframed its policies in the post-Soviet space and with its neighbourhood in general, differentiating between several subareas according to the policies it was pursuing. The ENP was by far a more nuanced and ambitious idea than previous projects that have dealt mainly with financial assistance and technical support. At the same time, it was not meant as a waiting room for membership into the EU. In words of Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for ENP (2017): '[the ENP] was deliberately built on a "constructive ambiguity" and meant to do the difficult job of using the transformative power of Europe without explicitly offering a membership perspective'. The original offer was based on the idea that those countries who undertook greater reforms towards democracy, human rights and the rule of law would be rewarded with more access to the European market. Importantly, the launch of ENP in 2004 was accompanied by the EU enlargement to Central-Eastern European

countries as well as NATO membership of all three Baltic states that are direct neighbours of Russia. This last move has definitely given other members of the former Eastern bloc an incentive, at least, to start a dialogue with the North Atlantic Alliance. Also in this case, NATO dialogue with post-Soviet countries differentiates case by case: we can observe the high commitment of countries to NATO membership like Georgia and Ukraine as well as the ‘wait-and-see’ strategy of Armenia, Moldova and Azerbaijan to the indifference of Belarus.

Table 3.1: Patterns of Euro-Atlantic influence in the common neighbourhood

Euro-Atlantic Influence in the common neighbourhood								
COUNTRY	Phase I			Phase II			Phase III	Phase IV
	PCA	ENTRY INTO FORCE	BAFTA	NATO enlargement	EU membership	ENPI 2004	EaP2009	EaP 2015 (since 2013)
ARMENIA	22/04/1996	01/07/1999	X	Individual Partnership Action Plan-2005	X	✓	✓	Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement-2017
AZERBAIJAN	22/04/1996	01/07/1999	X	Individual Partnership Action Plan-2005	X	✓	✓	Strategic Partnership-2016
BELARUS	06/03/1995	Not yet in force. The Interim agreement is also not in force	X	Partnership for Peace-1995	X	✓ Cross-border programmes	✓	X
GEORGIA	22/04/1996	01/07/1999	X	Intensified Dialogue 2006	X	✓	✓	Association Agreements 2014
MOLDOVA	28/06/1994	01/07/1998	X	Individual Partnership Action Plan 2010	X	✓	✓	Association Agreements 2014
UKRAINE	14/06/1994	01/03/1998	X	Intensified Dialogue 2005	X	✓	✓	Association Agreements 2014
RUSSIA	24/06/1994	01/12/1997	X	Partnership for Peace-1994	X	X 4 Common spaces	X	X
BALTIC STATES	X	01/04/1994	13/09/1993	✓Membership 2004	✓ 2004	X	X	X

Source: Adapted from Ol'ga Butorina, ed., *Evropeiskaya integratsiya* (Moscow: Delovaya literatura, 2011), p. 682, and White, Steven, and Valentina Feklyunina. *Identities and Foreign Policies in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus - The Other Europes*. (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 87, with additions.

Similarly, since its launch 2009, the EaP reflects the strengthening of EU's region-building as it explicitly categorises Eastern Europe and South Caucasus as a distinct regional

area from the Southern dimension. According to its founding declaration, the EaP would seek to create the ‘necessary conditions to accelerate political association and further economic integration between the EU and interested partner countries’ (European Council 2008). Generally, it reproduced the main elements of the ENP, but in addition held out the possibility of concluding association agreements (AAs) that would lead eventually to the establishment of deep and comprehensive free trade areas (DCFTA) as well as full visa liberalisation (European Council 2008).

Finally, the fourth phase of the Euro-Atlantic influence in the ‘common neighbourhood’ starts from 2013 on, when the EaP was set up on the idea that the countries that show progress on reform could negotiate and *sign* the AAs with the EU, including DCFTAs and visa liberalisation. Compared to previous phases, progresses required by the enforcement of AAs and DCFTAs entail a passage from a soft to a hard-law commitment from EaP countries and stricter conditionality from the EU Commission. Despite all the challenges related to the EU-Eastern Partnership Summit on 29 November 2013 in Vilnius, which has triggered the protest in Kiev and the current Russia-Ukraine crisis, EU managed to conclude the formal side of the association process for Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine by signing the AAs in 2014. It also seems to have found an alternative cooperation format with Armenia in March 2017 despite the fact Armenia has entered the Russia-sponsored EAEU. Even Azerbaijan concluded its Strategic Partnership with the EU: although it remains reluctant to go beyond energy and visa-related cooperation, it still perceives some form of cooperation with the EU as vital to its international standing. The most reluctant to engage with the EU’s integration projects is Belarus, which remains tied up with Russia (see Table 3.1).

While the EU has presented its relationship with the Eastern neighbourhood as part of a larger normative procedure, by looking at its time-frame development across more than twenty years, it is evident how the EU has gradually shifted from a soft conditionality to a

more hard-law external governance that implied the unconditional adoption of its voluminous *acquis communautaire* by the smaller and less powerful states (Lavenex 2004). Within this context, Russia, which has initially excluded itself from the ENP because it wanted an equal partnership with the EU, later has mainly seen the ENP as a power politics plan aimed at extending the EU's influence over 'its own' near abroad and at interfere with Russia's regional hegemony (Gretskiy, Treshchenkov, and Golubev 2014; Zaslavskaya 2016). Therefore, the Kremlin has differently reacted to the strengthening of the ENP as well as NATO Action Plan depending on the country and interests involved. In light of this background, I consider two systemic conditions – external pressure (condition *P*) and military alliance (condition *AL*). In accordance to my theoretical model, I distinguish between prospect of membership of neighbouring states, which may still give the local great power certain room of manoeuvres for military actions, and the already implemented membership into a military defence pact, which changes the geopolitical asset and pushes Russia to use instruments other than direct force.

The external pressure (*P*) is operationalised as the product between the launch of region-building projects promoted by the EU and NATO (outside-in perspective) and the level of commitment of states from the contested neighbourhood to such projects (inside-out perspective). The outside-in dimension gives emphasis to the EU and NATO agency in creating, promoting and spreading norms and dialogue in the contested neighbourhood, sometime with the final aim of membership (Börzel 2012; Schimmelfennig 2009). As seen, the external influence exerted by the EU and NATO has started from a gradual involvement into the region to a requirement of hard-law commitment from former Soviet states. In parallel, the inside-in dimension focuses on the level of convergence of neighbouring states with Euro-Atlantic projects (Pishchikova 2019, 169–71). This last point traces the *qualitative threshold* of a fuzzy set of external pressure. Indeed, even when an external great power launches its

region-building project, if the neighbouring state is not interested or is aligned with local power, its influence remains marginal in the region. This operationalisation of external pressure allows scholars to include also agency of small states, which are usually neglected in great powers' politics.<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, a fuzzy score of 0.0 is assigned when a neighbouring state is either aligned with the local great power or is not interested into projects promoted by external great powers. Conversely, a fuzzy score of 1.0 is assigned when either a neighbouring country has already obtained the membership into the integration or there is a hard-law commitment to the membership. In the latter case, I argue that a robust pro-EU governing elites in neighbouring countries increases the level of external interference provoking irritation in the Kremlin (e.g. Georgia under Saakashvili on 2003, and Ukraine under Yushenko in 2004). However, when such commitment stays at rhetorical level and/or is related to soft-law binding projects a fuzzy set score of 0.8 is assigned. The cross-over point (0.5) is here defined as an ideal status of total neutrality of the neighbouring country. Neutrality is here understood as the lack of any agreement with *all* great powers sharing the regional neighbourhood.<sup>49</sup> The condition Alliance (AL) relates to the presence or absence of a military defence pact that exclude the local great power. As mentioned in the theoretical chapter, I consider only pacts that follow the logic of external balancing against Russia itself. In the common neighbourhood, the military defence

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<sup>48</sup> On small states in IR, see e.g. Ingebritsen, Christine, Iver Neumann, and Sieglinde Gstöhl. 2012. *Small States in International Relations*. University of Washington Press; Archer, Clive, Alyson J. K. Bailes, and Anders Wivel. 2014. *Small States and International Security: Europe and Beyond*. Routledge.

<sup>49</sup> Data on the evolution of EU's relations to Eastern Europe have been collected through the online data base 'Eastern Neighbourhood' provided by EU Listco (<https://www.eu-listco.net/research-database>) as well as on the official webpage of North Atlantic Organization Treaty (<https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/index.htm>). Data on the level of convergence to the Euro-Atlantic project were collected through secondary literature on the elite discourse in these countries toward their positions regarding membership of various 'European' and Russia-sponsored integration projects (see e.g. White and Feklyunina 2014 for Ukraine and Belarus; Kirkham 2016 and Delcour and Wolczuk 2015 for Armenia; Rogstad 2018 for Moldova; Berg and Ehin 2009 and Winnerstig 2014 for the Baltics before 2004; Delcour and Wolczuk 2016 for Azerbaijan). Consequently, the elites discourse has been adapted into a fuzzy-score membership (see Basurto and Speer 2012).

pact operating in the region is NATO. Condition ‘Alliance’ is operationalised according to a crisp set-values, namely yes:1.0; no:0.0.

The condition regarding the perception of threats has been operationalised through the concept of ‘status recognition’ (condition *S*) in IR, which includes the permeability of group boundaries and the legitimacy and stability of the status hierarchy (Larson and Shevchenko 2014a). Using Social Identity Theory, on the one hand, I view Russia as an active agent in shaping how others see it; on the other hand, I explore how Russia perceive the legitimacy of hierarchy in the international system and its position within it.

In the strive of status recognition, states may enhance their relative standing by adopting several strategies (Tajfel and Turner 1979). First, they may imitate more advanced states by aspiring to be admitted to higher status international clubs (i.e. *social mobility*). In the current Western-led international order, social mobility includes membership in elite clubs such as the Group of 8 (G8)<sup>50</sup>, permanent membership in the UN Security Council, leadership positions in international organisations, hosting international sports events, formal state visits, and special role in informal problem-solving groups (Volgy et al. 2014). For instance, since the end of the Cold War, Eastern and Central European states have adopted market principles and democratic reforms to meet the requirements of NATO and the European Union. Second, they may attempt to find a new area in which to be superior (i.e. *social creativity*). This would mean to refuse the status markers of the current international order, and to transform negative traits into positive assets: see e.g. the concept of ‘Asian values’ stressing that these states are more harmonious, orderly, and communitarian than the individualistic and materialistic West. Similarly, the rise of nationalist-populist parties in Europe that reaffirm the importance of traditional values about family, gender roles and religion in contrast to globalist and liberal

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<sup>50</sup> Now G7 after other leaders of the group announced the suspension of their participation in preparations for the Russian-hosted G8 Sochi Summit as response to action taken by Russia in Ukraine.

values are also a striking example. Third, if social status in a specific situation is denied when its approval is important for maintaining self-esteem, groups may react emotionally by turning to increased hostility from the lower-status group (i.e. *social competition*) (Brown and Ross 1982). A pivotal example is the non-recognition (and even condemnation) by peer states of the role of some great and regional powers as patron states in certain regional neighbourhood (e.g. Russia in the post-Soviet space; Iran in the Middle East). In the last case, the denial of social status can trigger emotional reactions such as frustration and anger (Isbell, Ottati, and Burns 2006). Anger often leads to offensive actions and rhetoric tendencies against the out-group. The emotion of anger is often elicited by the perception of injustice or illegitimacy, thus the offensive behaviour, which is often *post-hoc* rationalised, is finalised to restore power and status (Shaver et al. 1987). In this scenario, status-recognition is about hierarchy in a reminiscent zero-sum game that may lead to status conflicts (Forsberg 2014b).

Strategies for enhancing Russia's international status have been discussed at domestic level since the fall of the Soviet Union. After a brief liberal trend led by the group of 'Westernisers' with the scope of 'normalising Russia', the foreign policy discourse since the 2000s has been subdued by pragmatist (Centrist) as well as messianic instances (Eurasianist), reflecting the assertiveness of the last years in the post-Soviet space (Clunan 2014; Zevelev 2016). In particular, while Centrists foreign policy supports a multi-polar international order, where interests of Russia are taken in consideration through the stipulation of 'strategic partnership'; Eurasianists and nationalists support an active role of Russia in defending (including the use of force) the country's prerogatives against Western demands (Buszynski 2003). Despite significant differences in their understandings of the country's past, present and future, various elites discourses of Russia's foreign policy executive view Europe and the West as a great reference point for interpreting Russia itself (Morozov 2015; Tsygankov 2013). However, Russia's search for recognition as great power from its main Other have been

so far ignored (Smith 2014; Urnov 2014; Zaslavskaya 2016; Zevelev 2002). Indeed, a number of scholars have attributed the deterioration of Russian relations with the West to Russia's desire to recover its status as a great power and reaction to perceived humiliations, going back to the 1990s when Russia's wishes on international security issues were ignored – e.g. the NATO bombing of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1999, US-led intervention in Iraq in 2003, and recognition of Kosovo's independence in 2008 (Sakwa 2014; Simes 1998; Stent 2015; Tsygankov 2008). A focus on states' status-seeking in IR as well as the emotions accompanying failure to win respect, helps to explain some of the shifts in Russia's foreign policy, from the Russia's immediate post-Cold War policy of trying to integrate with the West to more pragmatic and even confrontational orientation toward the West after 2000s.

Therefore, I operationalise the three strategies for S according to the perceived legitimacy of existing status hierarchy as well as of the permeability of group boundaries (Tajfel 1978, 201–34). Strategies for status recognition ranges from *social mobility* (1.0), where the foreign policy executive aspires to be admitted into the higher-status club by emulating values, norms and behaviour of the hegemon, thus, accommodating request from the elites group; to *social competition* (0.0), where foreign policy executive perceives the status hierarchy as illegitimate and aims to subvert it through geopolitical competition. If hierarchy appears to be partially legitimate and stable, yet state aims to achieve a higher status within it, foreign policy executive may exercise *social creativity* (0.6) by re-evaluating a negative trait as positive, by identifying a new criterion for evaluation on which the great power ranks highly – e.g. human rights protection or alternative region building projects – or simply by promoting a strategic partnership with other great powers.

In the absence of a large dataset, perceived status recognition in Russia is conducted by using qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis is widely used in social sciences for the analysis of 'the artefacts of social communication' (mainly texts) (Lune and



Berg 2016). Similarly, Schreier defined it as ‘a method for systematically describing the meaning of qualitative material’ (2012, 1). Conventional content analysis focuses on the frequencies of certain category appearance in texts, which then allows researchers to make certain conclusions about the content. In my case, qualitative content analysis is used as method of collecting and interpreting qualitative data at meso-level (texts) that would be later transformed into values of the mentioned fuzzy set (Basurto and Speer 2012b). I analyse the perceptions of Russia’s social status and of the international order made between 1992 and 2015 by Russian official responsible for shaping Russia’s foreign policy discourse, particularly the president (Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin, Dmitriy Medvedev), the minister for foreign affairs (Andrey Kozyrev, Yevgeny Primakov, Igor Ivanov, Sergey Lavrov), and the permanent representative to the EU (Vladimir Chizhov). The reason behind this choice relies on the assumption that state officials as well as their advisors and political scientists act on behalf of the state. Given the difficulty to access to primary sources from the Russian presidential and ministerial cabinets, I rely on available published document collections, online archives, and memoirs. I use official sources provided by cabinets of the Russian President; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Defence – e.g., ‘The Law on Security’ (1992), Foreign Policy Concept (1993, 2000, 2008, 2013, 2016), National Security Concept (1997, 2000, 2015, 2016, 2009 until 2020), Military Doctrine (1993, 2000, 2010, 2014) —, official speeches of the President of Russia – ‘Annual Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly (1992-2015), transcript of bilateral meetings of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and with the press (2002-2016), and reported speech in newspaper article — *Kommersant* in Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press (2003, 2006).<sup>51</sup>

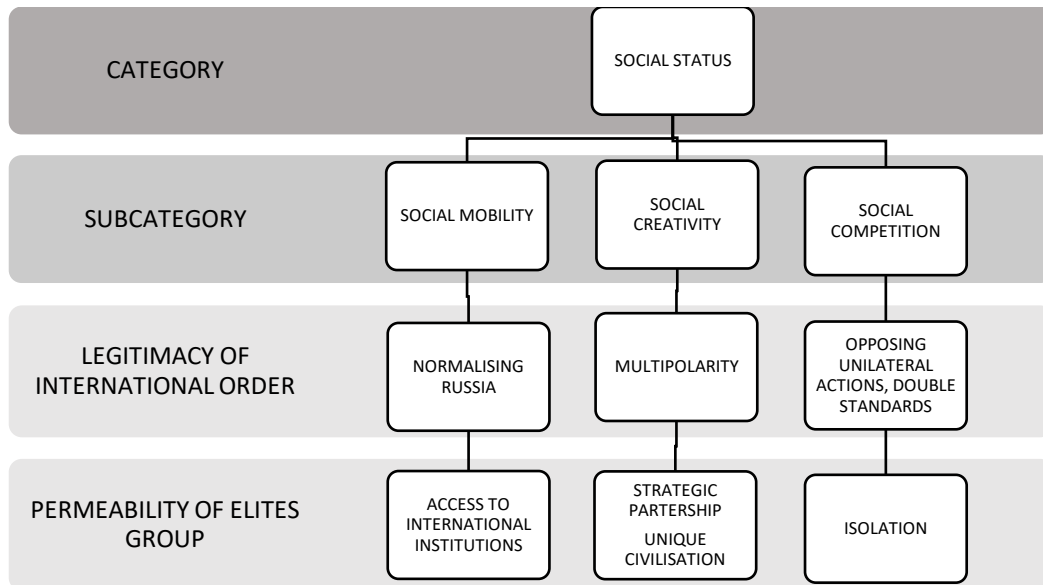
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<sup>51</sup> Importantly, selected official speeches and documents do not necessarily address the particular disputes or crisis with an individual state of the contested neighbourhood, rather they mainly address Russia’s strategy in enhancing its social status in world politics, in particular such data are indicative of the perceived status recognition of Russian foreign policy executive against the backdrop of the West in that period of time.

I developed my coding frame according to a hierarchical structure (see Figure 3.3) as well as a category definition for the text coding. In particular, I assume that a social mobility strategy for Russia entails the concepts of ‘Europeanisation’ which mainly refers to the adoption of ‘European standards’ in liberal market-oriented democracy as well as the Russian return to a common ‘European home’ (Gorbachev 1989). Conversely, social competition refers to a perceived ‘illegitimate hierarchy’ of the international order aimed to create ‘new dividing lines’ between Russia and the EU that exacerbate latent conflicts in the common neighbourhood and ‘isolate’ Russia from the international arena. Within the strategy of social creativity, on the one hand, Russia stresses the need for ‘strategic partnership’ with other great powers in order to develop a multipolar international order (partially challenging the unipolarity of post-Cold War system); on the other hand, promotes the ‘unique civilisation’ of Russia that seek pre-eminence in areas outside the traditional arena of norms and values. Finally, it should be mentioned that narratives of social status recognition are not mutually exclusive; they rather often overlap timely (within a presidential term) and spatially (within the same speech or official document). Therefore, I am searching for the *prevalence* of a strategy within a specific time-frame.

Finally, the conceptualisation of state capacity (condition *C*) is strongly debated at theoretical level. If its definition is still blurry, its measurement is not a simple task either. As Soifer et al. (eds. Carta and Morin 2014) claim: ‘Because we have no independent measure of the increased weight of the state apparatus from its effects, a convincing demonstration that the state has had an effect requires the elimination of alternative explanations for the observed effects’.

Figure 3.4: Hierarchical structure of the coding frame for the Social Status strategies



Taking in consideration such limitation and following the several definitions presented in section 2.3.2, I adopt a multi-dimensional index able to measure state capacity according to its level of fragility, which, in turn, includes coercive, extractive and administrative dimensions.<sup>52</sup> . In particular, I consider the definition of state fragility provided by Marshall et al. in the State Fragility Index (2017) consistent with my conceptualisation of state capacity: ‘A country’s fragility is closely associated with its state capacity to manage conflict, make and implement public policy, and deliver essential services, and its systemic resilience in maintaining system coherence, cohesion, and quality of life, responding effectively to challenges and crises, and sustaining progressive development’. Using State Fragility Index, I would determine the degree to which a state is able to extract its capabilities. Nonetheless, to determine whether executive constraints or institutional checks and balances actually explain assertive decisions or bargaining strategies with neighbouring states at any particular period in time, it would be necessary to do within-case research to assess whether domestic

<sup>52</sup> Several databases operationalise in various way state capacity; at the same time, they all rely on a multi-dimensional index that gather security (coercive), economic (extractive), social and political (administrative) indicators

constraints on the executives of specific states were in any way responsible for certain decision-making (e.g. tax revenue).

Although it is still understudied (see, e.g. Götz 2017; Taylor 2011), state capacity represents an important condition in determining Russia's external behaviour in foreign policy decision-making. Indeed, scholars have observed that Russia has quite assertive attitude in opposing NATO and EU membership of neighbouring countries. However, while Russia has even mobilised military forces to stop such process in Ukraine and Georgia (despite the official narrative of the Kremlin about the necessity of a humanitarian intervention), the same outcome did not happen in the nineties when the Baltic countries entered the Atlantic Alliance and the EU (Väyrynen 1999). One of the likely explanations for such 'underbalanced' response is due to serious economic contraction of Russian economy in that period as well as to the inability of raising revenues and collect taxes (Gregory and Brooke 2000; Litwack 2002). At the same time, Russia was occupied with intestine fragmentation along regional line, such as the Chechnya question, that ended up into two waves of violent conflicts. Therefore, it is plausible to say that Russia was not in full command of its capacity including coercive, social and administrative dimensions of it. Having saying that, the following empirical analysis will show whether a high state capacity has actually affected Russia's foreign policy in the near abroad in the last twenty years.

The concept of Russia's state capacity is operationalised using the coding of State Fragility Index (2017), which scores each country on both effectiveness and legitimacy in four performance dimensions – Security, Political, Economic, and Social, at the end of each year from 1995 until 2015. Each of the Matrix indicators is rated on a four-point fragility scale: 0 'no fragility,' 1 'low fragility,' 2 'medium fragility,' and 3 'high fragility' with the exception of the Economic Effectiveness indicator, which is rated on a five-point fragility scale (including 4 'extreme fragility'). The State Fragility Index, then, combines scores on the eight

indicators and ranges from 0 'no fragility' to 25 'extreme fragility.' Across more than 20 years, Russia's state fragility hangs between a maximum level of 11 and a minimum of 7. A threshold of 9.5 has been then selected based on case-knowledge. Indeed, Russia starts to regain state capacity mainly in the security – i.e., when war in Chechnya is over – and economic dimensions – oil and gas revenues – which stabilises approximately around 2004/2005. Here we have the switch from a more fragile state (10) to a less fragile state (9).<sup>53</sup>

This chapter's aim has been twofold. First, it has addressed the prevalent methods in neoclassical realist research. Despite their respective merits, it was noted that both statistical methods and case-study approaches entail limitations for the research aim of this study that goes behind the issues concerning the number of cases. While the comparative advantage of fsQCA has been acknowledged in social science research, to this date there have been few empirical applications of this methods in the subfield of IR (e.g. Haesebrouck 2017; Mello 2014). Second, in its extension of fuzzy-set analysis to a new empirical area, I have presented how to apply the operationalisation of my ideal types conditions to the study of Russia's foreign policy in the contested neighbourhood with the EU. Therefore, by presenting the results of fuzzy-set analysis to the study of Russia's regional policy, the next chapter seeks to demonstrate the contribution of using fsQCA for a neoclassical realist study.

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<sup>53</sup> Since data from State Fragility Index goes back until 1995, I am using scores of 1995 to refer to cases happened between 1992 and 1994. I am aware that such methodological choice could entail an approximation of Russia's state capacity observation; yet, by adopting such strategy I can include relevant cases that would be lost otherwise.

## **CHAPTER 4**

# **RUSSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE CONTESTED NEIGHBOURHOOD FROM 1992 UNTIL 2015: A FUZZY- SET QCA ANALYSIS**

After initial enthusiasm during the 1990s and early 2000s, EU-Russia interaction deteriorated gradually into 'stalemate', 'unfortunate continuity', 'systemic crisis', and 'mutual disappointment' as contentions over various issues piled up (see e.g., Medvedev 2008, 215–32). This deterioration culminated in 2014, when the EU-Russia relationship effectively turned from regional competition into actual rivalry following Russia's intervention in Ukraine (Nitoiu 2016; Smith 2016). The main source of divergence in the EU-Russia relationship has been the 'management' of the contested neighbourhood due to the controversy over the 'special' role that Russia claims to have in the post-Soviet space. Scholars largely attributed the failure of EU-Russia cooperation to divergence and competition between their value systems or worldviews. For example, Trenin (2009) points to the value-driven EU vs. the interest-driven Russia, Haukkala (2010) notes the incompatibility between the EU's post-sovereignty logic and Russia's sovereign democracy doctrine; while Delcour and Wolczuk (2016) emphasised the competing logics of region-building between the 'soft power' EU and the geopolitical Russia. Accordingly, these divergences are seen as the underlying reason behind the deterioration of EU-Russia relations and, consequently, the main cause of Russia's assertive foreign policy.

As argued in Chapter 1, these explanations alone fail to address change and continuity in Russia's foreign policy in the post-Soviet space across more than two decades. Indeed, Russia has often cooperated, at least at economic and strategic level, with the EU about the EU's Eastern neighbourhood. This review identified empirical gaps in the mono-causal explanations, pointed out disagreements over explanatory factors derived from alternative, if not competing IR theories, and specified on which points consensus exists about the

recognition of multiple sources in Russia's foreign policy. With the aim of developing an integrative model, Neoclassical Realism was introduced as theoretical framework in order to formulate directional expectations about different outcomes of regional policy. This approach integrates factors that previous studies have identified as important in explaining Russia's assertiveness but whose interaction has gone largely unobserved, and it provides specification of the research design, including criteria for the selection of cases, the conceptualisation and coding of the outcomes, and the four explanatory conditions.

This study argues that looking at the interaction between systemic and domestic factors in an integrated manner provides insights into *why* Russia's foreign policy has become increasingly assertive. This chapter aims to identify and analyse those factors that contributed to Russia's regional policy by distinguishing foreign policy instruments adopted by Russia. Since Neoclassical Realism recognises that states are influenced not only by exogenous systemic factors but also by cultural and ideological biases and by domestic political conditions, the objective of this analysis is to find out to what extent domestic factors can account for the observed outcomes when compared to structural factors. Particularly, the analysis focuses on Russia's perception of its status as great power in international politics and Russia's state capacity as main intervening conditions in the belt from systemic variables to foreign policy outcomes.

The specific aim of this chapter is to explain Russia's foreign policy in the contested neighbourhood between 1992 and 2015 by using of fuzzy-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA). The first and second sections of this chapter present two separate fuzzy-set analyses with a brief description of positive cases. The third section discusses the analytical findings and their theoretical implications for the integrated model. The concluding section summarises what has been achieved in the chapter.

## 4.1 Russia's Assertive Foreign Policy: from Coercion to Military Intervention

The fuzzy-set analysis comprises two separate fsQCA procedures: one for the analysis of the positive outcome, namely Russia's assertive foreign policy, and another for its negation, namely Russia's non-assertive foreign policy. According to the principle of asymmetry, it is good practice to conduct both of these analyses because the results for one cannot be inferred from the other (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 81–83).

Before proceeding with the analysis of sufficient conditions, it is prudent to test for necessary conditions (Rihoux and Ragin 2009, 110).<sup>54</sup> As described in Chapter 3, in fuzzy-set analysis a potential necessary condition is indicated when instances of the outcome are a subset of instances of a condition. Generally speaking, 'a condition is necessary if, whether the outcome Y is present, the condition [X] is present' (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 69). In formal terms, necessary conditions are calculated on the basis of separate measures for consistency and coverage. By convention, the consistency threshold for potential necessary conditions is set to 0.90 (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 143). Accordingly, each condition and its negation are tested separately for both outcomes, while conditions with a consistency value equal to or above 0.85 are further tested for coverage. As showed in Appendix, this procedure reveals that all conditions are substantially below the threshold for necessary conditions, and therefore, no necessary condition can be inferred for the outcome of assertive foreign policy (A). This result implies that Russia's has recurred to assertive foreign policy toward some post-Soviet republics even in absence of the systemic variables included in the

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<sup>54</sup> Textbooks give dissimilar advice on the treatment of necessary conditions. On the one hand, Charles Ragin advises to exclude necessary conditions from a truth table analysis, which, after all, is essentially an analysis of sufficiency (Rihoux and Ragin 2009, 110). On the other hand, Patrick Mello argues that identified necessary conditions should be included in the truth table procedure for analytical reasons. Accordingly, he states: 'causal conditions can be both necessary and sufficient, either on their own, which is quite rare in social research, or as an element in a conjunction of conditions, which occurs more frequently. If one excludes necessary conditions from the truth table procedure, however, one could not identify these configurations and would lose analytical leverage as a result' (Mello 2014, 56).



model, namely external pressure ( $\sim P$ ) and military alliance ( $\sim AL$ ). Despite the fact this result would apparently conflict with one of the neoclassical realist assumptions, which sees the variation in the international system as the primary source of foreign policy, in the process tracing of single cases in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 it would become clearer how other systemic variables not considered in the fsQCA triggered Russia's foreign policy outcome. At the same time, these implications make intuitive sense in the light of theoretical expectations about the primacy of systemic incentives to be effective only in combination with the constraining effects of domestic factors for states in neoclassical realist models. Nevertheless, they still need to be confirmed in the fsQCA procedure for inferring statements about sufficient conditions (see, e.g. Mello 2014, 56).

The analysis of sufficiency aims to find which conditions or which combinations of conditions are sufficient for Russia to adopt an assertive foreign policy towards states of the post-Soviet space for the two decades following the fall of Soviet Union. Can pathways be identified that resonate with the outlined theoretical expectations? To address this question, the fuzzy-set analysis proceeds through a sequence of steps, the core of which can be carried out with the QCA software.<sup>55</sup>

The first step is to construct a truth table on the basis of Russia's political conflicts' with other post-Soviet countries. The raw data for each condition and the outcome are thus converted in fuzzy-set membership. In a truth table, each row represents one of the logically possible 'AND' combinations between the conditions.<sup>56</sup> Table 4.1 displays the truth table for the outcome assertive foreign policy (A) and the four conditions external pressure in the contested neighbourhood (P), NATO alliance of the target state (AL), Russia's status recognition as great power (S), and Russia's high state capacity (C). Because the model

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<sup>55</sup> The R packages I have used are QCA 3.5; QCAtools 0.2.3; SetMethods 2.4.1

<sup>56</sup> As noted in Chapter 3, the logic of propositions uses the operator 'AND' in order to denote the intersection among two or more sets (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 54). From now on, the operator AND will be used without quotation marks.

contains four conditions, the truth table comprises  $2^4$  (P, AL, S, C) = 16 rows. Below row 3, logical remainders are displayed, which represents combinations of conditions not filled with empirical cases (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 151–75). Logical remainders can be included in an intermediate solution if one can make plausible assumptions about their potential outcomes. In this analysis, I have included directional expectations about logical remainder of row 14, which represents one of the eight conjunctions that should present the outcome as illustrated in the theoretical model (see Chapter 2).<sup>57</sup> Each case's membership in the respective conjunction of conditions is given in brackets. Ukraine 2013, for instance, which includes also the annexation of Crimea in April 2014, holds a membership of 1.00 in the conjunction given in Row 10. This conjunction comprises the absence of both military alliance of the target state ( $\sim$ AL) and status recognition of the great power ( $\sim$ S) with external pressure (P) and state capacity (C). The consistency column indicates the extent to which the fuzzy-set values of all cases in a conjunction are sufficient for the outcome assertive foreign policy (e.g. 1.00 in Row 9). The PRI column is the acronym for Proportional Reduction for Inconsistency and indicates the extent to which a combination of conditions is sufficient for both the outcome Y and its negation  $\sim$ Y, namely simultaneous subset relations (Duşa 2018, 134). Based on the consistency scores a cut-off point is determined to separate combinations that pass fuzzy-set sufficiency from those that do not (Ragin 2008a, 135). In general, the consistency threshold should be set at least to 0.75 (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 129). To conduct the analysis, I decided to use a minimum threshold as I did not have much choice since consistency in the truth table goes from the maximum value 1.00 to a value 0.71, which is slightly below the threshold for sufficiency. Besides the fact that values below 0.75 are often problematic as they have consequences for the subsequent analysis, the choice of this threshold has been decided by making reference to various research-specific features. Specifically, cases belonging to row

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<sup>57</sup> Row 14: PAL $\sim$ SC, where ' $\sim$ ' refers to the absence of a condition.

9 have been derived from previous studies as examples of ‘unanswered threats’ from Russia; they have thus been included as examples of socialising foreign policy rather than coercive. Therefore, according to the conceptualisation of assertiveness provided in this research, it would make more sense to exclude cases of row 9, rather than include them. Hence all configurations below Row 16 are excluded from the ensuing minimisation procedure.

In a second step, Boolean algebra is used to minimise the truth table and to identify combinations of conditions that are sufficient for the outcome by removing redundant conditions from the solution (Ragin 1987, 93–97). In fsQCA this is done via the Quine-McCluskey algorithm, also known as truth table algorithm (Klir, Clair, and Yuan 1997, 61). On this basis, three solutions are derived, which differ in their treatment of logical remainders. The *conservative* solution provides a more complex estimate that makes no assumptions about any logical remainders and does not go beyond the empirical information at hand, namely studied cases. The *parsimonious* solution incorporates all logical remainders but does not assess their plausibility. While this procedure yields solution terms that are easier to interpret, the results of the parsimonious solution should be treated with care as it represents only one of the many superset of the conservative solution term (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 160–67). Therefore, it should be always contrasted with the other solutions that do not consider, for instance, contradictory easy counterfactuals (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 200–212). Finally, the *intermediate* solution allows for the specification of how logical remainders ought to be treated, based on explicit assumptions about the causal relationship. It is thus positioned in between the conservative and parsimonious solutions. Table 4.2 displays three solution terms – the parsimonious, the intermediate and the conservative – and their constituent conjunctions of conditions that are sufficient for an assertive foreign policy. As no necessary condition has been found in the analysis, Table 4.2 does not shows necessity scores that are reported in Appendix.

Table 4.1: Truth Table for Assertive Regional Policy

Row	P	A	S	C	A	N	Consistency	PRI	Cases
10	1	0	0	1	1	3	1.00	1.00	DONBAS 2014 (0.8), GE 2008 (0.8), UA 2013 (1.0)
11	1	0	1	0	1	2	1.00	1.00	GE 2002 (0.6), UA 2003 (0.6)
12	1	0	1	1	1	1	1.00	1.00	MD 2006 (0.6)
13	1	1	0	0	1	1	1.00	1.00	LT 2014 (0.6)
15	1	1	1	0	1	1	1.00	1.00	LV 2003 (0.6)
16	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.00	1.00	EST 2007 (0.6)
9	1	0	0	0	0	4	0.71	0.45	BLT 1995, EST 1996, LV 1998, UA 1996 (0.8)
1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.57	0.25	AM 2015
4	0	0	1	1	0	1	0.27	0.13	BL 2010 (1.0)
3	0	0	1	0	0	10	0.25	0.18	ABK 1993,AM 1994,AM 2002, ,AZ 1993,BL1994, BL 2001,BL 2002,GE 1994,MD 1994, NGK 1992, PNR 1992, UA 1994 (0.8)
2	0	0	0	1	?	0	-	-	
5	0	1	0	0	?	0	-	-	
6	0	1	0	1	?	0	-	-	
7	0	1	1	0	?	0	-	-	
8	0	1	1	1	?	0	-	-	
14	1	1	0	1	?	0	-	-	

The numbered paths present one route within a solution for an outcome. On the bottom, consistency and coverage scores are given by solution and for each path within it. While *raw coverage* refers to how much of the outcome a path can account for, *unique coverage* discounts empirical overlap between paths to indicate only the specific explanatory contribution of the respective path. In Table 4.2, the three solutions cover the same amount of cases to a certain extent. The parsimonious solution is the same to the intermediate. However, the parsimonious solution includes two different models (M1 and M2), namely two alternative solutions, and the model with higher consistency has been chosen (M1), which the same of the intermediate. In line with the suggestion of Schneider and Wagemann (2012, 279), I focus on the intermediate solution since this provides the best combination of consistency and coverage in relation to level of detail.

While a theoretical interpretation of the results is provided in the next section, a few observations are evident from the configurations that comprise these solution terms. First, it is apparent that the presence of external pressure (P), which is here operationalised as the EU's and NATO political, economic and military activities in the contested neighbourhood, is present in almost each of the paths toward assertive regional policy of either solution term (A). Second, in Boolean algebra, multiplication [\*] refers to a logical AND, or the combination of conditions, whereas the addition [+] indicates a logical OR, as in alternative pathways to bring the outcome. Thus, this table shows that external pressure (P) determines that Russia has resorted to assertive foreign policy *only* in combination either with status recognition as great power (S) or with high state capacity of Russia (C) (Path 2, Path 3). A similar trend can be observed in the conservative solution, where the absence of military alliance (~AL) and state capacity (~C) contribute to the outcome (Path 5 and Path 6). By contrast, the absence of status recognition (~S) does not decisively demonstrate a link with assertive foreign policy.

## 4.2 Intermediate solution and X-Y plot

On their own, these solution terms are rather abstract; moreover, they do not provide information on the distribution of cases and the empirical fit of the model. In order to address this shortcoming, it is a good practice in fsQCA to construct an x-y plot that displays the position of each case by tracing membership in the solution against membership in the outcome. Figure 4.1 demonstrates the fit of the intermediate solution as a sufficient condition for Russia's assertive foreign policy. The diagonal line demarcates points that hold equal membership in both sets. More importantly, it separates cases with a higher value in the outcome than in the solution (above the line) from those where membership in the solution exceeds that of the outcome (below the line). While the former can indicate a sufficient condition, the latter can signal a necessary condition. In set-theoretic terms, it is crucial to distinguish whether a case rather holds membership in a given set ( $X_i > 0.50$ ) or whether it is situated rather outside that set ( $X_i < 0.50$ ). This procedure allows for the division of the x-y plot into six distinct zones, which differ in their theoretical relevance depending on the analytical aim of the research (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 23).

The x-y plot demonstrates visually that the intermediate solution is sufficient for Russia's assertive foreign policy, since the majority of cases, 21 out of 27, are located on or above the main diagonal. However, the x-y plot further shows two main groups of cases. In the first group, the 16 cases in the lower left corner hold low membership values in both the outcome and the solution term. Usually, they can be considered largely irrelevant for the theoretical argument (Zone 5). In this analysis, cases showed in Zone 5 are those with a non-assertive foreign policy of Russia, which include both cases of Russia's integration projects as well as of Russia's weakest assertive response to threats.

Table 4.2 Paths to assertive Russia's foreign policy

	Parsimonious			Intermediate			Conservative		
	Path 1	Path 2	Path 3	Path1	Path2	Path 3	Path 1	Path 2	Path 3
External Pressure (P)		●	●		●	●	●	●	●
Alliance (AL)	●			●				⊗	●
Status Recognition (S)		●			●		●		
State Capacity (C)			●			●		●	⊗
Consistency	0.80	1.00	1.00	0.80	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
PRI	0.75	1.00	1.00	0.75	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Raw Coverage	0.20	0.25	0.51	0.20	0.25	0.51	0.25	0.40	0.13
Unique Coverage	0.50	0.08	0.01	0.50	0.08	0.01	0.11	0.33	0.06
Covered Cases/Uniquely	LT 2014; LV 2003; EST 2007	GE 2002, UA 2003; MD 2006; LV 2003; EST 2007	DONBAS 2014, GE 2008, UA 2013; MD 2006; EST 2007	LT 2014; LV 2003; EST 2007	GE 2002, UA 2003; MD 2006; LV 2003; EST 2007	DONBAS 2014, GE 2008, UA 2013; MD 2006; EST 2007	GE 2002, UA 2003; MD 2006; L V 2003; EST 2007	DONBAS 2014, GE 2008, UA 2013; MD 2006	LT 2014; LV 2003
Solution Consistency		0.93			0.93			1.00	
Solution PRI		0.90			0.90			1.00	
Solution Coverage		0.68			0.68			0.65	
Model (Total)		M1(2)				M1(1)			M1(1)

Note: black circles indicate the presence of a condition, crossed-out circles its absence. The Intermediate solution rests on the simplifying assumption that the logical remainder is sufficient for the outcome. Where the solution yields multiple models, the model with the highest solution consistency is reported.

By contrast, of the nine cases that show assertive foreign policy, which hold membership in the solution term (Zone 1 & 2), six of them can be considered typical cases (Zone 1) – i.e. Georgia 2002, Ukraine 2003; Moldova 2006; Donbas 2014, Georgia 2008, and Ukraine 2013. In contrast, three cases in Zone 2 – i.e., Estonia 2007, Latvia 2003, and Lithuania 2014 – can be considered deviant cases consistency in degree (DCCG), as they namely hold a higher membership in the solution term than in the outcome, so they could be considered *uncharacteristic* due to their comparably low outcome value. Nevertheless, they are not truly deviant cases, which would be located in Zone 3, because the cases still show the outcome, albeit to a lesser extent than others.

Two cases also experienced an armed conflict with Russia, but are not explained by the solution: the military intervention with Georgia over Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 1993, and the one with Moldova over Transnistria in 1992 (Zone 6). However, although it lowers the overall coverage values of the solution term, the identification of cases in Zone 6 does not undermine the theoretical argument as they do not contradict the statement of sufficiency of the intermediate solution (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 307).<sup>58</sup>

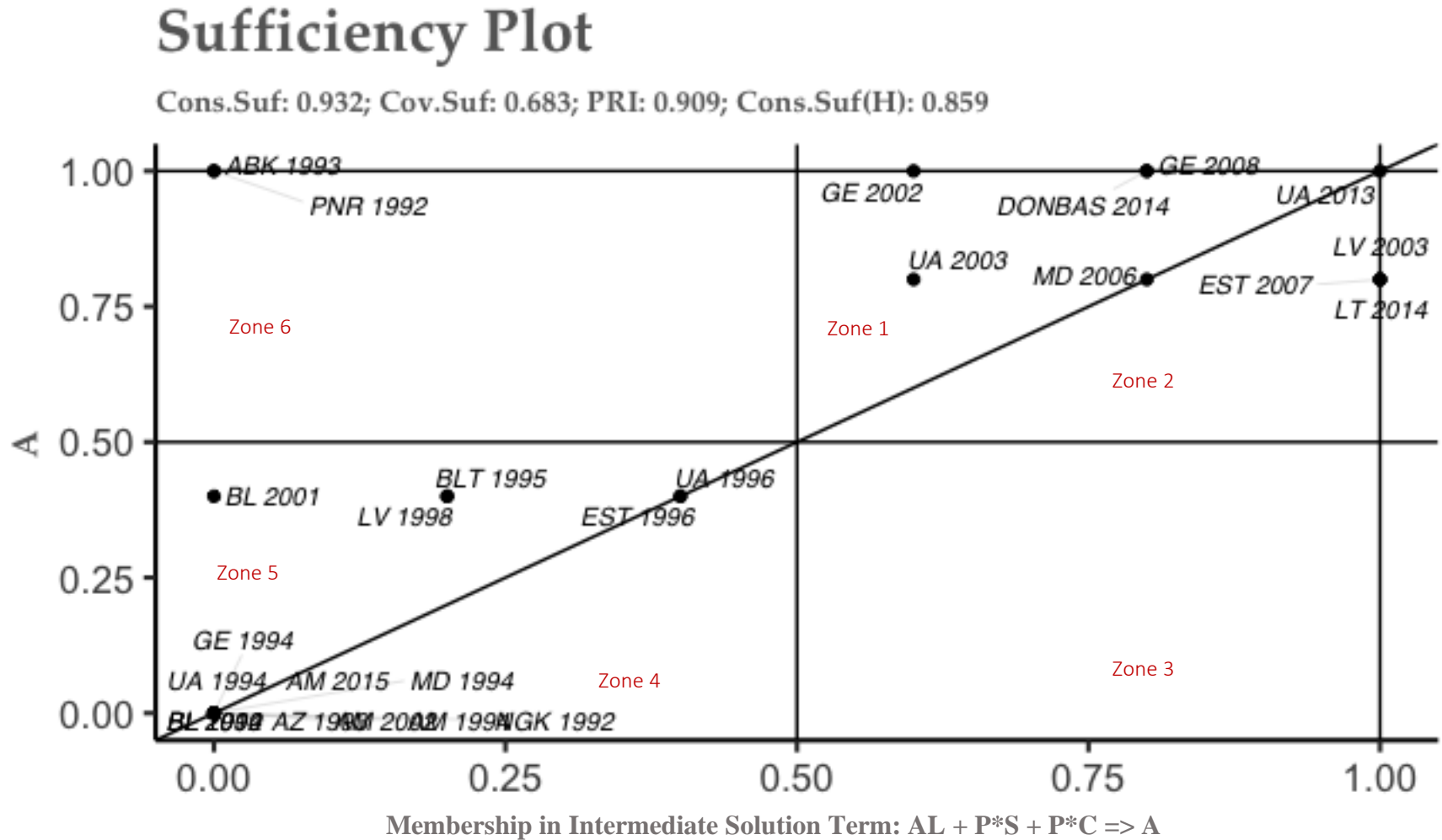
Russia's assertive foreign policy in the contested neighbourhood has been quite diversified across space and time. To understand the similarities and differences between the positive cases, it is useful to examine Zones 1 and 2, which include the outcome of assertive foreign policy implemented by Russia (A) *and* the solution terms ( $AL + P*S + P*C \Rightarrow A$ ). Zone 1 of x-y plot includes three case of Russia's *coercion* – Georgia 2002, Moldova 2006, and Ukraine 2003–, and three case of Russia's *intervention* – Donbas 2014, which refers to conflict in Eastern Ukraine, Georgia 2008, and Ukraine 2013. Starting from the latter group, the case of Ukraine 2013 has become the most recent and clearest symbol of EU-Russia tension.

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<sup>58</sup> A more nuanced description of unexplained cases is provided further below in this chapter.



Figure 4.1: Russia's assertive foreign policy: intermediate solution



The case of Ukraine 2013 refers to the mass demonstrations in Kiev started in November 2013 against President Viktor Yanukovich's refusal to sign the EU-sponsored Association Agreement. For Russia, the EU-sponsored agreement represented the highest point of external pressure in the common regional neighbourhood (Smith 2015). After three months of increasingly violent demonstrations, Yanukovich was driven from power, and an interim government, which was made up of various opposition groups, took over. Shortly after Yanukovich's ouster, unrest erupted on the Crimean peninsula where heavily armed 'little green men' appeared in the streets (Senate 2015). Russian military forces played a major role in the upheaval the Crimean peninsula, which has been formally annexed by Moscow and became part of the Russian Federation on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 2014 after a referendum took place. Similarly, the case of Donbass 2014 refers to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine between the central Ukrainian government and the separatist groups, who were allegedly supported by Russia. The conflict has turned parts of the area into a wasteland, resulting in almost 13, 000 casualties and nearly two million as internally displaced persons and refugees (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner and for Human Rights 2019). Besides the Ukrainian crises, Russia has previously engaged in military confrontations with Georgia in 2008, when Georgia attempted to regain the disputed territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia lost in previous conflicts in the early nineties. The full-scale Russian response through South Ossetia shocked the Georgian government, which had sustained a stunning defeat, leaving Russian troops about 35 kilometres away from the Georgian capital of Tbilisi (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012).

The group of Russia's coercive response is distinguished from the previous one because these post-Soviet countries did not experience a direct or masked Russian military intervention on their territory in the year considered for the analysis, yet they have been suffered from Russia's destabilisation efforts. For instance, the case of Moldova 2006 refers

to Russia's coercive turn against Moldova following the unsuccessful Russia-led memorandum for conflict resolution in Transnistria (the so-called 'Kozak' memorandum). Following the war in 1992, Russia was the main third party in negotiations process between the separatist region of Transnistria and the state of Moldova. Russia attempted to ensure the establishment of a Russia-friendly Transnistria as an autonomous region within a unified Moldova, and thereby checked any attempts to create western linkages by governments in Chisinau through the Kozak memorandum in the early 2000s. The abrupt U-turn by the Moldovan then-president Vladimir Voronin due both to Western pressure and emerging protests by the political opposition and civil society, caused a sharply assertive and coercive turn in Russia's policy toward Moldova (Istomin and Bolgova 2016; Danii and Mascauteanu 2011). Import bans were introduced on Moldovan meat, fruit, and vegetables in April and May 2005 and wines in March 2006, allegedly for health reasons (Crandall 2012). In January 2006 Gazprom cut off Moldova's gas supply for two weeks before it negotiated a gradual price increase in return for a majority share in the national gas company Moldovagaz (Yafimava 2011) Although no direct conflict occurred between the Russia-supported Transnistrian army and the Moldavian state since the war in 1992, Russia unilaterally suspended its troop withdrawal, leaving more than 40 trainloads of ammunition and around 1,000 troops, being practically present on foreign soil (Rogstad 2018; Rytövuori-Apunen 2019, chap. 7).

Similarly, the case of Ukraine 2003 refers to a complex chain of territorial issues and events in the Ukraine-Russia relationship. On 19 September, Russia began to build a dam to link the Russian mainland with the island of Tuzla in the Strait of Kerch. Since Ukraine regards Tuzla as part of its own territory, tensions increased and Ukraine sent its troops to the strait. Although the dispute was resolved following negotiations supervised by NATO and the US, the Orange revolution in 2004 represented a new break in Russia's policy toward Ukraine. The civil disobedience against electoral fraud during 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections,

which saw the Russia-backed candidate as the winning candidate, were a shock for Russian ruling elites. According to the Kremlin, the ‘colour revolutions’ was perceived not only as a Western-sponsored instrument designed to weaken Russia’s influence in the post-Soviet space – e.g. the rose revolution in Georgia in 2003–, but also as a dangerous weapon that might be used to destabilise Russia itself. Since then, Russia has attempted to increase its influence in Ukraine either by using public diplomacy or by adopting coercive means through the use of economic sanctions and suspension of gas supply (Saari 2014; see also Heidelberg Institute for International Conflicts Research 2003; 2004; 2006; 2009). Such instruments were initially quite successful in keeping Ukraine in check and in impeding its further closeness under a Euro-Atlantic influence without recurring to ‘more severe’ measures.

Finally, the dispute with Georgia escalated into a violent crisis in 2002 when Georgia refused Russia’s demand to lead a joint military operation against Chechen rebels in the Pankisi Valley. Georgia, which already had to accept trilateral peacekeeping forces under Russian command for the separatist entities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the 1990s, was rather sceptical of allowing Russian troops to enter the Georgian territory even for counterterrorism operations. Nevertheless, Russian combat aircraft repeatedly attacked the region in order to hunt down Chechen separatists accusing Georgia of not having acted resolutely enough in the Pankisi Valley. At the same time, Russia was deeply concerned by the arrival in Georgia of US military advisors to help train border guard troops in the Pankisi region. This action made Russian analysts suspicious that the Georgian army, with the support of the U.S. military, could try to re-establish Tbilisi’s control over Abkhazia (Naumkin 2002).

Besides the typical cases, the solution identifies three deviant cases consistency in degree (DCCGs) – Estonia 2007, Latvia 2003 and Lithuania 2014. The first two cases regard mainly the policies adopted by Latvia and Estonia towards their Russian-speaking groups as main source of conflict with Russia. Indeed, Russia has repeatedly warned Estonia and Latvia

for mistreating their Russian-speaking minorities (Aalto 2003). As I discuss in the next section, the issue of Russian-speaking minorities has mainly remained at rhetorical level and hindered the diplomatic relations between Russia and the Baltic states during the 1990s; so far, there have not been moments of serious confrontations. Nevertheless, the three Baltic states consider Russian-speaking minority relationship with its motherland a top priority of national security to be managed.

The case of Estonia 2007 refers to the Bronze Soldier affair when the Estonian government decided to relocate the monument of the fighters against Fascism from the centre of Tallinn to the military cemetery. This move by the Estonian government caused outrage among those, who revere the Great Patriotic War both in Estonia and in Russia, and rioting occurred by the Russian-speaking community, which was comprised around 26 percent of Estonia's population in 2007 (Statistics Estonia). This episode, which is the climax of a long cold diplomatic relations between Russia and Estonia, culminated into cyber attacks targeting the country's infrastructure, shutting down the websites of all government ministries, two major banks, and several political parties. The Kremlin was accused of perpetrating the attacks but the European Commission and NATO technical experts were unable to find credible evidence of Russia's responsibility. The seriousness of the attacks not only generated a rapid international response including cyber-defence preparations (Sieber and Brunst 2007) but also introduced the term of *hybrid-warfare* into the study of Russia's foreign policy (Garčević 2019; Seely 2017; Lanoszka 2016; Herzog 2011).

Similarly, the case of Latvia 2003 is one of the several peaks in the complex and conflictual relation between Russia and the Baltic states (Muižnieks 2011). Due to the strict citizenship policy Latvia has adopted toward its Russian-minority, many of Russians living in Latvia have a 'grey' stateless passport (Mole 2012). In response to this situation, Russia has hindered the naturalisation process of the often stateless persons by facilitating the acquisition

of Russian visa for 'non-citizens' living in Latvia. After the successful Latvian referendum on the accession to the EU, Russia has complained to the EU that large parts of the Russian-speaking minority are not entitled to vote. On 14 October, the Duma passed a resolution in which Latvia was accused of violating human rights and discriminating its ethnic minorities (Heidelberg Institute for International Conflicts Research 2003). Moreover, issues of history and memory play a large role in Latvian-Russian interstate relations. Latvian officials have often accused Russia of trying to 'whitewash' the past, particularly Stalinist repressions and the forcible annexation of Latvia. For their part, in both bilateral relations and multilateral fora, Russian officials have regularly accused their Latvian counterparts of 'revising' history, and even of 'glorifying' or 'rehabilitating' Nazism (Muižnieks 2011). In this fight for 'historical' memory, which has important geopolitical implications, the Russian-speaking community is perceived by the Latvia government as a fifth column of 'the Kremlin's destabilization policy' especially the aftermath of Crimea's events (Duvold, Berglund, and Ekman 2020).

Finally, the case of Lithuania 2014 refers to the active support of the Baltic state for EU-led sanctions against Russia in the light of the Ukraine crisis. In response, Russia applied sanctions against Lithuania as a EU member state and restricted the entrance to the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad for Lithuanian road vehicles (Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research 2014, 37). Since Lithuania's entrance into NATO, the countries' approaches to each other have remained unchanged; yet relations with Russia motivate and induce Lithuania's entire foreign policy arena (Jakniūnaitė 2015). However, after Russia's involvement in Ukraine's sign of the EU-led AA at the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit, Lithuania engaged more at the EU level with discussions focused on the probability of a Russian attack and the strength of NATO's commitment to defend Baltic States.

A issue that still remains is how to explain the three DCCGs. First, by comparing the x-y plot within Table 4.1, it is evident that each of DCCGs belong to a specific configuration that differs from those of typical cases grouped in row 10, row 11 and row 12. For instance, the DCCG case Latvia 2003 comprises external pressure (P), the NATO membership for the target state (AL), the presence of Russia's status recognition from peer states (S), and a low state capacity of Russia ( $\sim C$ ). Hence, based on these characteristics alone, we would have expected Latvia 2003 to be on or upper the diagonal. However, Latvia 2003, as all other DCCG, presents a lower membership in the outcome than in the intermediate solution term ( $AL + P*S + P*C \Rightarrow A$ ). This may be due to the kind of calibration of Russia's assertiveness, which has been theoretically justified in Chapter 2. For instance, Russia's reaction to Latvia's discriminatory treatment of the Russian minority has produced nothing more than a diplomatic crisis of words between the two states, which has been appropriately reported by the Heidelberg Conflict Barometer as a 'non-violent crisis' (level two of violence in a scale of five steps), and consequently has been converted into a fuzzy-set value of 0.8. Therefore, it is likely that calibrating differently the outcome assertive regional policy (A) by including also diplomatic crisis or dispute as fully assertive policy instrument may move the DCCG upwards along the diagonal. Second, despite their different configurations, all three cases show the presence of NATO alliance (AL), since the Baltic states have been members of NATO since 2004. This is a crucial difference between the DCCGs and the other positive cases, which cannot count on a military defence pacts to constrain Russia foreign policy.

Taken as a whole, the solution term provides a consistent account for Russia's assertive foreign policy in the contested neighbourhood, as visualised by the x-y plot and the number of typical cases in the top right corner. At the same time, the solution term does not include two pivotal instances of Russia's aggressive policy, namely conflicts over Transnistria in 1992 and over in Abkhazia 1993 and South Ossetia in 1992. These two cases will be more

attentively explained in the next section. At the same time, it is important to state that, although cases in Zone 6 are also deviant cases, they do not contradict the statement of sufficiency. Instead, they are left unexplained by the cross-case model, since they are good instances of the outcome assertiveness ( $A > 0.5$ ) but not of the sufficient solution ( $X < 0.5$ ). Schneider and Wagemann label these cases as ‘deviant cases in coverage’ (2012, 308). If we look back at truth table (Table 4.1), we can see that the two cases hold a membership of 0.8 in row 3, which entails the absence of external pressure ( $\sim P$ ), the absence of military alliance ( $\sim AL$ ), the presence of Russia’s status recognition by the West ( $S$ ), and the absence of Russia’s high state capacity ( $\sim C$ ). The membership of these two cases in row 3 not only come to an odd compared to the majority of other cases, which mainly refers to Russia’s cooperative regional policy, but also have not been included in the minimisation process as it does present any directional expectations explained in the theoretical chapter.

### **4.3 Robustness Test: Alternative Calibration of Assertiveness**

Before analysing the negative outcome, a robustness test on the outcome that implies a different calibration of assertiveness is discussed below.<sup>59</sup> As noted in Chapter 2, all assertive behaviours of Russia except socialisation, which entails diplomatic rhetoric, have been included into the fuzzy set of ‘Assertiveness’ ( $A$ ); and a certain fuzzy value according to my conceptual definition has been assigned to each of them. This calibration has included and investigated cases where Russia adopted *hybrid* strategies toward its neighbours by better specifying the assertive instruments. At the same time, it is reasonable to state that some literature focuses more on military actions or aggressive behaviour when speaking about assertiveness, especially in the case of Russia (Pisciotta 2019; Tipaldou and Casula 2018; Becker et al. 2016; Allison 2013). Therefore, it is to conduct a robustness test by applying a

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<sup>59</sup> For a more detailed explanation of the robustness test, see Appendix A



different calibration of assertiveness in order to see which effects can have to this project. By applying this reasoning, the core of the study would be Russia's *military* aggressiveness, namely the actual use of force against another state – both direct and indirect–, rather than the whole range of assertive foreign policy instruments.

According to the selection of cases, the truth table includes only those cases where Russia had a military confrontation with post-Soviet states as direct belligerent (A2). A threshold of 0.86 has been selected in order to be consistent with the conceptualisation of military assertiveness. This decision moves substantially upper the qualitative threshold of assertiveness by excluding coercive actions as well as non-direct use of force. In applying such calibration to the analysis, only one row, and thus, only one combination of conditions – external pressure, absence of military alliance of the target state, absence of status recognition as great power, and Russia's state capacity (P~AL~SC) – is included in the truth table with a consistency of 0.90. The row includes the cases of Georgia 2008, Ukraine 2013, and Donbass 2014.

After minimisation, the conservative solution (P~AL~SC => A2 ) has been selected due to the low consistency value (0.59) of the parsimonious solution (C=>A2). Two main different findings emerge from this robustness test. On the one hand, contrary to my initial analysis, the lack of status recognition (~S) is an important element for Russia's military intervention. This result is consistent with theoretical assumptions about Russia's assertiveness as response of the Russia's frustration over Western unwillingness to recognise Russia's values and interests in Eurasia. Accordingly, such attitude have polarised not EU-Russia relations but also has triggered a competition of values and vision of the world between the two great powers. Indeed, the language of the Kremlin soon after conflicts escalation towards the West shows deepening frustration and anger (Tsygankov 2014). For example, in his Crimea speech on March 18, 2014, Putin (2014) directly accused Western nations of

‘constantly trying to sweep us into a corner because we have an independent position, because we maintain it and because we call things like they are and do not engage in hypocrisy. But there is a limit to everything. And with Ukraine, our western partners have crossed the line, playing the bear and acting irresponsibly and unprofessionally.’ On the other hand, a high state capacity (C) with a strong control over military and administrative elites is essential in order to extract and mobilise military and economic resources to implement certain decisions. This was the case of Russia both during the war with Georgia as well as the meddling in Ukraine. Despite economic recession after the 2008 financial crisis or mass protests in Moscow against Putin’s third mandate as president in 2012, the highly centralised system in combination with the annexation of Crimea produced a major and lasting increase in the president’s popularity (Hale 2018). However, it is also evident from Appendix that, being this conjunction the only row included in the fuzzy-set of military assertiveness, the conservative solution of the robustness test –  $P \sim AL \sim SC \Rightarrow A2$  – does not consider any counterfactuals as no other logical remainder is included in the minimisation process. Moreover, looking only at Russia’s military interventions in the post-Soviet space precludes scholars to include other interesting cases such as Russia’s coercive energy policy or coercive diplomacy against neighbour states, that would be lost otherwise. Therefore, while an interest in regional powers’ military intervention is justified, it would not be recommendable to investigate it through QCA in the case of Russia alone due to the very low number of positive cases.

#### **4.4 Russia’s non-Assertive Foreign Policy: between Multi-lateral Cooperation and Underbalancing**

The analysis of negated outcome aims to find out which conditions are sufficient to bring a Russia’s non-assertive foreign policy understood either as Russia’s capacity of attracting neighbouring states into regional integration projects but also as Russia’s inability to face threats in a responsive manner. With this objective, the fuzzy-set analysis follows the same

procedure as applied above. Table 4.3 shows the truth table for the outcome non-assertive foreign policy ( $\sim A$ ). The conditions and countries' membership values for each conjunction are identical to the previous analysis. The only modification concerns the re-calibration of 'dispute' into a 0.2 membership value instead of 0.4;<sup>60</sup> in any case, both the values assigned to 'dispute', which belongs to socialisation as foreign policy instrument, is below the cross-over point of 0.5.

Since the analysis is now directed toward the non-outcome, the consistency values inevitably differ. What is evident at first glance is that the number of rows that present the non-outcome is lower than in Table 4.1. Indeed, I set the consistency threshold at the minimum of 0.75 in order to include row 9, which entails cases where Russia adopted 'underbalancing' instruments to maintain a certain degree of regional primacy against the Baltic states. Table 4.2 displays the resultant sufficient paths toward  $\sim A$  and the respective consistency and coverage values. It does not include the absence of military power ( $\sim AL$ ) as necessary condition for non-assertive foreign policy, because  $\sim AL$  has a quite low coverage (0.68) and a very low Relevance of Necessity (RoN) (0.31).<sup>61</sup> This values suggest that the absence of a military alliance of a target state could be a trivial necessary condition due to the high skewness of set-membership (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 233.) In the second analytical step, the truth table is minimised on the basis of Boolean logic. An intermediate solution could not emerge as my directional expectations for a non-assertive foreign policy ( $\sim A$ ), namely absence of external pressure ( $\sim P$ ) and absence of a NATO alliance of the target state ( $\sim AL$ ), the presence of Russia's status recognition by peer states (S), and Russia's high state capacity (C) is already included in row 7. Nonetheless, the parsimonious ( $\sim P + \sim S * \sim C * \sim AL \Rightarrow \sim A$ )

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<sup>60</sup> This decision has been taken due to methodological considerations such as the inclusion within the threshold of pivotal cases

<sup>61</sup> For a more detailed description of the analysis of necessity, see Appendix A

Table 4.3: Truth Table for non-Assertive Foreign Policy

Row	P	S	C	AL	~A	N	Consistency	PRI	Case
7	0	1	1	0	1	1	0.88	0.86	BL 2010
1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.85	0.75	AM 2015
5	0	1	0	0	1	10	0.82	0.81	ABK 1993, AM 1994, AM 2002, AZ1993, BL 1994, BL 2001, BL 2002, GE 1994, MD 1994, NGK 1992, PNR 1992, UA 1994
9	1	0	0	0	1	4	0.76	0.66	BLT 1995, EST 1996, LV 1998, UA 1996
10	1	0	0	1	0	1	0.50	0.00	LT 2014
14	1	1	0	1	0	1	0.50	0.00	LV 2003
15	1	1	1	0	0	1	0.50	0.00	MD 2006
16	1	1	1	1	0	1	0.50	0.00	EST 2007
11	1	0	1	0	0	3	0.36	0.00	DONBAS 2014,GE 2008,UA 2013
13	1	1	0	0	0	2	0.28	0.00	GE 2002,UA 2003
2	0	0	0	1	?	0	-	-	
3	0	0	1	0	?	0	-	-	
4	0	0	1	1	?	0	-	-	
6	0	1	0	1	?	0	-	-	
8	0	1	1	1	?	0	-	-	
12	1	0	1	1	?	0	-	-	

Note: [P] External Pressure, [AL] Alliance, [S] Status Recognition, [C] State Capacity

and the conservative solution ( $\sim P * S * \sim AL + \sim S * \sim C * \sim AL \Rightarrow \sim A$ ) consistently differ in their level of detail.

The conservative solution is more detailed, indicated by the complexity of its conjunction. Moreover, the parsimonious solution includes all logical remainders, making no distinctions between directional expectations and contradictory assumptions. Therefore, in contrast to the analysis of the positive outcome, the conservative solution has been chosen for the non-outcome due to the low number of covered rows in the truth table and to the lack of an intermediate solution. In producing the conservative solution, the analysis made ‘refrains from making assumptions about any logical remainder and is exclusively guided by the empirical information at hand’ (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 162).<sup>62</sup>

#### 4.5 Conservative solution and x-y plot

As in the previous analysis, I construct an x-y plot by tracing membership in the solution term against membership in the negated outcome in order to visualise the fsQCA result for non-assertive foreign policy. Figure 4.3 shows the empirical fit of the conservative solution as a sufficient condition for the non-outcome. With 16 out of 27 cases in Zone 1 and 2, 15 cases are placed above the main diagonal, indicating an almost sufficient condition. There is one DCCG (Belarus 2001) that holds higher membership in the solution than in the outcome (Zone 2). In the top right corner nine typical cases are found. The rest of them (five cases) are still placed in Zone 1, yet their membership is not so high as the group of nine typical cases. Countries in the bottom left corner (both Zone 4 and 5) hold low membership in both sets and are consequently irrelevant for the theoretical argument. In this analysis, such cases are those that present an Russia’s assertive foreign policy.<sup>63</sup> Finally, Zone 3 presents two

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<sup>62</sup> It should be noted that the x-y plot of the parsimonious solution for the negated outcome does not differ much from that of the conservative solution. See Appendix A for a comparison.

<sup>63</sup> However, it should be noted that usually negative output should not be confused with negative outcome as they are two different things. An overlapping of the two concepts can occur in a situation with perfect consistency scores (either 1 or 0), and indeed explaining the negative output or negating the outcome

deviant cases consistency in kind (DCCK). Cases in zone 3 are good instances of the solution term ( $X > 0.5$ )  $\sim P * S * \sim AL$ , yet do not present the outcome ( $Y < 0.5$ ) non-assertive foreign policy. In fsQCA language, they are true logical contradictions (Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 307).

Generally, the cases presented in the x-y plot are representative of Russia's non-assertive foreign policy in the contested neighbourhood across last decades. Indeed, the two paths of the conservative solutions for the non-outcome are the *alternative but not exclusive* routes of Russia's non-assertive foreign policy: the term  $\sim P * S * \sim AL$  includes cases of Russia's cooperative regional policy, where Russia managed to maintain influence over the post-Soviet space through multilateral integration projects; while term  $\sim S * \sim C * \sim AL$  includes examples of Russia's inability or unwillingness to answer promptly and adequately to external pressure.

A detailed presentation of each single case would go behind the intentions of the dissertation; yet the two groups of cases present some differences that should be discussed. Cases presenting both the outcome and the solution term  $\sim P * S * \sim AL$  (except for Belarus 2001) present both systemic and domestic factors. By looking at systemic factors, cases in this solution have in common the absence of NATO alliance for target states ( $\sim AL$ ) as well as the absence of external pressure meant either as the low level of activities from the EU and NATO in the post-Soviet space or as their failure to attract the small neighbouring states ( $\sim P$ ). By looking at domestic conditions, path 1 of the conservative solution shows the presence of Russia's status recognition by the West as great power (S) and, consequently, the recognition of Russia having a special role in the post-Soviet space.

Russia's approach to multilateral cooperation has changed markedly across more than two decades resulting in a more structured regional organisations from early 2000s on. The

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lead both to exactly the same solutions, hence it is understandable how matters can be confused (Duşa 2018, 168).

first phase of Russia's multilateral cooperation projects includes cases like Armenia 1994, Azerbaijan 1993, Georgia 1994, Moldova 1994, and Ukraine 1994, which refer to the membership of mentioned post-Soviet states in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).<sup>64</sup> At the same time, throughout the 1990s, the EU presence in the region was still marginal and not very effective as nowadays. The policies implemented by the EU in the former Soviet Union largely focused on bilateral relations with the newly independent states, Russia included, rather than on developing any clear regional strategy that could go beyond technical and financial assistance. In conjunction with that, the state-building process under which the post-Soviet states went through seemed hardly compatible with regional cooperation, not to mention integration. Many among former Soviet republics, even countries like Georgia and Ukraine that are currently very pro-EU membership, were initially reluctant to accept any decrease of sovereignty after the collapse of Soviet Union (Wirminghaus 2012; Delcour 2011, 35). The kind of regional projects promoted by Russia in the post-Soviet space were not in competition but rather in coexistence with the EU, implying an approach of limited or no interference in the shared neighbourhood (Schunz, Gstöhl, and Van Langenhove 2018, 5). Within such context, Russia appeared to be the central actor for guaranteeing regional security and filling the gap left by the Soviet Union (Dimitrova and Dragneva 2009). This was the case for most of post-Soviet states in the early 1990s, except for the Baltic states, that were dealing with serious ethnic-separatist challenges following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. At that time, Russia aspired to be admitted to higher-status Western clubs such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Group of Seven (G7), and even the NATO to enhance its status in the international arena (Centre for International Studies 1992).

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<sup>64</sup> Ukraine did not ratify the Charter of CIS, however it kept participating in it without being a member state. Ukraine became an associate member of the CIS Economic Union in April 1994.

Table 4.4 Paths to NON-assertive Russia's foreign policy

	Conservative		Parsimonious	
	Path 1	Path 2	Path 1	Path 2
External Pressure (P)	⊗	—	⊗	—
Alliance (AL)	⊗	⊗	—	⊗
Status Recognition (S)	●	⊗	—	⊗
State Capacity (C)	—	⊗	—	⊗
Consistency	0.82	0.79	0.83	0.79
PRI	0.81	0.72	0.82	0.72
Raw Coverage	0.70	0.23	0.77	0.23
Unique Coverage	0.67	0.21	0.70	0.16
Covered Cases/Uniquely Covered Cases in Bold	ABK 1993, AM 1994, AM 2002, AZ 1993, BL 1994, BL 2001, BL 2002, GE 1994, MD 1994, NGK 1992, PNR 1992, UA 1994; BL 2010	AM 2015; BLT 1995, EST 1996, LV 1998, UA 1996	ABK 1993, AM 1994, AM 2002, AZ 1993, BL 1994, BL 2001, BL 2002, GE 1994, MD 1994, PNR 1992, UA 1994; BL 2010	AM 2015; BLT 1995, EST 1996, LV 1998, UA 1996
Solution Consistency	0.82		0.82	
Solution PRI	0.80		0.80	
Solution Coverage	0.91		0.93	
Model (Total)	M1(1)		M1(1)	

Note: black circles indicate the presence of a condition, crossed-out circles its absence. The Intermediate solution rests on the simplifying assumption that the logical remainder is sufficient for the outcome. Where the solution yields multiple models, the model with the highest solution consistency is reported.



Therefore Russia's aspiration in the region could still be observed with suspicion, yet it was not openly obstructed. In this difficult transition period, elites of post-Soviet states were still bounded through political, economic and cultural ties to the old regime of Soviet Union (Belousov and Vlasov 2010). Consequently, it is not a surprised to see that states of post-Soviet space such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova have joined the CIS, a Russian-led regional integration structure that was created to cope with interdependence after the USSR's disintegration.

Nevertheless, it would be misleading to define Russia's foreign policy of early 1990s as successful in maintaining regional primacy due to both structural and domestic constrains. Firstly, while the leaders of newly independent states agreed on the end of the Soviet Union, they diverged on the motivations for initiating a new regional organisation (Brzezinski and Sullivan 1997). On the one hand, the CIS served Russia's necessity to preserve the central role in security, economic and political matters; on the other hand, the membership of CIS for some post-Soviet states, like Belarus and Armenia, was considered as an automatic steps; whereas to Ukraine or Georgia, the CIS was seen as a temporary arrangement on the way to independence. For the Baltic states, the CIS was never an option. However, the Kremlin soon realised that the CIS has long proved its ineffectiveness and inability to adopt binding resolution for its members because neither strong ideology was built nor strong leader emerged (Delcour 2011, 27; Hedenskog and Larsson 2007). Secondly, although Russia was still perceived the main heir of Soviet Union and, consequently, the strongest regional power in the post-Soviet space, it was not strong enough to act as an engine for the new integration project in the early 1990s despite its control over the area to prevent any competing-region building project. Therefore, Russia initially managed to incorporated most of neighbouring countries into a Russia-led project of regional cooperation (~A) thanks also to the lack of willingness both from the EU to promote a regional vision of the post-Soviet space and from

the target states that were experiencing domestic troubles (~P). In this context, Russia had still optimistic expectations to be (an equal) partner with the West (S) despite the complexity of its political and economic conditions (~C). Finally, no hostile military alliance to Russia were built (~AL). Nevertheless, the experiment of the CIS poorly served his intentions of promoting Russian influence in the post-Soviet space.

The second phase of Russia's multilateral cooperation projects in specific fields such as the CSTO and EAEU include cases like Armenia 2002, Belarus 2002, Belarus 2010, and Armenia 2015.<sup>65</sup> These cases of Russia's multilateral regional policy differ from the previous group in several aspects. By the turn of the millennium, the newly elected President of Russia Vladimir Putin identified the near abroad as a key priority. In light of the disillusionment with the CIS, Russia started to pursue a targeted strategy for increasing its influence in the post-Soviet space by developing multilateral cooperation through smaller regional organisations with those states most inclined to cooperate with Russia (Aris 2010). These regional organisations cover several fields from traditional military cooperation (CSTO) to multilateral economic cooperation and most recently even economic and political integration (EAEU). Despite their achievement in developing Russia's multilateral agenda, Russia's overwhelming dominance in the CSTO and EAEU is still not universally welcomed by other members states, which have negotiated their participation and engagement by demanding political concessions from Moscow on other issues (Dutkiewicz, Sakwa, and Sakwa 2014).

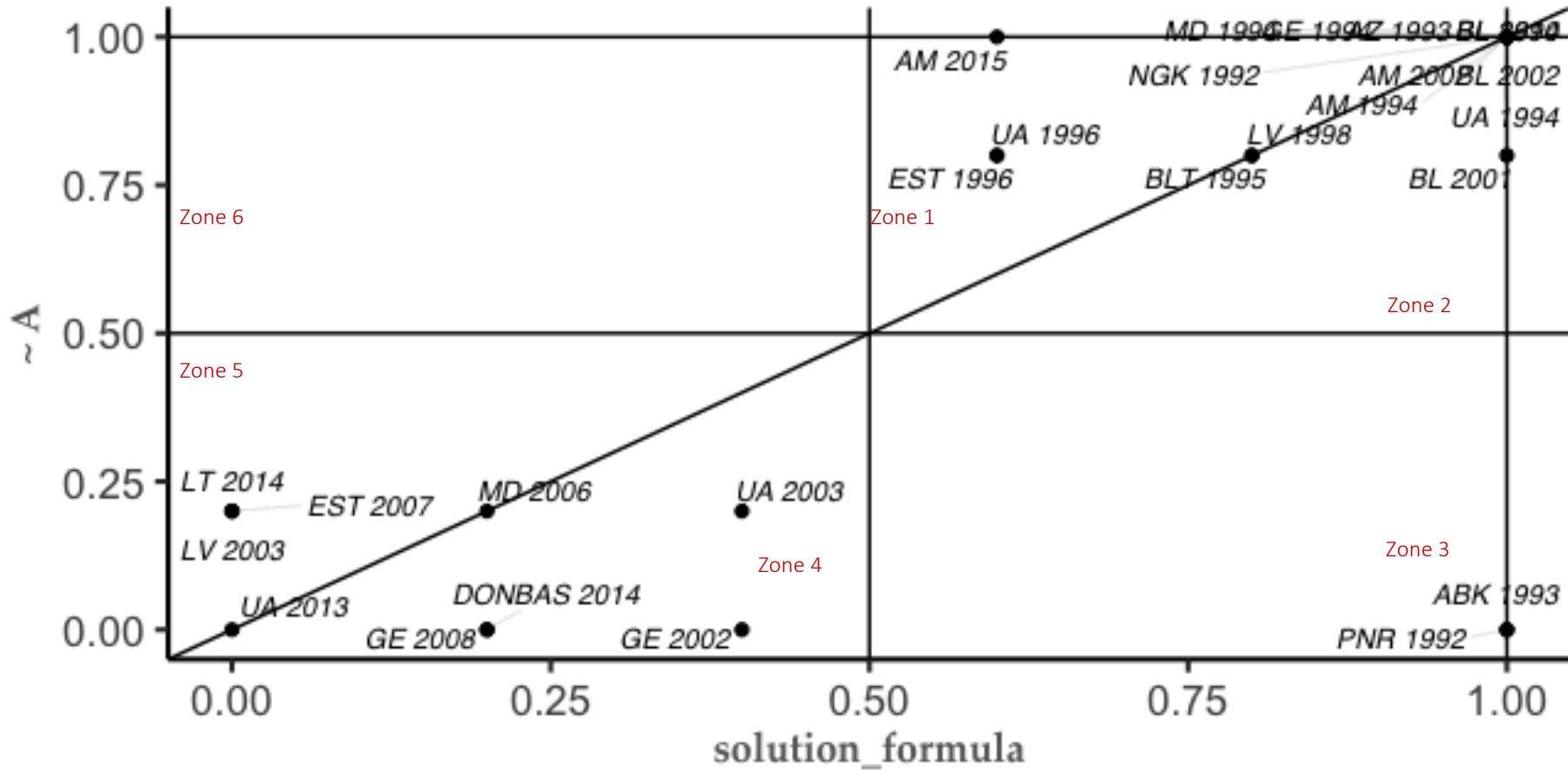
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<sup>65</sup> A third Russia-led organisation such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which aims at harmonising approaches to regional security challenges, has not been included because no cases considered among the shared neighbourhood between Russia and the EU is member of it.

Figure 4.2: Russia's non-assertive foreign policy: conservative solution

# Sufficiency Plot

Cons.Suf: 0.820; Cov.Suf: 0.912; PRI: 0.805; Cons.Suf(H): 0.805



Membership in conservative solution term:  $\sim P * S * \sim AL + \sim S * \sim C * \sim AL \Rightarrow \sim A$

Not only Russia has developed a more limited but nuanced approach to multilateral cooperation in the post-Soviet space compared to CIS, but also the external regional environment has gone through several transformations since the 1990s. As already argued in the previous chapter, the EU's approach to the post-Soviet space went through multiple stages relying first on more soft-law instruments based on persuasion and assistance and then moving to a more comprehensive, binding and detailed legal framework structuring relations between the EU and its Eastern neighbours (Gstöhl and Schunz 2018). The EU gradual shift to hard-law contractual framework toward its Eastern neighbours had a strong impact on Russia's regional policy. Particularly, with the launch of the EaP in 2009 Russia perceived that the implicit consensus on the nature of EU engagement with the region was violated constraining Russia's own strategy in the region (Zagorski 2010). The EaP then accelerated the formation of Russian own highly legalised integration project. After a period of stagnation, in 2009, the CSTO reached an agreement to establish the Collective Operational Reaction Force that reflects Russian dominance of the collective military component, and, thus, serves to ingrain Russia as a vital military sponsor for its members (Aris 2010). Similarly, the launch of EAEU in 2010, which included Belarus and Kazakhstan as co-founders, was then accompanied by the quest to include other post-Soviet states, especially those that has prospect of concluding an Association Agreement with the EU such as Armenia and Ukraine. Thus, the relation between the two regional powers moved from coexistence to competition affecting their approach to the shared neighbourhood (Schunz, Gstöhl, and Van Langenhove 2018).

While pushing neighbouring states to join the EAEU has been an unsuccessful strategy with Moldova and Georgia, and even detrimental for Ukraine, it was favourable to a different extent with Belarus and Armenia. In the first case, as co-founder of the Eurasian Economic Community in 2000 that evolved into a custom union in 2007, Belarus has always been a reluctant observer of EU political conditionality within the ENP and the EaP later. At the same

time, Belarus had resisted every opportunity for more binding cooperation under the EAEU delaying the signature of customs code on its territory until 6 July 2011. Such behaviour is not surprising as Belarus, although to a lesser extent than other post-Soviet space, undertakes political balancing to maximise their capacity of survival (Booth and Wheeler 2007). However, while the pursuit of both directions – if not pressed for choice – could have helped to modernise the county for the benefit of all (Korosteleva 2014), Belarus has nowadays opted for cautious cooperation with Russia, which is still Belarus' main ally.

In the second case, Armenia reflects the position of some countries of the post-Soviet space that simply cannot afford to balance and they have been put in a position of choice between the two main centres of power. In the early 2010s, although hardly progressed in democratisation, Armenia vigorously adopted EU policy and institutional templates (Delcour and Wolczuk 2015). At the same time, in a surprise move, the president of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan announced on 3 September 2013 that his country was abandoning its Association Agreement (AA) with the EU and instead, committed the country to seek membership in the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which was officialised in 2015. Armenia did not actually initiate the U-turn but it was rather the product of its overwhelming dependence on Russia. Armenia's pro-Russian orientation manifests itself in two key respects: security and dependency in key economic sectors. First, Armenia relies on Russia as a primary security guarantor against Azerbaijan as well as against Turkey. Reliance on Russian military capabilities and participation in Russia-led multilateral organisations such as the CSTO was already in Armenia's strategy to strengthen its position in the frozen conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh and probably to deter further escalation. Second, although a Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) was signed between Armenia and the EU in 2017 as a signal to overcome the bitter distrust in the EU Commission provoked by Armenia U-turn, in terms of economic links, Russia is the most important source of investment in Armenia

and a relevant destination for labour migration. It is also a key supplier of energy to Armenia and has a monopoly over gas distribution (Minassian 2008). In sum, Armenia's (inter)dependence with Russia is broad and deep and has left Armenia very low space of manoeuvre to negotiate its position toward the EU in the short time (Terzyan 2019). In the current scenario of regional competition, the membership of Belarus and Armenia in the EAEU and the peripheral partnership built with the EU represents, on the one hand, an example of marginal and even failing external pressure on the shared neighbourhood ( $\sim P$ ); on the other, an example of successful Russia's maintenance of regional primacy without recurring to assertive and even aggressive instruments ( $\sim A$ ).

Solution term  $\sim P * S \sim AL$  provides a consistent account for non-assertive foreign policy as it addresses a large number of typical cases, where Russia managed to attract neighbouring states in its sphere of influence without recurring to the use of force. All the same, how can the uncharacteristic case of Belarus 2001 as well as the deviant cases of Abkhazia 1993 and Transnistria 1992 be explained? It is apparent from Table 4.3 that Belarus 2001 shares the same configuration with many other cases of Russia's non-assertive foreign policy (row 5), which comprises the absence of external pressure ( $\sim P$ ), the absence of military alliance ( $\sim AL$ ) as Belarus is not a member of NATO, and of Russia's low state capacity ( $\sim C$ ); while it includes the presence of Russia's status recognition ( $S$ ). Hence, based on these characteristics alone, we would have expected that Russia acted in a more cooperative way with Belarus. In fact, as previously mentioned, Belarus has never expressed its willingness to enter other region-building projects like the EU ( $\sim P$ ). Nevertheless, as neoclassical realist literature suggests, the absence of external threat does not guarantee that states will always act in a cooperative way with its neighbours. It rather recommends to analyse the domestic conditions that may influence determined policy behaviours (see e.g. Meibauer 2020).

In this case, Belarus entered in a dispute with Russia because of the conditions for planning and implementing a likely state of the Union between the states. Since negotiations in early 2000s, Belarus has attempted to shape an independent domestic policy and economy from Russia without really succeeding in it (Deyermond 2004). On the other hand, it should be noted that the dispute of 2001 between Russia and Belarus has never escalated letting Russia opt for a rather diplomatic manoeuvring, which then resulted in Belarus being a co-founding state of the Eurasian Economic Union.

Regarding two deviant cases of conflicts both with Georgia in 1993 and with Moldova in 1992 over Abkhazia and Transnistria respectively, Russia resorted to a rather assertive response that included a direct military intervention. Just before and directly after the fall of the Soviet Union, ethnic Russians living on the Eastern bank of the Dnestr river were concerned with suddenly becoming an unprotected minority in the newly born states of Moldova. This fear was justified by the Moldovan nationalistic movement, which promoted the Romanisation of Moldova. After the collapse of the USSR in August 1991, Moldova quickly built up a military forces and on March 2, 1992 President Snegur launched a war against Transnistria to protect the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of Moldova. The Russian military officially invaded on 20 June 1992, in response to Moldova's assault and subsequent capture of the city of Bendery. Conflict ended with a ceasefire on July 21, 1992. Since the ceasefire, no meaningful agreements have been passed, nor has the conflict resurfaced. Similarly, weary of Georgia's attempts to seek independence and their treatment of minorities once freed from the USSR, the Mountain People's Congress gathered in Sukhumi, the capital of Abkhazia, and decided Abkhazia must secede from Georgia. On a similar line, in 1990, South Ossetia proclaimed its status as a democratic republic within the Soviet Union, boycotting Georgian independence elections. Tensions rose for the next two years as the USSR dissolved, Georgia repeatedly annulled Abkhazian as well as South Ossetian decisions of sovereignty and the two Caucasian de-facto entities continued to insist on their independence. Russia both

overtly and covertly supported the Abkhazians and South Ossetians in their fight for independence until a ceasefire agreement signed between Georgia and Russia was reached in 1992 (South Ossetia) and in 1993 (Abkhazia). Given the internal weakness that Russia was facing due to the break-up of Soviet Union as well as the efforts that Russia put to detach itself from the Soviet past and to be accepted into the Western-led international institutions, it was unexpected to see Russia intervening military into the two neighbouring states. While this section cannot provide a comprehensive treatment of the two cases, a possible explanation for Russia's military intervention at that time could lie in case-specific circumstances such as the high ethnically fragmentation of the two post-Soviet states.<sup>66</sup>

Different from the previous one, the term  $\sim S^* \sim C^* \sim AL$  of the conservative solution includes cases of Russia's *inability* or *unwillingness* to respond more assertively to external threats: i.e., the Baltic states 1995, Estonia 1996, Latvia 1998, and Ukraine 1996. An attitude that neoclassical realist scholars like Schweller have labelled 'underbalancing' (2004). As noted above, Russia's dispute with the Baltic states since independence in the 1990s revolves mainly around their membership into the European sphere and in NATO, which has progressively increased Russia's sense of insecurity (Schmitt 2019; Mearsheimer 2014; Trenin 2014). All three Baltic states have joined NATO Partnership for Peace Program in 1994 and, in the following years, they participated in a number of projects aimed at adjust technological and military structure with those of the West (Mihkelson 2003). Moscow has initially demanded that Baltic states remained neutral and has categorically rejected their joining NATO. Indeed, Russia has always perceived the Baltic states as a region of strategic importance for several reasons, among others the shared borderland, which is crossed by very busy routes of passenger, goods and services traffic every day (Sergunin 2013).

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<sup>66</sup> This argument will be further investigated into a within-case analysis in the next chapters.



In this background, the Baltic states presented the absence of defensive military alliance against for neighbour states ( $\sim$ AL). In absence of this military constrain and in light of Russia's approach to NATO expansion in 1997, a purely realist analysis would expect Russia to act quite assertively to halt the Baltic countries to join the Euro–Atlantic influence. However, little action has followed the harsh warning of Russia to the US of not moving NATO borders within former-Soviet Union (Götz 2017). In a similar manner, Russia's discourse about the duty to protect the Russian-speaking minority in the Estonia and Latvia, which was often framed by official discourse as oppressed people or 'compatriots', has remained at rhetorical level in the 1990s (Berg and Ehin 2009). Finally, the divergence between Russia and Ukraine in 1996 that regarded the status of Crimea's Russian-speaking population and the claim of the former-Soviet navy base in Sebastopol was not promptly and effectively managed by the Kremlin (Sasse 2007). Despite the fact that this non-violent crisis was then pacifically resolved through mutual diplomatic efforts, the peninsula of Crimea has remerged almost twenty years later as the main 'bone of contention' between Russia and Ukraine in 2014. Likewise, Russia's inference into Ukrainian domestic affairs was not only circumscribed to territorial issues but also affected Ukraine's position in the global arena.

#### **4.6 Interpretation of Analytical Findings: Fit of the Integrated Model**

The core of QCA does not end with truth tables and x-y plots of solutions as they should always be related back to cases and theoretical expectations (Rihoux and Ragin 2009, 65; Schneider and Wagemann 2012, 280). With this aim, Figure 4.3 shows to which pattern or configuration of the model presented in Chapter 2 the empirical cases belong. As it is evident, seven of eight patterns of the model were covered by the analysis, and consequently, data are consistent with seven out of eight propositions. At the same time, two of the confirmed propositions (P<sub>2</sub> and P<sub>4</sub>) need some specifications; while one remaining configuration (P<sub>3</sub>) has not included any empirical observation, and consequently, the corresponding proposition

could not be either confirmed or disconfirmed. Due to the relatively small number of observations, which comprises 27 cases in total, some of the patterns have included only one case, not providing a strong support for the proposition. However, the integrated model provides us with the analytical tools to observe *how* conditions interact to bring Russia's foreign policy in the contested neighbourhood during the selected time-frame as well as to detect differences between foreign policy instruments adopted by Russia.

The group on the right corner from pattern 5 to pattern 8 present the absence of NATO membership (military alliance) for the neighbouring states, which gives Russia a larger range of manoeuvre for maintaining its regional primacy without risks of retaliation or military escalation (Tsygankov 2018). At the same time, Russia did not always react aggressively in absence of military alliance. It is evident from the model that the type of outcome in this group of patterns differs based on the kind of combination of NATO alliance with domestic conditions. Pattern 7 shows that, under absence of recognition by the West of Russia's status as great power ( $\sim S$ ), Russia has invaded the neighbouring countries such as in the case of Georgia as well as Ukraine when its state capacity was high enough to respond adequately and promptly to the perceived external threats (C).

In contrast, pattern 8 shows cases of Russia's socialisation, namely when Russia has responded to external threats by recurring to harsh rhetorical discourse, yet little or no assertive action has followed. The main difference between pattern 7 and pattern 8 relies in the level of state capacity, a factor that tips the balance between socialisation/coercion on one hand, and military intervention on the other hand. It is not a case that pattern 8 includes political conflicts with the Baltic countries during the 1990s as at that time Russia was struggling to recover from the economic abrupt following the break-up of Soviet Union as well as from the fight against internal disruption – e.g. the war in Chechnya. Within this situation, Russia's tax collection, and consequently its extraction capacity, was in tatters in the late nineties due to

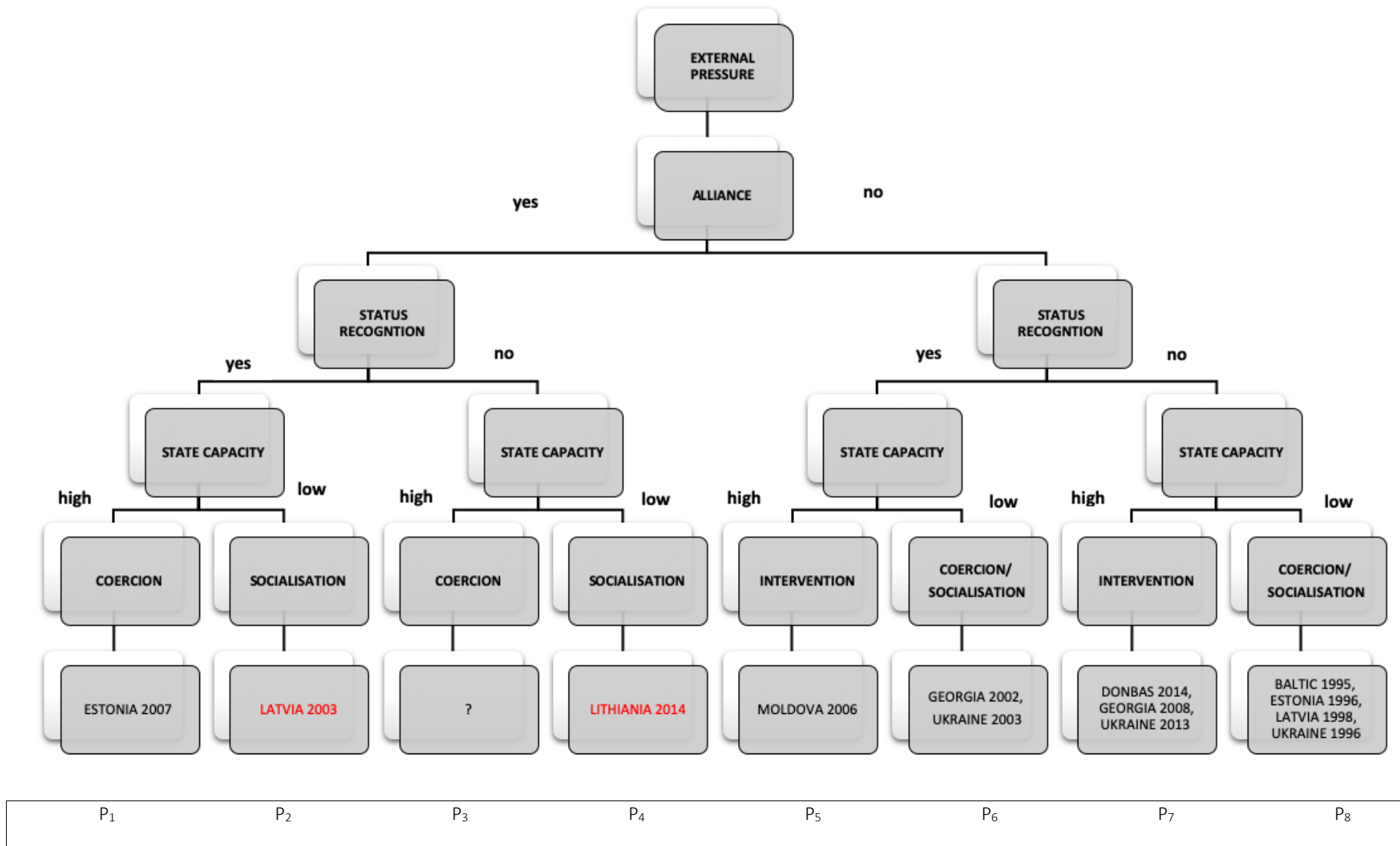
disastrous consequences of economic reforms following the break-up of Soviet Union and it took several years to completely recover from it (Oliker and Charlick-Paley 2002; Treisman 1998).

Under recognition by the West of Russia's status as great power (S), Russia's foreign policy outcomes slightly differ from previous groups. Pattern 6 confirms proposition 6 (P<sub>6</sub>) by presenting two cases of Russia's coercion, namely Georgia 2002 and Ukraine 2003. Within this pattern, Russia has two constraints not to use military intervention: on the one hand, the efforts by the West to include Russia in the current Western hegemony would be spoiled if Russia had openly antagonised the West (S). In the early 2000s, despite the parenthesis of 'colour revolutions', Russia was still profoundly engaged in a political and economic dialogue with the EU as a peer state. An act of force against neighbouring states, which were already in negotiations with the EU to build the ENP program, would have hindered the very fragile mutual trust that was achieved through the signing of the Common Spaces framework for cooperation between the EU and Russia in a wide range of areas (Zaslavskaya 2016). On the other hand, despite its economic recovery due to the oil revenues, the unsolved issue of Chechen separatism, which revealed itself in the terror attack of Beslan in 2004, shook new convictions about the apparent consolidation of Russia and reinforced old beliefs in the need to strengthen the Russian state (~C) (Lynch 2005b).

More problematic is pattern 5 since proposition 5 (P<sub>5</sub>) assumes that external pressure (P) together with absence of military alliance (~AL) should bring to Russia's military intervention in presence of status recognition (S) and high state capacity (C). However, the actual empirical observation includes only the case of Moldova 2006, a case that is partially inconsistent with previous assumptions. Since the conflict in 1992, no direct clashes between the state of Moldova and the Russian-backed troops in Transnistria have occurred, yet, no significant step towards the settlement of the conflict has been achieved. In addition to that,

Russian troops are practically based in Transnistria aiming at modify the domestic political structure of Moldova by strategically supporting dissident groups. As already seen in pattern 6, the rapprochement between the EU and Russia after the disillusionment of the 1990s triggered very cautious reactions by Russia in order not to undermine cooperation with the EU (Freire 2018). Therefore, even in front of the external threat to its national interests regarding the case of Moldova and unsolved issue of Transnistria, Russia has preferred not to react by using direct force against Moldova even if Russia had the capacity to do so (Rogstad 2018). Certainly, the presence of Russian troops on a foreign soils already represents an ‘easy’ political leverage against a recalcitrant neighbour with no need to escalate violence. Indeed, even after digesting the bitter pill caused by the Moldovan government refusing to sign the Kozak memorandum, the Kremlin did no change its position on the conditions about the settlement (in Russian ‘урегулирование’, *uregulirovanye*) of the frozen conflict in Transnistria. On a purely theoretical point of view, the case could be considered an example of Russia’s intervention, as the economic sanctions and mutual threats occurred in 2006 after the failure of the Kozak memorandum are direct consequences of the stalemate since the 1992 (Dembińska and Mérand 2019; Crandall 2012). Nevertheless, from an empirical point of view, the case of Moldova of 2006 cannot be compared to the invasion of Ukraine in 2014 or to the conflict with Georgia in 2008 as scale of violence differs substantially.

Figure 4.3: a Neoclassical realist model of Russia's foreign policy in the contested neighbourhood



By looking at the case of Moldova 2006 as an episode of coercion, pattern 5, and consequently P<sub>5</sub>, should be re-discussed by considering the role played both by ideas such as status recognition (S) as well by domestic condition such as state capacity (C).

The group on the left corner from pattern 1 to pattern 4 presents the presence of NATO membership (AL) for the neighbouring states, which drastically diminishes the range of foreign policy instruments adopted by Russia to face an external threat (Bugajski 2016). In facing a risk of international retaliation, which could take the form of expulsion from international organisations, economic sanctions, or even armed conflict, Russia would be dissuaded from using direct military intervention against a member of the EU and of NATO. At the same time, this does not mean that Russia would stay quietly in front of rising external pressure, but that Russia adopts alternative instruments other than military force in order to exert influence on post-Soviet states (Adamsky 2018; Fridman 2018). The case of Estonia 2007, included in Pattern 1, is an example of such strategy. Domestically, the oil and gas export revenues have contributed to the substantial economic growth Russia has experienced in the 2000s; moreover, the institutional reforms promoted by Vladimir Putin of eliminating Russia's gubernatorial elections has increased the Kremlin's control over regional entities (Goode 2007; Ross 2005). In this framework of newly gain of high state capacity (C), Russia has managed to destabilise the Baltic states through coercive instruments yet not recurring to the direct use force (Winnerstig 2014).

While the case of Estonia 2007 is a perfect example of how Russia's coercion has been implemented in presence of constrains such as the NATO membership of the target state and of opportunities such as Russia's high state capacity, the cases of Latvia 2003 and Lithuania 2014 come to an odd with proposition 2 (P<sub>2</sub>) and proposition 4 (P<sub>4</sub>). Based on previous studies of Russia's foreign policy, P<sub>2</sub> and P<sub>4</sub> expect that Russia will be unable to act upon system level incentives and constraints by simply recurring to socialisation, if the Russian state lacks

extraction capacity and autonomy (~C) (see e.g. Götz 2017; Oldberg 2003). This has been the case when Baltic states officially moved towards a EU and NATO membership since the 1990s, yet Russia has maintained a rather low profile in foreign policy behaviour (Morozov 2004; Kramer 2002). In contrast to that, the case of Latvia 2003 and of Lithuania 2014 are examples of Russia's coercive policy in *absence* of Russia's high state capacity. Indeed, the dataset of State Fragility Index has considered Russia in 2003 and in 2014 slightly more fragile compared to other Russia's performances in several years until 2015 (Marshall and Elzinga-Marshall 2017).

The discrepancy between theoretical assumptions and empirical observations encourage scholars to engage in a more in-depth discussion about the role and the measurement of state capacity in Russia's foreign policy literature. Starting from the latter, despite difference in operationalisation, the calibration of Russia's fragility index of year 2003 in a 0.4 value of the fuzzy-set, which entails a slightly non-membership into the set 'Russia's high state capacity', is in line with the reasoning of other scholars, such as Elias Götz (2017, 12) that argues how '(a)t least until 2003, [...] Russia remained weak in terms of extraction capacity and state autonomy'. In his study, although Götz does not refer to aggregated data set including coercive and administrative capacity, he recurs to the analysis of tax allocation and revenue to measure how Russia's state capacity increased from the early 1990s until nowadays (Götz 2017). Moreover, it is likely that the conceptualisation of Russia's coercive instruments would require a more nuanced analysis. The HIIK dataset does not distinguish the rhetorical *discourse* like the 'threat of force' from non-violent *actions* such as economic sanctions and compellence for non-violent crisis, which are both operationalised as level 2 of the 5-values violence scale. By applying indiscriminately this operationalisation to the cases of Russia's regional policy, this analysis may have missed some specific features of cases.

Beyond operationalisation issues, the case of Lithuania 2014 can help to shed lights on some theoretical fallacies in the role of state capacity in Russia's foreign policy. According to the State Fragility Index, Russia scored a lower state capacity in 2014 compared to previous years (Marshall and Elzinga-Marshall 2017). This is understandable since Russia's annexation of the Crimean peninsula and the start of the conflict in the Donbass region, the EU has introduced three waves of restrictive measures against Russia, which are regularly updated. Having thus expanded from measures targeting individuals to entire sectors, the current EU sanctions policy has impacted Russia's financial markets, energy sector, defence industry, and consequently, has affected Russia's capacity to extract and mobilise sources (Mau 2016). In this tense scenario, one would expect Russia not to escalate the crisis in order not to further harm Russia's economy, especially Russian consumers. Instead, the Russian government banned in August 2014 imports of different food and agricultural products from the European Union, especially against Lithuania, which was one of the most eager member state to press the EU institutions in applying sanctions against Russia (Oja 2015). Choosing the food sector as the subject of countersanctions was convenient for Russia because the Kremlin had already undertaken some protectionist measures to improve production and consumption of domestic food products, thereby making Russia more independent of Western influence (Pospieszna, Skrzypczyńska, and Stępień 2020). At the same time, the countersanctions promoted by Russia resulted during the worst crisis between the West and Russia since the end of the Cold War. Moscow's distrust of the European Union was now at the highest level since the European Union's EaP Programme, which was presented as a 'civilizational choice' for post-Soviet states' characterization likely, was regarded as a provocation by Moscow. Furthermore, Putin, who had previously included Russia within the European cultural sphere, started positioning Russia as a unique civilization in contrast to the moral decadence of contemporary Europe (Larson and Shevchenko 2014c). Therefore, being Russia not any more interested in catching



for the West's attention in a constructive manner in order to redress injured Russian prestige in the international arena (~S), it is likely that the ideological and geopolitical motivations trump the domestic constraints.

This argument does not aim to disregard the role of state capacity and source extraction in an integrated model of foreign policy outcome. However, the case of Lithuania 2014, in comparison with the Baltic countries in the early 1990s, shows how Russia can behave differently – ranging from socialising instruments (P<sub>8</sub>) to coercive ones (P<sub>4</sub>) – under absence of high state capacity (~C). Therefore, it would be interesting to further specify and discuss what specific dimensions of state capacity's measurement are pivotal in the case of Russia instead to use aggregated data sets. Some studies have considered Russia's countersanctions as instrumental to achieve, among various objectives, a bolstered domestic public support. During the 1990s, the Kremlin had to deal with an impoverished audience with very low trust in government and local institutions. In contrast to that, although Russia faced serious economic problems after the sanctions were implemented, the economic sanctions were not recognised by the population as a problem (Kazin 2016). Instead, not only it was accepted as a necessary condition, but also became the basis for a large-scale 'rally-around-the-flag' effect in Russia and the increase in Putin's approval rating (Treisman 2014). Related to this last argument, another interesting 'missing condition' for this pattern could be the role of leadership. In the case of Russia, Vladimir Putin has been a central figure in constructing an effective national discourse not only about cultural and historical ties with Russian borderlands but also to strengthen the Russian state at the international level, by restoring Russia's status among world powers (Roberts 2017). Furthermore, Putin adopted a strategy aimed at strengthening central state authority, tightening its grip on economic and political institutions and strengthening its strategic capabilities (Hussein Mezher Khalaf and Husham Ezzulddin Majeed 2018).

What about the non-observed pattern? Proposition 3 ( $P_3$ ) assumes that under external pressure (P), military alliance for target state ( $\sim AL$ ), lack of status recognition ( $\sim S$ ) and high state capacity (C), a great power would be able to adopt coercive instruments in order to maintain regional primacy. Although there are no cases confirming proposition 3 ( $P_3$ ), it is not difficult to imagine how this pattern could resonate with previous results of Russia's foreign policy. As mentioned, status recognition is the most well-developed theme within the ideational argument of Russia's foreign policy (Smith 2014; Urnov 2014). Accordingly, Russia's actions reflect the kind of recognition that Russia obtains from other great powers, in particular the West, which is perceived as Russia's significant Other. Consequently, the less recognition Russia obtains in the international arena, the more assertive it will be with its neighbours to re-establish legitimacy (Forsberg 2014; Larson and Shevchenko 2014, 2010). The early year of Putin's 'pragmatic cooperation' quickly gave way to Russia's position as a great power. Since NATO enlargement in 2004, besides sporadic moments of strategic partnership, Russia has complained about lack of recognition of Russia's special role in the post-Soviet space resulting into more assertive foreign policy, which did not take the requests and interests of the West in consideration. The ideational dimension is important to gauge because it tells us how ideas and perception can have an impact on foreign policy-making.

#### **4.7 Solution Terms and Theoretical Implications**

From the minimisation process, five sets of sufficient findings with theoretical importance can be derived from the two fuzzy-set analyses. Among them, three cases can follow multiple paths toward the outcome – Estonia 2007, Moldova 2006, Latvia 2003. In these cases, the outcome occurs for more than one reason. I will discuss the three paths of the intermediate solution for the outcome ( $AL + P*S + P*C \rightarrow A$ ), and the two paths of the conservative solution for the non-outcome ( $\sim P*\sim ALS + \sim AL*\sim S*\sim C \rightarrow \sim A$ ). Finally, I will address the limitations of this fsQCA study.

First, the presence of NATO membership in a target state (AL) as a sufficient condition for Russia's assertive foreign policy (A) has two theoretical implications for the case of Russia. On the one hand, since NATO's decision to expand in 1994, Russia's perception toward the North-Atlantic alliance has been characterised by cautious scepticism and even open antagonism during the most strained crises. In particular, when the Kremlin's protests over NATO's expansion were ignored, while alliance continued to include new members and build new military infrastructure on territories bordering Russia, Moscow started to perceive NATO as a tool serving hegemonic ambitions of the Western civilization in general and the United States in particular (German 2017; Allison 2013). This is not surprising since Russia was rarely accommodating the post-Cold War liberal order by often defending the necessity of multipolarity in the international relations or by openly competing with it (see e.g. Diesen 2020; Sakwa 2020). In addition to that, Russia's historical experience of security interactions with the West, including multiple defensive wars, resulted in Russia's defence mentality or the entrenched fear of being attacked from the western borders (Tsygankov 2018). For these reasons, the presence of a defensive military alliance at its Western borders has become a source of external threat for Moscow. On the other hand, Russian actions in the Baltic states after their NATO membership in the alliance have been geared toward achieving strategic aims with a primary concern to stay *below* NATO's threshold of reaction. Since 2004, the Baltic states have enjoyed the security provided by NATO's Article 5 in relation to collective defence. After the events in Ukraine in 2014 and increased Russian probing activity in the Baltic Region, NATO has significantly improved its deterrent posture on the Eastern Flank (Takacs 2017). Despite NATO's current strategic fallacies, simulations have demonstrated that an attack on the Baltics would trigger a prolonged and serious war between Russia and a materially far wealthier and more powerful coalition, a war Moscow must fear it would be likely to lose (Shlapak and Johnson 2016). Although a direct confrontation between Russia

and NATO members is cleverly avoided, Russia's assertive foreign policy has been quite diversified towards the Baltics by preferring non-violent means to covert efforts in order to radicalise Russian speakers (Radin 2017). Therefore, with the aim to balance the effects of NATO enlargement, Russia has tested against the Baltic states a 'new' capacity to combine traditional military power with covert efforts to undermine an enemy government. Such strategy goes under the label of 'hybrid war' (Winnerstig 2014) although several scholars oppose the use of term hybrid war as 'new' to address Russia's approach to conflict since the political, diplomatic economic tools adapt lessons from prior military experience, colour revolutions as well as Soviet-era subversion (D. Johnson 2015). Whatever term is used for Russia's activities, the QCA minimisation process has identified the condition of NATO membership of neighbouring countries (AL) as *sufficient* for Russia to adopt an assertive foreign policy toward these target states in the post-Soviet space. This argument derives mainly from defensive realism, which holds that states tend to balance against dangerous concentration of power near their borders. However, although pairs of states may pursue purely security-seeking strategies by allying with more powerful states, they inadvertently generate spirals of mutual hostility or conflict (Taliaferro 2000). Therefore, Russia's actions, especially assertive ones, could be explained because foreign policy executive perceive close ties between Western institutions and post-Soviet states as detrimental for national security (Mearsheimer 2014a). They not only fear losing Russia's regional influence, but also jeopardising the survival and territorial integrity of their country.

Second, the analysis further demonstrates that the combination of external pressure (P) and the presence of status recognition (S) suffice to explain Russia's coercive foreign policy (A). These findings are basically consistent with the geopolitical imperatives behind Russia's foreign policy as function of external threat (Valovaya 2005). At the same, the geopolitical factor in the Russian case emphasises three dimensions, which do not necessarily contradict

each other: the strategic importance of neighbour states for security reasons (Mouritzen and Wivel 2012; 2006) as well as for expansionist aims (Krickovic 2014); the EU's increased activism in the common neighbourhood (Gretskiy, Treshchenkov, and Golubev 2014; Lavenex 2004); and the pro-western orientation of governments of the neighbour states (Götz 2015, 2016a, 2017). Russia has been often examined as a former hegemon seeking to maintain its influence over its lost empire (Giusti 2017). Starting from the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia's policy vis-à-vis former Soviet republics has been premised upon a vision in which Russia's security is tightly interwoven with the fate of these countries. From Moscow's perspective the post-Soviet space plays an existential role in redefining the political situation following the disintegration of Soviet Union: i.e. Russia 's profound security dilemma concerning not only Russia's status as great power but also its territorial unity (Rytövuori-Apunen 2019, 10; Rezvani 2014). Consequently, not only Russia considers the post-Soviet states of strategic importance, but it regards them as an area of privileged interests where it has a special role to play.<sup>67</sup> Within such framework, the EU managed to act as a region-builder in Eastern Europe and in the South Caucasus through the creation of a common regulatory space based upon its *acquis*, thereby bringing these countries closer to the EU and to each other. Yet, this has not always been the case. In the early 2000s, the EU envisioned cooperation with Russia as a crucial component of its future neighbourhood policy, thereby developing patterns of inclusion (Sergunin 2012). The EU's inclusive practices vis-à-vis Russia were combined with the absence of a strong region-building approach to its neighbourhood in the early ENP that only offered limited and vague incentives (Sasse 2008). Although the extent to which the EU could act as an anchor for domestic reform processes was questionable, the ENP had implications on EU-Russia interactions in the shared neighbourhood. The EU's attempts

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<sup>67</sup> This does not necessarily mean that the post-Soviet states do not play an active role in bargaining such influence in the region from Russia and other great powers. On this point, see Costa Buranelli, F. 2017. 'Spheres of Influence as Negotiated Hegemony – The Case of Central Asia'. *Geopolitics*: 1–26.

at inclusiveness loose integration with ENP countries and lack of open disagreement on interaction with Russia did not translate into effective cooperation with Moscow in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus but it rose scepticism among Russian elites resulted in the problematisation of the insufficiently reciprocal or intersubjective nature of the EU–Russian ‘partnership’ (Prozorov 2007). The aforementioned circumstances led to a predictable decline of interest in the ENP on the part of some post-Soviet countries. Without a doubt, this tendency changed as result of the colour revolutions in the post-Soviet space, specially of the Orange revolution that turned out crucial beyond just the Ukrainian society (Gretskiy, Treshchenkov, and Golubev 2014). The Orange Revolution, like the other colour revolutions happening in Georgia and in Moldova, have increased Moscow’s apprehension over its political and economic influence in the region (Mazloomi, Yeoh, and Karim 2018; Gerlach 2014). They demonstrated the vulnerability and limited appeal of the Russian model of integration and, in fact, formalised the abandonment by a number of the former Soviet Republics the strategy of balancing between Russia and the EU, giving way to a closer political and economic integration with the Euro–Atlantic structures (Glinkina and Kulikova 2007).

As far as status recognition is concerned, the findings lend also strong support to the theoretical expectations, according to which the deterioration of Russian relations with the West should be attributed to Russia's desire to recover its status as a great power. In particular, cases included in this path of the intermediate solution — GE 2002; UA 2003; MD 2006; LV 2003; EST 2007—own a value of 0.6 in the calibration of status recognition. This value refers to the concept of ‘social creativity’, namely the strategy of refusing the status markers of the current international order, and transforming negative traits into positive assets. Such calibration has been assigned to distinguish this attitude from ‘social mobility’ (1.0), where the foreign policy executive aspires to be admitted into the higher-status club by emulating values, norms and behaviour of the hegemon accepts the current hierarchy in the international

order. At the same time, despite the promotion of alternative values and ideas, social creativity does not entail open antagonism with the ‘significant other’ but a recognition of *mutual differences* and a willingness to keep a strategic partnership in pivotal sectors. Such trend has been observed with EU–Russia relations since the early 2000s. On the one hand, Russia refused the role of ‘normative hegemon’ that the ENP had assigned to the EU, yet the Roadmap on the Common Space on External Security, adopted in Moscow in 2005, reiterated the importance of ‘close result-oriented EU-Russia collaboration’ with the view to ‘creating a greater Europe without dividing lines’ (EU–Russia 2005). On the other hand, the EU changed its attitude toward Russia. As Giusti (2017, 37) states:

The EU moved away from the assumption that Russia was a country in transition towards the Western mainstream and recognized that it had to be treated as a *sui generis* [emphasis in original] entity. Implicitly, the EU renounced playing its normative role and acquiesced to a functional and selective cooperation.

On a more general term, status recognition in Russia’s regional policy resonates well with the role of ideational factors in realist frameworks for foreign policy (Mouritzen 2017). Scholars have discussed if and how soft positivist theories such as Neoclassical Realism can embrace concepts frequently associated with constructivist (and institutionalist) frameworks in a theoretically sound way (Foulon 2015; Larson and Shevchenko 2010b; Schweller 2004). In particular, they have focused on the (re)conceptualisation of ideas as beliefs externalised into political deliberation through language (Meibauer 2020). Within this framework, ideas are thus deliberative tools, wielded instrumentally and strategically in an interactive process (the so called *discourse*) to communicate, exchange, and convince by their use in language and text, from which they can be extracted. In the case of Russia, the data collected about foreign policy executive discourses and official documents have been pivotal tools to analyse

the role that discourse about status recognition played in defining Russian policies of cooperation and balancing with the West (see also Kropatcheva 2012).

Third, the analysis further shows an alternative path, which entails the combination of external pressure (P) and high state capacity (C) for Russia's assertive foreign policy (A). Beside the multiple covered cases of MD 2006 and EST 2007, the outcome in this conjunction includes cases of intervention – DONBAS 2014; GE 2008; UA 2013. Cases of Russia's military or sub-military intervention corroborates neoclassical realist assumptions about the causal primacy of systemic variables. In this regard, neoclassical realist introduce the concept of permissive or restrictive strategic environment, which refers to the imminence and magnitude of threats and opportunities that states face. As Ripsman et al. (2016, 52) state:

All things being equal, the more imminent the threat or opportunity and the more dangerous the threat (or the more enticing the opportunity) the more restrictive the state's strategic environment is. Conversely, the more remote the threat or opportunity and the less intense the threat or opportunity, the more permissive the strategic environment is.

In the case of Russia, the external pressure adopted by the EU in the shared neighbourhood has been gradually perceived as an imminent threat. For instance, scholars of diverse theoretical leanings have claimed that Georgia's ties with the West (in particular NATO) is strongly linked with the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. Realists argue that NATO provoked this war since the United States has lost sight of its own true strategic interests in supporting NATO enlargement and Georgia's candidacy in that alliance (Mearsheimer 2014a; Posen 2014, 9). Even some constructivists agree that 'it is essential to frame the Georgia War of summer 2008 within the issue of NATO's expansion' (Pouliot 2010, 223). On the other hand, as consequence of the Russo-Georgian conflict, the EU accelerated the launch of the EaP. This new initiative gave rise to growing tensions with Russia, which turned into an open competition over deep economic integration in the early 2010s. Compared to the ENP, the EaP



marked a substantial shift in the EU's offer to post-Soviet countries since the EU increased rewards by offering an enhanced contractual framework (Delcour 2011). Contemporarily, the EU renounced to link Russia to the Eastern dimension of its neighbourhood policy triggering Russia's suspicion about the EaP (Zagorski 2010). In this regard, the EU is perceived to be a potential great-power centre in the making, which has begun to extend its economic and diplomatic influence into Eastern Europe. It is not a case if many of Russian elites regard the EU as a 'Trojan horse' for NATO expansion (Zaslavskaya 2016). Within this context, the willingness of post-Soviet countries such as Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova to enter the EU region-building project triggered a sense of 'competition with the EU for common neighbours' (Zagorski 2010, 50), which resulted in a series of counter-actions by Russia to limit the EU's core instrument to expand its influence. While such counteractions succeeded with Armenia, they have failed with Ukraine, Moldova and previously with Georgia. However, even under high external pressure (P), the third path shows that the systemic condition is sufficient only by incorporating the domestic intervening condition that influence whether and how states respond to the international systemic pressures. All three cases of Russia's intervention included in the solution term present a high state capacity (C) to extract and mobilise sources in order to respond to external threats. Internal environment in which Russia has crafter its foreign policy has changed over the last decades. In order to rebuild the Russian state, which became the top priority during the first term of Putin's presidency, the Kremlin has adopted a twofold strategy. On the one hand, Russia had regained economic stability largely due to lucrative oil and natural gas exports (Maitra 2014). Contemporarily to that, political power also became more consolidated under Putin. On the other hand, Moscow has managed to build a common ideology as instrument to mobilise society (Romanova 2012). Although the rally-around-the-flag effect can be powerful on the short term by exaggerating an outside threat such as Western hegemony via regional EU dominance, Russia has been successful in

mobilising not only its elites but also public opinion around the ‘necessity’ of intervention both in Georgia as well as in Ukraine.

Overall, this finding broadly supports the work of other neoclassical realist studies of foreign policy analysis that aim to link systemic factors to foreign policy outcomes through the ‘belt’ of intervening conditions when systemic factors alone are not sufficient to explain them (Kozub-Karkut 2019). At the same time, the introduction of domestic conditions have been used to support alternative arguments. On this matter, Giusti (2017, 62) argues that

[Russia]’s external projection has shifted from cooperation with the West to competition – not only for re-establishing its leverage in the post-Soviet space but also for being recognised as a major power and filling the country’s vacuum of purpose derived from its loss of status. For this reason, Russian leadership has set targets which do not always reflect *the country’s capabilities* [emphasis added].’

Conversely, using the foundational assumptions of a neoclassical realist perspective, Becker et al. (2016) found that ‘strategic use of norms made by Russia to justify its interventionist policy in Ukraine should be understood within the context of more state-specific realist objectives and the underlying systemic distribution of power. In other words, although norms and values hold themselves influence on the international behaviour of states, they make little sense if not linked with external features bounded international community’(2016, 126).

Finally, both paths of the conservative solution suggest that Russia’s *non-assertive* foreign policy is implemented in absence of external pressure (~P) as well as in absence of military defence pact based on its bordering territories (~AL). The solution, which nevertheless does not include counterfactuals, mainly confirms neorealist assumptions, according to which states must always seek to strengthen themselves and their position in relation to other states, even in the absence of a direct threat (Mearsheimer 2001). As result, even when Russia does not pursue an assertive foreign policy in the contested neighbourhood but instead promotes ‘multilateral’ regional policy, dynamics of national security from Russia

seem to produce a trend in favour of great power management, which produces a multipolar order rather a multilateral international order (Makarychev and Morozov 2011). Nevertheless, Russia has been able to implement such ‘multilateral’ policies as function of Russian leaders depending on the Western nations’ recognition (S) (A. P. Tsygankov 2014). Scholars have shown that in Russian identity discourses the notion of ‘great-power status’ is closely associated with regional spheres of influence and the right to exert control over neighbouring small states (Matz 2001). Similarly, Russia’s inability to implement an assertive foreign policy that could go beyond rhetorical actions is also function of domestic features such as the low state capacity (~C). This result confirms a point made earlier on Russia’s *assertive* foreign policy, that status recognition and domestic constrains of state capacity ‘seem to complement rather than contradict each other’ in addressing the combination of resources that leads to Russia’s foreign policy (Götz 2017, 16). This result confirms that such assumption is valid also for non-assertive foreign policy.

As for limitations of the present study, three aspects stand out. First, as Figure 4.3 reveals, some cases were not captured as the integrated model of regional policy as expected. As discussed above, this result might be due to a narrow-ranging operationalisation of state capacity, which included values equal to or under 9.5 points for a low state fragility index. However, the state fragility for Russia swings between values of 7 and 11 in a whole range between 0 and 25. Certainly, a more wide-ranging threshold would have yielded results that had been more in accordance with the data set of State Fragility Index. Yet, as was argued in the respective section, one of the valid reasons why the threshold was set this way is to be more in accordance with previously formulated theoretical expectations. Nevertheless, as an alternative to the present study, one could either replicate the analysis with a different threshold on State Fragility Index or to choose another kind of operationalisation. Second, the analysis of Russia’s assertive foreign policy identified Transnistria 1992 and Abkhazia 1993

as unexplained cases, namely while they present the outcome, they are not included in the solution term. Indeed, they share characteristics with cases that point in the opposite direction – i.e. a cooperative regional policy. Therefore, the argument about the presence of external pressure by competing great powers in the post-Soviet space is not able to explain why Russia entered into conflict with Moldova and Georgia over separatist regions in the early 1990s.

Finally, the analysis of necessity has revealed that no single condition or SUIN combination are deemed necessary for Russia's assertive foreign policy even if the theoretical model presented in this dissertation where assumes the presence of external pressure. Is this result at odd with theoretical expectation? The answer mainly relies in discrepancy between theoretical model and the methodological choices. The model argues that the presence of external pressure can lead to *both* assertive as well as non-assertive state's response depending on the interactions of the intervening conditions. Differently, set-theoretic methods such as QCA makes uses of sets that are qualitatively defined concepts that establish a difference in kind. In my case, I distinguish the set of *assertive* foreign policy from that of *non-assertive*.

## **4.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on the questions of why and under what conditions Russia has become more assertive toward some post-Soviet republics and less so with others in its pursuit of regional primacy in the post-Soviet space. Drawing on both geopolitical and neorealist assumptions, this chapter has shown that Russia's ultimate aim is stability and security on its borders, a condition that requires Russia to claim a 'special role' in the region. In order to achieve this goal, Russia has resorted to a diverse range of political means when possible, and to military ones when necessary: e.g., in addition to prosecuting the Russo-Georgian war and the intervention in Ukraine, Russia repeatedly cut off energy supplies to neighbouring states such as Ukraine, Moldova, and Lithuania; it interfered in the domestic political affairs of these and other countries in the region on a number of occasions; and it strengthened its military

presence in the post-Soviet space with the construction of new bases. Alternatively, Russia recurred to non-aggressive policies to maintain its influence in the region by sponsoring region-building projects such as the CSTO and the EAEU. Although these organisations are Russia-centred, they are based on the mutual interests of states within the post-Soviet space. Finally, even under pressing external threats, Russia was not able—or not willing—to produce an effective response against target neighbouring states in order to counteract rising influence of other great powers.

Russia's foreign policy is in many ways characteristic of great powers' regional policies. As the intermediate solution suggests, Russian behaviour is predominantly driven by its pursuit of national interests, which derives both from its relative position in the international system and of its geographic proximity with neighbouring states. At the same time, states from Eastern Europe have been interacting with other great powers acting in the shared neighbourhood. Consequently, Russia's projection of power in the post-Soviet space cannot be understood without reference to its interactions with the West (Matveeva 2018; Zięba 2018). Such interaction has not been linear over the last two decades but it has gone through several 'ups and downs' swinging from strategic partnership to open competition with the EU and NATO. While the ultimate goal of Moscow during the Yeltsin era was integration into Western institutions, a shift in Putin's foreign policy signified that integration into the Western world on Russia's terms was not possible and that Moscow had to follow its own path by seeking to adapt the rules in its favour (Surkov 2018). With this aim, Russia has adopted a vast range of policies in the shared neighbourhood in order to maintain regional primacy. Beyond the cases of direct intervention, which still count as last *ratio* in Russia's foreign policy, Moscow remains an antirevisionist power and continues to act as the *status quo* power in the

contested neighbourhood where it had attempted to adapt its hybrid strategies in a climate of (perceived) hostile international relations.<sup>68</sup>

By taking in consideration structural conditions, this chapter has shown that from 1992 to 2015 Russia increasingly depended on ideas and perceptions when these tools had the potential to soften international punishments and decrease the costs of intervention. At the same time, status recognition by the EU did not result in a syncretism of values to develop a post-Cold War international order, but in the admission of Russia's 'peculiarities' that would keep relations between the two great powers at the 'strategic-partnership' level. In addition to that, the finding illustrate the importance of state capacity for Russia's military intervention. This is an important point since Western policy discourses tend to deny Russia's internal strength and are inclined to interpret its actions as motivated by weakness, even though various scholars challenged this premise (see e.g. Monaghan 2016). This chapter has shown that, despite its internal problems, Russia's domestic order does not seriously constrain the pursuit of foreign policy objectives that the leadership considers important. Thus, while the mainstream theory of neo-realism remains a powerful tool in predicting Russia's pursuit of national interests, it requires more nuanced analyses to account for the vast array of both military and non-military strategies that Russia uses to achieve its goals in the shared neighbourhood.

The research design of this study sought to redress the limitations of previous studies that focused either on monocausal explanations or did not apply integrated approaches to more than two cases by including 27 cases of Russia's interactions with neighbouring states. Based on explicit criteria derived from a detailed conceptualisation of assertive foreign policy, this study found that 9 of these 27 interactions had assertive outcomes (Y), while 17 cases were examples of Russia's non-assertive foreign policy (~Y). The analytical framework comprised

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<sup>68</sup> On Russia's (conservative) attitude toward the international order, see Sakwa (2020).

four conditions, including external pressure from other great powers in the regional neighbourhood, membership of the target state into NATO alliance, Russia's status recognition and Russia's state capacity to extract and mobilise resources. Among the eight propositions, which represent eight possible outcomes (either assertive or non-assertive) of the integrated model, five were confirmed focusing primarily on military intervention (P<sub>7</sub>), coercion (P<sub>1</sub>, P<sub>2</sub>, P<sub>4</sub>, and P<sub>6</sub>), and socialisation (P<sub>8</sub>).

Based on the fsQCA procedure, empirical evidence provided strong support for the assumptions derived from the geopolitical imperatives, which holds that Russia adopts assertive and even aggressive instruments when external pressure of other great powers in the shared neighbourhood increases. However, external pressure from other great powers ought to be sufficient for assertive regional policy *only* in combination with the intervening variables concerning Russia's status recognition from peer states and Russia's state capacity. Similarly, Russia has even cooperated with neighbouring states to maintain regional primacy in absence of external pressure and with the EU recognising Russia its status of great power. Both these results are consistent with the neoclassical realist argument about the importance of introducing domestic conditions such as ideas and perceptions along with systemic variables in order to see how differently states respond to the international systemic pressures. The fsQCA has provided new insights into how to combine several conditions in order to explain sources of Russia's regional policy. At the same time, a likely limitation of using a fsQCA as method for the cross-case analysis is represented by the two unexplained cases of Russia's intervention in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and in Transnistria in the early 1990s, which comprise important examples of Russia's aggressiveness in the immediate neighbourhood. Indeed, those conflicts in the early 1990s hold consequences not only in today relations between Russia and former Soviet republics of Georgia and Moldova, but also represent one of the 'unsolved issues' of the regional neighbourhood between the EU and Russia.

Taking into account this limitation, it is necessary to specify the missing condition from the solution term to which these cases belong. This kind of analysis is not included in a logical set-theoretic method like fsQCA because it does not explain the complex *processes* underlying foreign policy decisions. In order to address this limitation, the next two chapters complement this comparative study by addressing two cases of the same conjunction in order to see *how* the solution term comprising external pressure, military alliance, and status recognition were ‘funnelled through the subjective understandings’ (Kaarbo 2003, 20) of Russia’s decision makers in order to produce two different outcomes.



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **RUSSIA'S NON-MILITARY INTERVENTION OVER NAGORNO-KARABAKH**

While case studies can benefit from QCA by disciplining the analysis of set-relational patterns that are difficult, if not impossible, to identify in small-n research, process tracing is an invaluable complement for QCA in order to discern the causal mechanisms behind a set-relational pattern and to further improve the theory and QCA model. Nevertheless, discussion about case selection for process tracing on the basis of a truth table analysis has only recently started (Beach 2018; Beach and Rohlfing 2018; Schneider and Rohlfing 2013b). When selecting cases for within-case studies, researchers must distinguish between the types of cases (such as typical, deviant, irrelevant, or unexplained) according to the six zones of the x-y plot that were introduced in the previous chapter. Following these criteria, researchers can adopt several strategies to compare different types of cases – e.g. typical-typical, typical-deviant, etc. – depending on the scope of the analysis.

In this study, a likely typical-typical case comparison would entail the study of the most prominent cases of Russia's military intervention during the last twenty years, namely Ukraine 2014 and Georgia 2008. However, these cases have been abundantly analysed elsewhere by applying either the neoclassical realist approach (Becker et al. 2016; Götz 2016; Smith 2016; Smith 2015) or more general multi-causal approaches that combine both international and domestic variables (Toal 2017; Hans Mouritzen and Wivel 2012). Moreover, results from previous fsQCA analysis have convinced scholars that this approach moves beyond individual explanations and demonstrates the capacity of integrated models to explain Russia's foreign policy behaviour in a more systematic way. In contrast, the fsQCA analysis of the negated outcome ( $\sim A$ ), namely Russia's non-assertive foreign policy, has shown that the term of the conservative solution – which includes the absence of external pressure together with status recognition and the absence of a military alliance ( $\sim P * S * \sim AL$ ) – does not

explain the two cases of Abkhazia 1993/South Ossetia 1992 and Transnistria 1992. Indeed, these two deviant cases, which refer to ethnic conflicts in Georgia and Moldova respectively, *did* see a military intervention by Russia (A).

As the aim of this analysis is to find out why these cases present an aggressive foreign policy (A) even if they share the same configuration with typical cases ( $\sim P * S * \sim AL$ ) that do not present the outcome ( $\sim A$ ), a within-case analysis of a deviant case for consistency in kind with a typical case has been selected. The ideal comparison of a typical case and a deviant case for consistency in kind includes two cases that conform to these criteria: they display a large membership in the term X – i.e., the subset in analyses of sufficiency; a small difference in X between the cases; and the maximum difference between the membership in the outcome Y – i.e. the superset. Two of the several cases that meet all these criteria in the previous analysis are Russia's non-intervention over the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh (NGK 1994) ( $X = 1.00$ ;  $\sim Y = 1.00$ ) – the typical case – and Russia's intervention over the conflict of Abkhazia in 1993 and South Ossetia in 1992 (ABK 1993) ( $X = 1.00$ ;  $\sim Y = 0.00$ ) – the deviant case for consistency in kind.<sup>69</sup>

In the early 1990s, violent ethno-separatist conflicts erupted in several successive states of the Soviet Union. Since then they have been labelled 'frozen conflicts' because whilst in most cases active armed conflict has been brought to an end, no peace treaty has been achieved between the conflictual sides (Lynch 2005). Nevertheless, the situations are anything but frozen and are in fact constantly in flux. Each dispute has its own history, character and context, and these have grown more distinctive over time, becoming further shaped by the more recent confrontation over Ukraine (for a review, see de Waal and Twickel 2020). At the

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<sup>69</sup> Although the case of Transnistria could also be chosen for a comparative study of mechanism, it has been temporarily excluded from this preliminary process-tracing analysis as it presents different geopolitical interests, challenge and historical attachment to Russia than the two cases that are both located in the region of South Caucasus. A more detailed description on the similarities and differences of the chosen cases is provided further on in the text.

same time, a Russian ‘presence’ is a common factor in all these frozen disputes. Russia has adopted different policy mechanisms of ‘freezing’ in order to maintain peace and stability according to the political goals these mechanisms served. However, these mechanisms have not necessarily included a plan for the final resolution of these conflicts. They have rather mirrored Russia’s efforts to establish control over a political settlement<sup>70</sup> by *also* resorting to military instruments (Rytövuori-Apunen 2019, 8).

The frozen conflicts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, and of Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan in the early 1990s follow a similar pattern of escalation and subsequent ‘freezing’ (Smetana and Ludvík 2019), yet they exhibit significant differences. On the one hand, the two Caucasian republics of Georgia and Azerbaijan, like the whole Caucasian region, are home to a highly fragmented ethnic population, each group of which is united by an intransigent struggle over territory as the core of their identity (O’Loughlin, Kolosov, and Toal 2014, 5). Such hostilities were silently encouraged during the Soviet time in order to keep the dominant groups (Georgians and Azerbaijanis respectively) under control (O’Loughlin and Kolosov 2017). Furthermore, they were (and still are) both of geopolitical importance to Russia for at least two reasons. Firstly, the Black Sea basin and particularly the Caucasus has become the main corridor for the transit of hydrocarbons from the Caspian and even from the Asian-Pacific region to Europe and elsewhere. As a consequence, the significant involvement of non-regional players in the region after the fall of Soviet Union has been interpreted by Moscow as a major threat to Russia’s national security order (Bajrektarevic and Posega 2016). Secondly, since its conquest by the Tsarist empire in the nineteenth century, the Caucasian region has always had a deep, almost existential, significance to post-Soviet Russia

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<sup>70</sup> Although ‘settlement’ is the best term to translate the Russian equivalent term of *урегулирование* (*uregulirovanie*), many Western scholars use the term ‘management’ to indicate Russian-led resolution processes as foreign policy strategies of power projection. Cuppuleri, Adriana. 2020. ‘Russia and Frozen Conflicts in the Post-Soviet Space’. In *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Peace and Conflict Studies*, Cham: Springer International Publishing, 1–9. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11795-5\\_110-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11795-5_110-1) (April 27, 2020).

as part of ‘Russia’s efforts to avert the threat of crumbling borders’ (Rytövuori-Apunen 2019, 68) especially after the Chechen separatist challenge erupted in the North Caucasus in the 1990s. On the other hand, Russia has employed different tools and different actors in the two conflicts to achieve a political settlement, and consequently to project influence, with varying success. Russia has kept up a very aggressive posture towards Tbilisi, reinforcing the boundary lines of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which then evolved into the Russo-Georgian war in 2008. In contrast, Russia has always supported Armenia in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh; however, Russia has never officially intervened in the conflict against the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, nor has it evoked Nagorno-Karabakh’s independence. In the current unresolved issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia is more detached, as it lacks a presence on the ground in the conflict region and seeks to maintain good relations with both sides.<sup>71</sup>

This chapter aims to better understand *how* the conjunction ~P\*S\*~AL of the conservative solution of the fsQCA analysis produces the outcome of non-intervention. In particular, I am interested in unpacking the mechanism that led Russia *not* to intervene in Azerbaijan when the separatist conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh erupted during the break-up of the Soviet Union. The first section analyses the steps needed to develop a theory-driven mechanism of Russia’s decision-making as post-QCA process tracing, and the second section provides guidance for presenting the actual mechanisms of the typical case. In contrast to this, the next chapter will analyse a case where Russia intervened despite the presence of a conjunction for non-intervention.

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<sup>71</sup> This was the case until a new ceasefire agreement was signed on 9 November 2020 that ended the armed conflict that had erupted on 27 September 2020. Among the terms of agreement, a peacekeeping contingent from the Russian Federation has been deployed along with the withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces from Nagorno-Karabakh. The deployment of the Russian peacekeeping contingent is due to last five years, with automatic renewal for the next five-year period should none of the parties state otherwise six months in advance. See e.g. ‘Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia Sign Nagorno-Karabakh Peace Deal’. 2020. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54882564> (13 November 2020). Although the reader will find some updates relating to the events occurring in 2020, it should be noted that this dissertation was written before the conflict escalation and subsequent ceasefire agreement.

## 5.1 Designing a post-QCA Process Tracing Mechanism of Russia's Non-Military Intervention

When studying mechanisms, we are (usually) able to isolate the workings of individual causes through the conceptualisation and operationalisation process, enabling us to analytically distinguish whether a particular mechanism at the evidential level was present irrespective of other causes also being present. This means that it is important for us to be very careful in specifying that process tracing only provides us with evidence of the workings of the mechanism we are tracing – not other mechanisms.

In order to see whether the conjunction is a causal or spurious relationship, it is necessary to isolate ‘the effects of these causes analytically by delineating the component parts of the mechanism it produces and how they operate together’ (Beach 2018, 77). In other words, I conceptualise and operationalise a theory’s test of a proposed mechanism linking the term  $\sim P * S * \sim AL$  with the outcome  $\sim A$ , followed by theory-testing the process-tracing case study of one positive case – Russia’s non-intervention in Nagorno-Karabakh.

As for the fsQCA analysis, the proposed mechanism is inspired by Neoclassical Realism, which includes both systemic and domestic conditions. However, while fsQCA accounts for the co-occurrence of conditions (conjunctions), process tracing addresses the mechanism regarding the way in which a systemic variable is conducted through a connecting belt of intervening variables to the outcome. Thus, in operationalising the single conditions of the term  $\sim P * S * \sim AL$  with the core assumptions of Neoclassical Realism into a mechanism of decision-making, a four-step causal chain is utilised. In line with theoretical assumptions, the mechanism prioritises the role of the distribution of power in the international system, manifested as external pressure in the shared neighbourhood emanating from other great powers (P) as well as by the presence of a military defence alliance for the target state (AL). The intervening variable that acts as a ‘further transmission belt’ between the international system and foreign policy decisions is the perception on the part of the foreign policy executive

about status recognition as a great power (S). However, in developing a plausible mechanism for the two frozen conflicts, it became clear that both external pressure and status recognition from the conjunction cannot logically be a cause in a mechanistic sense because it was difficult to see what they could actually *do* beyond acting as a scope condition.

A scope condition does not ‘do’ anything in a mechanism-based understanding of causation; it is merely a factor that has to be present for a relationship to work (Falletti and Lynch 2009). This argument does not deny the previous results of the QCA about the terms as sufficient for the outcome; yet, whereas a distinction between a causal and scope condition is not important in QCA, it becomes vital in process tracing as this method is interested in entities that are *active* in the mechanism (Beach 2018, 81). As a consequence, the two conditions are a form of background that *have to* be considered when seeking an explanation for the great power acting in the contested neighbourhood.

In terms of the set-theoretic relations about the constellations of possible combinations of conjunctions, the mechanism, which is visualised in Figure 5.1, theorises that there is a sequential occurrence of the three conditions that the QCA analysis has found to be individually necessary parts of an unnecessary but sufficient cause (INUS) for the outcome – Russia’s non-intervention. In addition to this, the mechanism presents the episode triggering the chain of events as recorded by the Heidelberg International Conflicts Institute (HIK). Therefore, the mechanism works as follows: external pressure from other great powers in the post-Soviet space is marginal: ethnic-separatist violence erupts in the newly independent state → Russia’s hunt for status recognition is fulfilled: the target state is not part of any military defensive alliance → Russia’s non-military intervention.

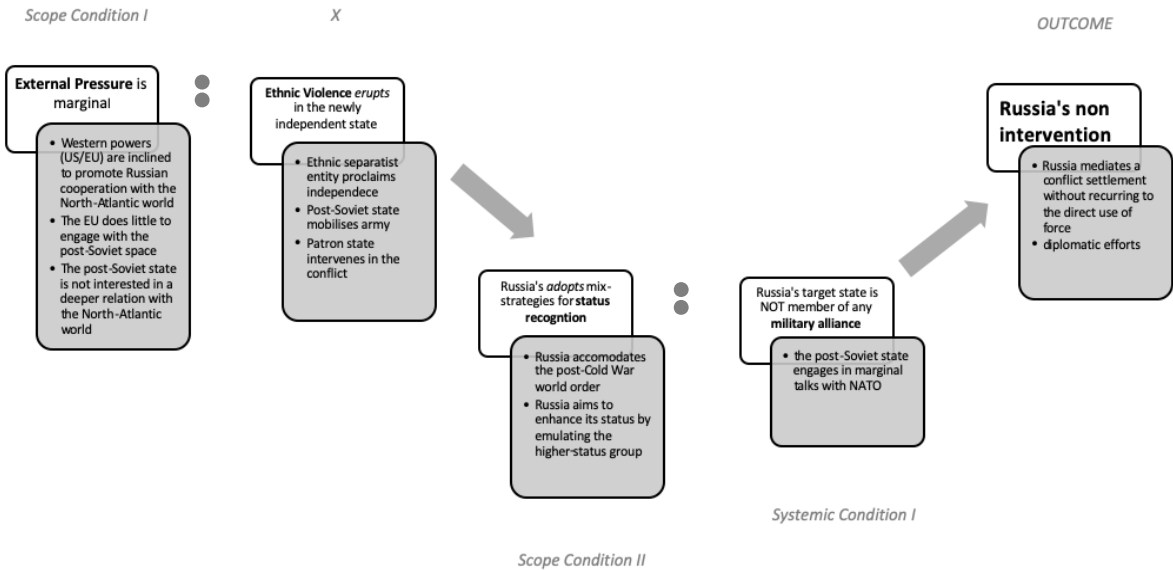
The upper part of Figure 5.1 illustrates the theorised parts of the mechanism, while the lower part depicts observable implications that can be used to test whether the mechanism was present or absent in a case. In the theorised mechanism, conditions are in bold letters, whereas

activities are in italics. A colon is used to separate some of the four conditions instead of an arrow, given that the external pressure and status recognition are not *causally* related to Russia's non-intervention in the ethnic-separatist conflict but instead are just elements that have to be present for the mechanism to function properly. Importantly, as already discussed in Chapter 3 on methodological choices, for each empirical manifestation of parts of a mechanism, we need to evaluate whether it is unique and/or certain, which determines the types of inferences we can make when we find it/do not find it (Beach and Pedersen 2013; Checkel and Bennett 2014).

In a condition of marginal external pressure from other great powers (*scope condition*), it is theorised that the great power will deal with the conflict/crisis happening in its immediate regional neighbourhood (*X*) by adopting a non-intervention stance (*outcome*). Here we should expect to find evidence that shows the low or even marginal engagement of external great powers in the post-Soviet space following the break-up of the Soviet Union. In the theorised mechanism, the eruption of ethnic-separatist violence (*X*) represents what the neoclassical realists would call 'the independent variable', which departs directly from the structural realist baseline (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, chap. 2). Unlike the independent variable – and the scope conditions in this mechanism – the next part deals with the domestic dimension of the states' situation. In particular, they refer to the decision-process of Russia's foreign policy executive in assessing and responding to the threat. At the domestic level a second scope condition is identified, which refers to Russia's perception about its status recognition from the other great powers. In this case, we would expect to find evidence about Russia's commitment to 'catching up' with the elite group of Western great powers by accepting the post-Cold War hierarchy and even by embracing the legitimacy of the Western-led international order. Finally, a second systemic condition, military alliance, which here works as a *moderating* factor captures the first causal effect of the independent variable: the foreign

policy executive evaluates the risks of intervening in the violent separatist conflict of another state by assessing the likely intervention of other third parties, and consequently, by checking any likely or official military alliance of the target state that could escalate the conflict. Empirical fingerprints of this aspect would include any strategic/military dialogue between the target state dealing with the ethno-separatist conflicts and other regional/super powers.

Figure 5.1: Russia’s non-military intervention<sup>72</sup>



The final outcome is Russia’s non-intervention. Here, according to the conceptualisation of assertiveness in chapter 2, I have defined Russia’s non-intervention by referring to Russian management of the conflict by resorting to instruments other than the use of direct force with the official aim of defending the most vulnerable part in the conflict or of stopping violence and ‘mediating’ the peace process.

A test of the directional expectations regarding the marginal presence of other great powers in the post-Soviet space can be operationalised as: ‘We should expect to see that there

<sup>72</sup> The PT mechanism of Russia’s non-military intervention is inspired by the Type I of Neoclassical Realist model developed by Ripsman et al. in Ripsman, Norrin M., Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, and Steven E. Lobell. 2016. Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, p.31.



are sporadic political, economic, military activities by the EU and NATO/US engaging with the target post-Soviet state'. In this test, we should expect to see account evidence in the form of a paucity or even complete absence of economic and political agreements as well as marginal reference from external great powers in official discourse about the strategic importance of the post-Soviet state. Similarly, a test of the directional expectations regarding Russia's hunt for status recognition would expect to see the Russian foreign policy executive exhibiting a subaltern position toward Western powers in order to obtain status recognition as a peer state. In this test, we should expect to see account evidence of Russia's official discourse about friendship and collaborative relations with Western partners regarding economic, political and strategic partnership. Moreover, we should expect to find trace evidence of bilateral meetings between the Russian president and Western state leaders, where the main topic is financial and political support towards Russia's transition into a democratic market economy. The technological catch-up of Russia with Western liberal democracies has been a pivotal debate regarding post-Soviet Russia, which reflects not only the way Russia saw itself, but also how Russia related its identity to others at that time (Malinova 2014).

The evidence of the eruption of violence in the post-Soviet state would rely mainly on archive sources, journalistic news and secondary literature. The separatist conflict is here considered as the independent variable (X) that starts the mechanism. While X does not entail the verification of a proposition or hypothesis as it exists as a fact, the absence of military alliances requires more accurate evidence collection to test its proposition as part of the mechanism. This issue is due to the complex task of tracing the evidence of the negative pole of a concept (Collier, Gerring, and David 2008), namely the absence of a military alliance. In order to do that, it is essential to establish some indicators for addressing a dichotomous understanding of the presence or absence of the concept (Collier, LaPorte, and Seawright 2012). In this regard, a way to operationalise the absence of a military alliance can be to

mention the kind of relation between the target state and a likely external military alliance. Such a relation may serve the mutual interests of both the target state and the members of the alliance in intensifying strategic dialogue. At the same time, we should also check whether partners with external military alliances have any geopolitical interests in the region. As previously seen, although the absence of a military alliance could give the green light to Russia in order to use more assertive means than mere diplomacy, even informal partnerships between external military allies and post-Soviet states have provoked a deep feeling of insecurity within the Russian foreign policy executive. Finally, an important indication of the absence of any military alliance, which affects Russia's perception of the threat of escalation and its logistic strategy of intervention, is whether the target state has a former Soviet military base on its ground. This is far from unusual; with Russia being the legal heir of the Soviet Union, there was an intense negotiation with many post-Soviet states about the dismantling – e.g. in the Baltic states – or even the formal concession of military base to Russian authorities – e.g. Sebastopol in Ukraine and Gyumri in Armenia.

## **5.2 Russia's policy in Nagorno-Karabakh 1988-1994: from the Inadequacy of the Soviet Centre to Russia's Privileged Role in the Negotiation Process**

While Azerbaijan has been (unsuccessfully) attempting to restore control over the separatist province of Nagorno-Karabakh (in Armenian, Republic of Artsakh) since 1992, the Karabakh Armenians, strongly supported by their compatriots in Armenia, have been seeking independence. Although the Karabakh Armenians initially gained control over the enclave and areas to its Western borders that allow connection to Armenia, they have been unable to secure international recognition of that independence (Mihalka 1996a). Since then, the core issue of Karabakh Armenians has never been fully resolved, provoking eruptions of sporadic violence,

the most recent of which occurred in April 2016 when tensions flared up leading to a war lasting several days (Broers 2016).<sup>73</sup>

One of the main obstacles to an enduring peace settlement is that no peacekeeping mission could be established following the ceasefire in May 1994. Azerbaijan, Armenia and the Western actors all opposed the solution of giving Russia a dominant role in any likely mission (De Waal 2005). At the same time, the OSCE was not able to establish a peacekeeping mission on the ground.<sup>74</sup> Nowadays, the status of Nagorno-Karabakh remains the fundamental issue separating the sides during negotiations (Bláhová 2019). Unlike the settlement process of other frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space where Russia has typically pursued its policies on its own, in Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia has managed to pursue its own interests by strongly advocating for a multilateral political and diplomatic resolution (Cornell 1997; De Waal 2003, 227–34; Souleimanov 2013a, 135–64).

In the following subsections, the role of each mechanism component presented in Figure 5.1 is analysed in order to trace the process of Russia's diplomatic arrangement of a ceasefire in May 1994. The conclusion discusses the consequences for Russia's current privileged role in the negotiation process.

### **5.3 External Pressure: Western Powers' marginal Engagement in the South Caucasus**

Since the end of the Cold War, the primary question in Western-Russian relations concerned the breadth and depth of Russian cooperation with the North Atlantic world. Quite rightly, both foreign observers and Russian analysts have characterised the period from June 1991 – when Boris Yeltsin was first elected President of Russia and Andrei Kozyrev was

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<sup>73</sup> Although there has so far been less bloodshed than during the clashes in 2016, major clashes on the Line of Contacts were registered in July 2020. Nagorno Karabakh Observer. 2020. 'Major Clashes on Armenia-Azerbaijan Border - July 2020'. <https://nkobserver.com/archives/6395> (accessed August 10, 2020).

<sup>74</sup> The CSCE was renamed OSCE in 1995; since I analyse events both before and after this date, I will refer to the organisation by the title it had at the time of the events being discussed; i.e. depending on the period, I will refer to either the CSCE or the OSCE, without further explication.

appointed Foreign Minister – until mid-1993 – when Russian policies in a number of areas began to harden – as the ‘honeymoon period’ in Russia’s dealings with the outside world (Marantz 1997). In this regard, US foreign policy during Reagan’s presidency partially shifted from realist assumptions of threat evaluation and balance of power to an increasing preoccupation with the internal consequences of the Soviet Union’s disintegration (Lynch 2002).

For their part, Russian policy elites welcomed a warmer diplomatic relationship with the United States in the framework of financial and strategic assistance to Russia, with the aim of accelerating internal economic and political reforms. Russia’s moderation was based on a sober appreciation of Russian weakness and a recognition of Russia’s need to get along with the West during a period of acute vulnerability (McFaul 1995). On the one hand, Russian reformers and the IMF had similar views about necessary and urgent economic reforms in the early 1990s – i.e. macroeconomic stabilisation, liberalisation, and privatisation (Odling-Smee 2006). On the other hand, Western leaders invited Russia to formally join the G7 in 1997 despite Russia’s failure to fulfil certain economic criteria (Gilman 2007). Both these episodes show the good-will attitude of both the Western powers and Russia to building a framework of partnership.

The more permissive international environment that emerged from the end of the Cold War led West European and North American powers to be generally reluctant to press Russia forcefully to observe important international legal and political norms. Examples include the use of the Russian army to underwrite the de facto secession of Transnistria from Moldova (or of Abkhazia from Georgia), the observance of OSCE rules on troop movements on the eve of the invasion of Chechnya (as well as the conduct of the Russian army during the Chechen war); and reckless statements by Russian officials, including the president (who declared in September 1995 that NATO expansion would mean the return of ‘the flames of war’ to

Europe). The same applied even where Russian commercial interests conflicted with longstanding US (as well as US–Soviet) non-proliferation policy, as in the sale to Iran of \$800 million worth of nuclear reactors by the Russian ministry of atomic energy (Erlanger 1995). Therefore, the West's accommodating stance regarding Russia partially enabled Moscow to expand its influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus without damaging its relations with the major powers (Lynch 2002).

Similarly, the relations between the European Union and the post-Soviet successor states, including Russia, were taking shape from the early 1990s, parallel to the development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in the aftermath of the break-up of the USSR. The underlying assumption of EU policy towards the newly independent states in the early 1990s was determined by the expectation that the Soviet successor states would form a relatively coherent group of countries around Russia within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). This is why, later in 1991, when defining the criteria for the recognition of the post-Soviet successor states, the EU urged the latter to maintain close economic links with Russia and why it did not at that time consider offering any of the Eastern neighbours either membership or any sort of association (Zagorski 2001). The EU's policy towards Russia was initially guided by the vague idea of providing support for systemic transformation. It was only later that the EU realised the limited impact of its assistance and shifted from the idea of market transformation to building a strategic partnership that included energy and development within a common economic area as well as within security issues (Giusti 2017).

The political dialogue between the EU and Russia provided for a more institutionalised framework for cooperation compared to other post-Soviet states, and EU foreign policy towards the other newly independent states was somewhat timid. This happened despite the fact the region of the South Caucasus had been envisaged in the framework of broader

energetic Caspian region as it represented an important area for the EU facing new energy needs and trying to diversify its energy supplies. This could explain why the Western powers revived their interest in the region in middle of the 1990s following the discovery of the rich mineral deposits in the littoral states of the Caspian Sea, including Azerbaijan, which could provide a valuable alternative to Middle Eastern oil and gas (Cornell 2003, 7). Therefore, following the signing of the Dayton Accords for peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina in November 1995, some of the EU member-states stepped up their activity in the Caucasus, with Germany's Foreign Minister visiting the region in December 1995, followed by his counterpart from the United Kingdom the next month and many others (Mihalka 1996a).

However, despite the region's pivotal geopolitical potential, the EU's foreign policy towards the South Caucasus in the early 1990s can be defined not only as timid but even as inconsistent. On the one hand, the EU has spent billions of euro in the region since the collapse of the Soviet Union mainly through the economic assistance provided initially by the TACIS programme and later by the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) ; concurrently, the EU has insisted on the region's commitment to democratic reforms and market economy. These and other instruments have undeniably grounded the framework for political dialogue and economic relations (Nuriyev 2007). On the other hand, at least until the launch of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2004 and the Eastern Partnership in 2009, the EU could not devise a common strategy towards the South Caucasus apart from using resources of an economic and diplomatic character. Furthermore, the extent to which the EU actorness in the region has been (and currently is) inconsistent is due to both external factors such as the role of other great powers including Russia and the US and internal factors such as the lack of a coherent and consistent policy on the part of the member states (Dekanozishvili 2004).

The absence of a collective strategy across Western European headquarters has been most evident in the EU's foreign policy for conflict resolution towards the South Caucasus.

Although the EU already established its delegations in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in 1992 to address emergency problems in the immediate aftermath of the independence, for the most of 1990s the EU did not engage in the troubled process of civilian peacekeeping, neither was it directly involved in the principal multilateral negotiations of the UN and CSCE (here on in OSCE) during the ethnic-separatist conflicts that hit the region. Despite the fact that the signing of the PCA agreement formally represented a qualitative breakthrough in the EU-South Caucasian relations, the lack of any reference to conflict resolution in this agreement further proves that the EU was unable to act coherently as a single state in developing a strategic vision for the region.<sup>75</sup>

Paradoxically, the main external ‘obstacle’ to further EU involvement in the South Caucasus peace process, and thus an increase in its influence in the region, was the presence of the UN and the OSCE. Although the mission was considered by the EU to be better suited to mediate in its neighbourhood than a Russian military presence, this decision was counter-productive (Faber and Kaldor 2005). Indeed, while the OSCE provided the major multilateral instrument for the EU’s involvement in the conflict settlement, due to members-states’ different interests in the region, the EU was unable to formulate a common strategy of conflict resolution except for the OSCE peace mission. Moreover, given that the OSCE is a consensus-based organisation of countries from Europe, the former Soviet Union, the United States and Canada with a broad mandate on security matters but few resources, Russia’s participation in the OSCE made it a decidedly imperfect vehicle that hindered not only a quick resolution of

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. ‘Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and Their Member States, of the One Part, and Georgia, of the Other Part’. 1996. *EUR-Lex Access to European Union law*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A22014A0111%2801%29> (July 14, 2020).

‘Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and Their Member States, of the One Part, and the Republic of Armenia, of the Other Part’. 1996. *EUR-Lex Access to European Union law*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A21999A0909%2801%29> (July 14, 2020).

‘Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and Their Member States, of the One Part, and the Republic of Azerbaijan, of the Other Part’. 1996. *EUR-Lex Access to European Union law*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX%3A21999A0917%2801%29> (July 14, 2020).

the frozen conflicts but also Western interests in the region (Helly 2002). This strategy, combined with the prospect of significant oil profits has on the one hand led the West to become directly interested in the region; on the other, the incapability or the unwillingness to use a much wider range of tools to exert its influence in the region further shows the marginal engagement of the EU in the South Caucasus in the early 1990s.

Since the 1990s, the strategic location of Azerbaijan in providing oil and gas has had regional implications for Europe's project of energy diversification. Despite the complexity of the geopolitical environment and the lack of political experience – e.g. lack of good governance – Azerbaijan is the EU's largest trading partner in the South Caucasus (Nuriyev 2007). Western interest was stimulated when vast reserves of oil, perhaps as much as 40 billion barrels, and natural gas were discovered just off the coast of Azerbaijan. At the same time, as an energy exporter and land-locked state, Azerbaijan is in a unique and especially challenging position. Unlike most oil exporters, Azerbaijan's export infrastructure passes through neighbouring states before reaching world markets; thus, decisions on energy export pipelines involve designating permanent transit with neighbouring countries (Shaffer 2010).

Although the EU and Azerbaijan have been cooperating in political, economic and trade terms, Azerbaijan has always been reluctant to deepen its cooperation with the EU in fields other than energy transport – such as the promotion of democratic values as well as domestic and justice affairs (Franke, Gawrich, and Alakbarov 2009; Nuriyev 2007). Therefore, while the EU has pushed Azerbaijan, as well as the other South Caucasian countries, to demonstrate credible and sustainable commitment to reform in the wider social and political sphere, the Azerbaijani elite is not interested in (and even looks with suspicion at) implementing the EU's demands, which limits the EU's power (Tamm 2007). An explanation for this reluctance can be found in the country's autocratic regime (Cornell 2001; Levitsky 2002) since fulfilling EU demands would pose a direct threat to the incumbent



regime. Finally, as we will see in the subsection on military alliance, compared to other post-Soviet states, natural resources make Azerbaijan more independent from the EU and increase its resistance to EU demands (Franke et al. 2010).

#### **5.4 Violence at the Periphery: Chronology of Escalation in the Karabakh Conflict**

Since 1921, Nagorno-Karabakh had been an island of territory dominated by Armenians inside the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan (see Figure 5.2). Compared with Armenia, Azerbaijan has a far more diverse population and a greater ethnic mix with substantial minorities of Russians and Armenians, as well as smaller Caucasian nationalities (Goble 1992). This unusual situation has driven many scholars to argue how the ethnic-based dividing lines in the Soviet system as well as the intricate geopolitical conditions derived from the imperial legacy of the region could address the causes of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh (see e.g., Broers 2019, 23–26; de Waal 2003, chap. 9; Oskanien and Oskanian 2013). Investigating the interweave of the likely conditions that caused the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict would go beyond the scope of my research. Instead, I am interested in the agency of Russia in settling/managing the conflict. Therefore, after a brief historical background, I will retrace the main steps of the conflict in the 1990s from its eruption, then its escalation and until the ceasefire in 1994.

After World War I and the consequent fall of the Russian and Ottoman empires, the two nationalist regimes that took over Armenia and Azerbaijan in 1918 already quarrelled over where their common borders should lay (Smith 2001). Two years later, the Soviet authorities inherited an already highly fragmented ethno-social region that then became the Transcaucasian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic, within which Azerbaijan and Armenia were recognised as nations (in Russian *нация* or *natsja*) of the Soviet Union. In this project, the Soviet state created the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region in July 1923. As evident in

Figure 5.3, the new border gave the region of an overwhelmingly Armenian population – 94 percent of the total – to Azerbaijan but did not link it to Armenia (Saparov 2014, 123).

Figure 5.2: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh



Source: Mihalka, Michael. 1996. 'Nagorno-Karabakh and Russian Peacekeeping: Prospects for a Second Dayton'. *International Peacekeeping* 3(3): 18

Although this policy has often been interpreted as a Bolshevik artifice seeking to 'divide and rule' (Hasanli 2018), it is more plausible that the Soviet authorities were interested in a quick *sovietisation* of the area, which could be achieved by integrating the mountainous area of Nagorno-Karabakh with the industrialised area of Baku rather than with the physically unreachable Yerevan (Broers 2019, 26–29). Whatever reasons the Bolsheviks had, during the Soviet period local Karabakh authorities (with a majority of ethno-Armenian) regularly raised the doubtful legitimisation of the Nagorno-Karabakh allocation whenever the Soviet regime

went through a period of relative liberalisation (Libaridian 1988). The Karabakh Armenians had long been dissatisfied with living under Azerbaijani rule and gave a strong ideological value to reaching either sovereignty or union with Armenia. For its part, in Azerbaijan, Karabakh developed far less mobilisation potential; however, Baku has maintained that Karabakh is an integral part of Azerbaijan (Zürcher 2007b, 195).

Within this context, the beginning of the modern ‘Karabakh dispute’ between Armenia and Azerbaijan is usually dated to February 1988 when the Regional Soviet Politburo of Nagorno-Karabakh passed a resolution for seceding from the Azerbaijani Soviet Socialist Republic (AzSSR) and demanded unification with the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic (ArmSSR). This was an unprecedented act that deeply shocked both Baku and Moscow. However, there was little the Azerbaijani authority could do, since local police, law enforcement organs and party officials (who were mainly Karabakh Armenians) were on the Karabakh side (De Waal 2003, 18). Both the AzSSR and the ArmSSR witnessed an escalation of communal violence against minorities of the other nationalities, and in Nagorno-Karabakh itself populations were forcibly exchanged (Hakobyan 2010; De Waal 2003, 16).

Although senior party officials of Armenian ethnicity in Moscow were using their influence in the Politburo to support the Nagorno-Karabakh cause, Mikhail Gorbachev was not interested in giving a precedent to the other nineteen secessionist movements within the USSR (De Waal 2003, 59–60). At the same time, the Politburo tried to find a legal solution in line with the *glasnost* path initiated by Gorbachev. Not only was the Soviet centre perplexed by the unprecedented developments in Nagorno-Karabakh; it was also not prepared to respond adequately to such a crisis without resorting to the use of force, resulting in a loss of ‘adjudicatory authority’ (Broers 2019, 32).

Throughout 1988 and 1989, the Armenian and the Azerbaijan communities of Nagorno-Karabakh began to use whatever weapons they could against each other: armed

clashes in Karabakh and surrounding areas grew in intensity, and the number of victims rose (Souleimanov 2013b, 109). On the one hand, the Karabakh Armenians exploited their greater force of numbers against the Azerbaijanis. On the other hand, Azerbaijan's main weapon was the economic pressure they could exert on an enclave entirely inside its territory: the Azerbaijanis were able to block the supply of goods to Karabakh by road and rail (De Waal 2003, 93–99).

Meanwhile, mass protests were spreading across the USSR and demanding democracy and independence. Nevertheless, each Soviet republic was pursuing different goals: Armenia, along with Georgia, Moldova, and the Baltic republics had begun moving toward independence and refused to work with Gorbachev. In contrast to this, when the Soviet Union imploded in 1991, Azerbaijan – for a price – agreed to work on a new Union Treaty. The Azerbaijani leadership's act of loyalty was a necessary condition for implementing a plan to disarm and regain control over Nagorno-Karabakh (De Waal 2003, 114). For their part, the Soviet authorities were trying to win Azerbaijani support by taking a tough line on Nagorno-Karabakh. In 1990, nationalist parties elected in both Armenia and Azerbaijan contributed to a continuation of the low-intensity conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh (Zürcher 2007a, 195–96). In the spring and summer of 1991, after Azerbaijan launched Operation Ring (in Russian, Operation кольцо or *koltso*) with Soviet support to re-take control over the Nagorno-Karabakh region and the Azerbaijan villages which Armenian paramilitary *fedayin* had infiltrated, Gorbachev lifted the State of Emergency in the region on 4 July 1991 on the grounds that the situation was normalising (De Waal 2003, 119).

The resignation of Mikhail Gorbachev in August 1992 after a coup d'état and the declaration of independence of Armenia and Azerbaijan raised the conflict to a new interstate level. Since Armenian Karabakh had also declared independence on September 2, 1991, Armenia felt entitled to claim that it was only an interested observer, not a part of the conflict

(De Waal 2003, 159–60). After independence, neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan had a proper army. However, on 15 May 1992, at a meeting in Tashkent, both Armenia and Azerbaijan formally inherited vast amounts of Soviet weaponry from Russians as their due from the dividing up of the Soviet army (Cornell 2017; Mesbahi 1993, 205). Therefore, the former Soviet Union was incapable of either mediating the conflict or avoiding any further escalation.

The last phase of the Karabakh war (1993-1994) was also the bloodiest. Taking full advantage of the chaotic domestic politics in Azerbaijan, the Armenia-back paramilitary conquered most of the towns in Nagorno-Karabakh, including the corridor of Kelbaazhar/Kelbajar (Zürcher 2007b, 169–71). The hastily formed Azerbaijani army made an all-out effort to launch an attack by recovering only small pieces of territory in the North and South, but after initial successes, the attack collapsed. As would become clear, neither side had sufficient strength to wage offensive warfare (Souleimanov 2013b, 111).

Through the creation of the Minsk Group of the CSCE in 1992, western European countries, the United States, and Turkey all had a stake in the resolution of the conflict. However, the Western countries were not in fact seriously interested in resolving the Karabakh war, nor was the OSCE actually able to achieve this due to the lack of experience in running peacekeeping operations; the Western states were reluctant to approve an arrangement which would acknowledge the post-Soviet region as lying in Russia's sphere of interests (Zourabian 2006). Therefore, in May 1994, a ceasefire was signed by the belligerent parties (the so-called Bishkek Protocol) but Azerbaijan refused to accept its enforcement by a Russian peacekeeping force. This gave birth to an unusual ceasefire line, which had no neutral troops on the ground to patrol it, as the Russian forces desired, and was thus self-regulated. As Thomas De Waal (2003, 240) stated: 'With a cease-fire in place but no political agreement signed, the dispute now entered a strange phase of "no war, no peace"'. This stage, which is currently still in force, came to be known as the 'frozen conflict' of Nagorno-Karabakh.

## **5.5 Russia strives for Status Recognition: Consequences for the South Caucasus**

Within this regional framework, Russia's foreign policy since December 1991 has gone through considerable fluctuations in both formulation and implementation. The ideological vacuum left by the break-up of the Soviet Union triggered an intense debate within the Russian elites on the necessity of identifying the key concepts of Russian national interests and, consequently, developing a strategy for their implementation. As already seen in chapter 3, several trends emerged from the debate, ranging from the Euro-Atlanticist 'schools of thought' to the most imperial/nationalist Russian forces. Despite significant differences in their understandings of the country's past, present and future, these various trends all agreed that Russia was a great power and should be recognised as such by the West (Morozov 2015; Tsygankov 2013). However, they disagreed (and continue to disagree) on the strategies that Russia should implement both on the international arena and in the post-Soviet space in order to finally obtain such recognition by the West.

In the early 1990s, Russia's underwent a significant shift from a Western-oriented to a Eurasian-oriented foreign policy. This shift was highlighted by the replacement of Andrei Kozyrev with Yevgeni Primakov as Foreign Minister in January 1996 after the previous approach to foreign policy appeared to be discredited by the improbability of Russia's early integration into the liberal international community. Although the two figures are often analysed as representing very different approaches in Russia's foreign policy, Moscow's diplomacy in the early 1990s was far more complex and balanced than critics of each school of thought were prepared to accept. Bearing this in mind, I will first address the key concepts of the main schools of thought in Russia and their strategies towards the West before tackling the policy implications of these strategies for Russia's foreign policy in South Caucasus.

One of the foundations of the Euro-Atlanticist perspective is that domestic and foreign policy are closely related. Regarding Russia's fate, this would imply the creation of an

international environment that would enable Russia to become a democratic, market-oriented, civilised nation (Mesbahi 1993). At their heart, argued Kozyrev, Russia's international interests paralleled those of the democratic world and were to a large extent a reflection of Russia's democratic aspirations (Kozyrev 1994, 1995). Russian liberals concluded from these postulates that Russia must itself observe international norms of behaviour or face the likelihood of exclusion from that international community. In this eventuality, Russia's own prospects for democratic development would be seriously compromised. According to this view, great power status is not determined by the scale of a power's empire but by the wellbeing of its citizens as well as the level of integration in the liberal world order. During his mandate, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Andrei Kozyrev strongly believed that joining the 'civilised' world's club – e.g. through membership in the G7 – would generate respect and trust from the West toward Russia (Mankoff 2011, 76). As a bold symbolic gesture Yeltsin even addressed a letter to NATO suggesting that his country looked forward to the day when Russia would become a member of that organisation, and at the beginning of his mandate as Foreign Minister, Kozyrev stated that Russia did not regard NATO as an aggressive bloc but viewed it as one of the mechanisms of stability in Europe and in the world as a whole (Baker III 2002; Dannreuther 1995).

However, such assumptions proved to be unrealistic (Marantz 1997). Being disappointed with the foreign economic assistance supplied for the transformation of the Russian economy as well as with enlargement intentions that NATO announced without consulting with Moscow, Russian elites switched toward a more realistic foreign policy. This pragmatic strategy was pursued by the newly appointed Foreign Minister Yevgeni Primakov, who Andrey Tsygankov calls the father of Russia's new Statism (Tsygankov 2013, 74). A central tenet of the statist school is that Russia cannot avoid addressing its unique geopolitical reality (Tsygankov and Tsygankov 2010, 669). Statists want Russia to be a strong and

independent great power able to maintain order and keep the country safe from threats from both the west and the east. Consequently, Russia cannot gravitate solely within the Western pole and should not necessarily transform into a ‘normal power’ in order to enhance its own status in the eyes of Western powers. Instead, it has to focus on security and economic partnership with the West rather than romanticising it (Jackson 2003, 43–44).

Finally, on the opposite pole to the Euro-Atlanticists there are the (neo-)Eurasianists, known also as civilisationalists, who theorise that Russia is a distinct civilisation from the West possessing a unique set of values different from those in either Europe or Asia. Already established in the eighteenth century, classical Eurasianism portrayed Russia not as a common state but as a civilisation in its own right, with Russia compared to Europe or the ‘Atlantic civilisation’ as a whole (Shnirelman 2009). After the fall of Soviet Union, ideologists of neo-Eurasianism, which included also Alexander Dugin, idolised medieval Muscovy – a place of considerable importance to the Orthodox faith in Russian society – whilst emphasising Russia's distinctly Eurasian civilisational basis and its deeply patriarchal nature. This ideology rejects not only ‘Western’ overtures for partnership with Russia but also the notion that Western liberal values could have any place in Russian society (Clowes 2011). The best choice for Russia would be not to remain a passive player in world politics, but to spread Russian values abroad and aggressively respond to security threats (Tsygankov 2013, 76). According to this school, Russia could not keep its status as a great power without establishing order in Eurasia, where Moscow would become the cornerstone of a widening Eurasian community (Leszek Buszynski 1996). However, while neo-Eurasianism has become well-entrenched within Kremlin policy since the beginning of the 2000s (Pryce 2013a), in the early 1990s, it remained a marginal idea from the right-wing milieu that did not officially appeal to the Russian society (Parland 2004).



Because of the highly conciliatory policies toward the West, Russia's foreign policy during Yeltsin's first mandate (until 1993) was deemed subjugated to the prime goal of winning the West's support and assistance. As a consequence, despite the fact that the Caucasus was engulfed in the explosive issue of Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia's foreign policy towards the 'southern flank' of its borders displayed an uncharacteristic passivity. Although it is true that Russia chose policies of emulation and integration that would clearly demonstrate how Moscow had broken decisively and completely with past Soviet foreign policy, Russia has, nevertheless, engaged in pragmatic policy-making aimed at protecting and promoting its core national interests, especially in the post-Soviet space (Marantz 1997). Although building a partnership with the United States and Europe was a priority, Euro-Atlanticists warned their Western partners of a new 'geopolitical rather than an ideological rivalry, with a resultant new split in Europe' (Kozyrev 1995, 4). Consequently, Russia cultivated another partnership with the fundamental partners of the post-Soviet space: Russia founded the collective Community of Independent States (CIS) security system, in which Moscow was the main guarantor and dominant player. Euro-Atlanticists were aware of the strategic importance of the near abroad for at least two reasons: firstly, the security of 25 million ethnic Russians living in the newly-born independent states; secondly, genuine concern over the spread of Islamic radicalism especially in Central Asia and the Caucasus against which Russia had the role of 'container' on behalf of the 'civilised world' (Mesbahi 1993).

As will be more specifically addressed later in the chapter, throughout the civil conflicts of southern CIS members, Russia successfully managed to maintain privileged relations, mainly because of the enduring military, economic and political legacies of the Soviet Union that would not be overcome overnight. Therefore, although Russia's early foreign policy rotated around partnership and even ideological integration with the Western powers in order to be recognised as a great (democratic) power, Russia managed to advance

its material interests in the face of the US and, at the same time, to be the dominant interlocutor among post-Soviet states (Lynch 2002, 168).

## **5.6 Military Alliance: Azerbaijan's Semblance of an Independent Foreign Policy**

The early years after the collapse of the Soviet Union were marked by a security gap within the ex-Soviet empire that gave neighbouring states the possibility to play an important, if not a decisive, role in the affairs of the Caucasian region. From the Azerbaijani perspective, after gaining independence, Azerbaijan had to fulfil the task of formulating a foreign policy strategy that could capitalise on its sensitive geo-strategic position and ensure security and military guarantees in the face of internal secessionism. This strategy was based on two main pillars that were alternated according to several regime changes that occurred in the early 1990s: on the one hand, reconnecting the Azerbaijani people with their historical, religious and ethnic affiliation in the region; on the other, taking into account the geopolitical and strategic necessities of the Azerbaijani state (Mehdiyeva 2003a). While the first approach privileged relations with neighbours of ethno-cultural and religious affiliation such as Iran and Turkey, the second approach urged Azerbaijan to maintain a balanced foreign policy with both its regional neighbours and global institutions in the absence of any official military alliance.

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union and rising instability in the South Caucasus, Iran has been keen to preserve the status quo of its northern borders (Cornell 2017a, 114–19). For the first time in three centuries, several independent states form a buffer zone between Iran, Turkey and Russia; and maintaining the status quo implies preserving the economic and political sovereignty of the states within this zone. However, the ethnic conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has undermined such intentions. From its beginning in 1988, the conflict became a major challenge for Iran's foreign and domestic policies for several reasons, which mainly concern geopolitical interests. Firstly, the ethnic Azerbaijani population of Northern Iran had

a central role in forming a strong public opinion about the conflict, urging Iran to provide military support to the 'Muslim brothers' from Azerbaijan against the Armenian invasion (Shaffer 2002). Due to the ethnic affiliation with Northern Azerbaijanis, which was amplified by the nationalistic rhetoric of Azerbaijan's president Abulfaz Elchibey, as well as the porousness of the borders with both belligerent parties, Iran has feared a spillover of the conflict along its border territory (Mehdiyeva 2003b, 281). This is the main reason why Iran's policymakers emphasised the inviolability of recognised international borders (Goble 1992).

Second, Iran felt the pressure to mediate the conflict in certain ways, so as to contain Russia's (already reinforced) position in the South Caucasus. Similarly, Iran intended to use its influence in the region to limit Turkey's ambitions, given Turkey's role as the US's most reliable ally in the region (Ramezanzadeh 1996). However, despite all the efforts, Iran's mediation process in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict basically ended in failure (Mahmudlu and Abilov 2018). For its part, Azerbaijan relied on Iran's support in providing basic services to the Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic, the landlocked exclave of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Kouhi-Esfahani 2019, 127). Moreover, because the United States had blocked Iran's participation in the giant pipeline project Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, Azerbaijan sought to appease Iran by offering it a major role in developing yet another oil field in the southern Caspian sea (Mihalka 1996a, 23). However, despite emphasis on cultural historical bonds as well as on cooperation on security issues, Azerbaijan-Irani relations have experienced several downward developments, which have, to some extent, served to limit Iran's influence in Azerbaijan (Makili-Aliyev 2013).

In contrast to Iran, the Turkish influence and the Turkish element in Azerbaijan's foreign policy had more of a commercial/economic tilt. President Abulfaz Elchibey counted on the support of Turkey in the conflict against Armenia over Karabakh: oil was the only commodity that Azerbaijan could offer in return for the hoped-for Turkish support. Indeed,

when the conflict flared up, Turkey was ready to support its (also militarily) ‘Azerbaijani brothers’ against Armenia (Souleimanov 2013b, 139–40). For its part, Turkish policymakers have been mainly interested in getting a piece of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline route that enters the European market by securing the location of the pipeline end at the Turkish port of Ceyhan (Sayari 2000). At the same time, Azerbaijan represented a big expansion of the Turkish export market (Sobhani 1996).

While Turkey restricted its relations with Azerbaijan to purely economic interests, Azerbaijan’s foreign policy under President Elchibey (1992-1993) was strongly affected by ideological considerations, which even superseded material factors (Shaffer 2010). Unlike his predecessor, President Elchibey supported the idea of Azerbaijan’s integration into an alliance with Turkey and sought to follow the Turkish Kemalist model of statehood that had the potential to see it become a member of the Euro-Atlantic Community while preserving the Azerbaijani identity (Priego 2008). Therefore, Elchibey prioritised the expansion of relations with the West, including the acceleration of negotiations with Western oil companies (Valiyev and Mamishova 2019). In March 1992, Azerbaijan, together with most other post-Soviet countries, joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, which was transformed into the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in 1997. Moreover, Elchibey, who was interested in limiting as far as possible Russia’s influence in the South Caucasus, rejected any institutionalised military cooperation with Russia and did not join the CIS; instead, he made alliance choices based on identity by assuming that the common Turkic background would serve as a basis for a political and military alliance with Turkey. However, despite the fact that Turkey gave priority to Azerbaijan right from the start in its relations with the republics of the former Soviet Union, in the aftermath of the Karabakh conflict Turkey embarked on a policy of neutrality, which simultaneously enabled it to present itself as an impartial mediator between the parties. Turkey was unwilling to risk its relations with Moscow for the sake of

active unilateral support for Azerbaijan in the Karabakh war (Cornell 1998, 65). As Shaffer (2010, 57) states: ‘Ankara showed no signs in this early period of wanting to undertake an active role in the security outcomes in the region, or to enter into a military alliance with Azerbaijan’.

In such an unfavourable context, Azerbaijan’s foreign policy under Heydar Aliyev, who was elected as the third President of the independent Azerbaijan in 1993, underwent a shift towards a multi-dimensional approach that has generally been pro-Russian but not necessarily anti-Western (Gvalia et al. 2013, 100). Aware of its role as a major alternative energy supplier to Europe to the troubled Middle East region, Azerbaijan has been using oil as its principle lubricant not only to reinforce its domestic regime but also to search for a solution over the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh by appeasing all the major external and regional actors and by isolating the Karabakh Armenians. In the first case, Azerbaijan’s choice of a major energy export pipeline route through Georgia and Turkey indicated the view that a security alliance with these states brought it the most benefit among its various regional options and that being dependent on these states was less risky than dependency on any others (Shaffer 2010). At the same time, Azerbaijan adopted a policy of balancing the interests of Russia and US, as well as attempting to maintain stable relations with Turkey and Iran. Azerbaijan has pursued multiple alliances and cooperation with states that often possess opposing strategic orientations. Baku maintains multidirectional security cooperation with a number of alliances, including opposing alliances such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It has even sought to attract Armenia by holding out the promise of a pipeline for ‘later’ oil, on the condition that Armenia would cease to support self-determination for Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan’s choice of main energy export pipeline route reflects its primary alliance orientation (Mihalka 1996a).

Although the energy sector has given Azerbaijan a large space for strategic manoeuvring, the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has occupied a major portion of Baku's foreign policy activity. On the one hand, Azerbaijan was irritated by Moscow's military cooperation with Armenia (De Waal 2003, 225–26). This was surely a good motive from Baku for starting to move towards the West and pursuing cooperation with NATO. Aliyev signed the Partnership for Peace Framework in 1994 providing for political dialogue, participation in NATO-led operations – e.g. the Kosovo campaign – and practical cooperation on defence and army reforms (Malek 2008, 33). However, despite the formal cooperation on logistic and army reform, between 1993 and 2000, Azerbaijan neither exhibited any striking attempt to upgrade its own military according to NATO standards, nor has it ever unequivocally expressed a formal desire to join NATO within a specific time frame (Fuller 2013). It is not a secret that Azerbaijan's neighbours (Iran and Russia) never felt comfortable about any NATO enlargement within the region. On the other hand, since the stabilisation of the situation in Karabakh was largely impossible without engaging with Moscow, Azerbaijan has halted its rapprochement with the West, and under pressure for the unprecedented loss of territory in the Nagorno-Karabakh and on the verge of internal dissolution and civil war, Aliyev signed both the Collective Security Treaty in 1993 –which preceded the creation of the CSTO – and acceded to the CIS (Valiyev and Mamishova 2019, 275).<sup>76</sup> Lastly, Azerbaijan hosted the former Soviet 4<sup>th</sup> Army on its territory. Although Russia's withdrawal from Azerbaijani territory was almost completed in 1993, Russia demanded that its border troops be allowed to remain on Armenia's border with Iran, of which two-thirds was Azerbaijani territory controlled by Armenian military forces. Generally, although Azerbaijan's vast oil and gas resources have encouraged it to maintain a rhetoric of independence and neutrality in the

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<sup>76</sup> Azerbaijan participated in the CSTO between 1993 and 1999. Azerbaijan's membership in the CSTO has been highly dependent on the withdrawal of Russian (former Soviet) military troops and installation from Azerbaijani territory. On the other hand, Azerbaijan has renovated the Partnership for Peace with NATO in 1999. See Azerbaijan-NATO Partnership, <https://nato-pfp.mfa.gov.az/en/parent/3> (accessed 6 August 2020)

formulation of foreign policy and alliances, Russia's role as the main mediator in the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has pushed Azerbaijan not to search for political and security guarantees from other global actors (Coyle 2018). Therefore, the absence of an alternative alignment option induced Azerbaijan to exercise caution and military restraint.

### **5.7 Outcome: Russia's (non-Military) Intervention as non-Underbalancing**

As seen, Russia was able to arrange a ceasefire in May 1994 – the Bishkek protocol – that subsequently held until the end of the decade. However, no political agreement has been reached since. Militarily exhausted, both belligerents signed a ceasefire brokered by Russia but could not come to a political agreement that would allow for the deployment of peacekeepers. Due to the historical background of Russia's active presence in the South Caucasus since the mid-eighteenth century, Moscow saw itself as the natural candidate to lead any peacekeeping operation planned for Karabakh (De Waal 2003, 203–5). The initial plan handled by Minister of Defence Pavel Grachev was the deployment of 1,800 (predominantly Russian) peacekeepers under the official framework of a CIS plan. The rationale behind this was to let the Armenians control Kelbajar in order to restore a balance that would be kept under Russian control (Rytövuori-Apunen 2019, 155). Indeed, the plan partially worked. After the takeover of Kelbajar, the UN prompted a resolution against Armenia to demand 'the immediate withdrawal of all occupying forces from the Kelbajar district and other recently occupied areas of Azerbaijan' (Resolution 822 - UN Security Council 1993).

With Armenia facing international pressure, and Azerbaijan politically and militarily weak, Russia emerged as the main provider of security guarantees by resorting to its peacekeeping mission. However, Grachev's plan to establish Russia-led peacekeeping forces was obstructed by Azerbaijan, Western powers and even Armenia.<sup>77</sup> A Russian presence in

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<sup>77</sup> As will be clearer in the next chapter, this attitude against the deployment of Russian troops will be a pivotal difference in Russia's conflict management in Abkhazia and South Ossetia

the region would have an unfavourable solution for Azerbaijan as it would prevent any future attempts to change the status quo and to regain the area around Nagorno-Karabakh. At the same time, the Western powers, under the so-called Minsk Group, were reluctant to approve an arrangement that would acknowledge the post-Soviet regions as the prerogative of Russia's 'sphere of influence' (Zourabian 2006). For its part, despite its economic and military dependence on Russia, Armenia was also sceptical about stepping back and giving up the conquered territory of Karabakh. However, the question over the only plausible alternative, namely an OSCE mission, ended up in a stalemate without reaching a political settlement that would allow for the deployment of OSCE forces (Mihalka 1996b, 19). Therefore, both the belligerent sides and the OSCE members had to accept that no agreement on Nagorno-Karabakh could be reached without the Russians and the only trade-off was to establish a monitoring mission along the Line of Contact in 1995.

At the same time, Russia's non-military intervention over the Karabakh dispute should not be advanced as underbalancing (Schweller 2004) or even as disengaging foreign policy. Moscow's policy in both Azerbaijan and Armenia reflected an intense desire and determination to remain involved in the management of the conflict. Firstly, although both Armenia and Azerbaijan refused a Russia-led peacekeeping force on the Line of Contact in 1995, a consistent number of Russian military troops in Armenia are stationed in the former Soviet military basis of Gyumri. Therefore, although Russia did not directly intervene in the conflict over Karabakh to stop violence, the bilateral military pacts between Russia and Armenia, which was signed in 1995, effectively deters Azerbaijan from initiating military actions that seeks to 'reconquer' Nagorno-Karabakh.<sup>78</sup> However, the unspecified

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<sup>78</sup> This was the case until the summer of 2020, which saw renewed violence and conflict escalation in Nagorno-Karabakh. This time, the factor that may have broken the very precarious balance of the conflict 'freezing' mediated by Russia is the active involvement of Turkey in providing military support to Azerbaijan. For a similar argument, see Crawford, Timothy W. 2003. *Pivotal Deterrence: Third-Party Statecraft and the Pursuit of Peace*. p.22. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.



responsibility of Russia's protection in relation to Karabakh Armenians allows Russia to maintain balanced relations both with Turkey and Azerbaijan (Rytövuori-Apunen 2019, 172).

Secondly, Russia's settlement of the Karabakh conflict through an intense diplomatic effort with the belligerent actors has been placed within the context of further CIS integration (Mesbahi 1993). After Moscow's plan to position its peacekeeping forces was rejected by Azerbaijan, Russia aimed to be the principal shaper of the conflict's eventual politico-military development, and it is currently the most active mediator in the frozen conflict (Pokalova 2015). On the one hand, Russia has been deemed a conflict manipulator, being the primary force of fuelling the arms race between the two parties (Coyle 2018). It is no secret that Russia has transferred billions of dollars' worth of arms both to Armenia and Azerbaijan. Consequently, rather than an impartial observer, as Svante Cornell (2017b, 200) states: '[...] Moscow's has sought to combine the roles of peace broker, arms provider to both, as well as "ally" with one (Armenia) and "strategic partner" with the other (Azerbaijan) belligerent, a combination that speaks for itself'.

On the other hand, Russia's policy in Nagorno-Karabakh has consisted of a fine balancing act: maintaining stability in the region and preventing a flaring up of violence. Any disruption of this harmony – e.g. escalation or the settlement of the conflict – would negatively affect the space of action necessary for accommodating both Armenia and Azerbaijan, and avoiding intervention by other regional powers. Indeed, while Armenia is solidly tied up with Russia both militarily – through its membership in the CSTO – and economically – through its membership in the EAEU – Azerbaijan insists on cultivating a multilateral foreign policy that may include closer cooperation with NATO and tying its Caspian Sea energy resources more closely to Western companies (Geybullayeva 2016.; Mikheev 2016). Should violence increase, Russia may not be able to prevent further escalation without deploying its military forces. In this scenario, the co-chairs of the Minsk Group and OSCE members would bring in

their peace enforcement units or even establish their military presence on the ground. In contrast to that, if conflict escalates and Russia decides not to interfere, it would lose credibility within the CSTO members as the main security guarantor in the region and would lose political leverage over Azerbaijan's foreign policy (Rytövuori-Apunen 2019, 151). Therefore, Moscow's general preference regarding the conflict is the continuation of the status quo. This does not necessarily mean that Moscow is opposed to a resolution—but it would support it only as long as it does not interfere with Moscow's primacy in the South Caucasus.

## 5.8 Conclusion

This chapter has conducted an in-depth analysis of a typical case – Nagorno-Karabakh 1994 – following a QCA analysis of the negated outcome, namely Russia's non-assertive foreign policy. Based on an underlying ontological understanding of causation of a method, a process tracing method has been adopted to assess whether we have confirming or disconfirming evidence of the operation of the theorised causal mechanism. This means that the analysis of this typical case only provided us with evidence of the workings of the mechanism we are tracing; thus, we have to be very cautious about making *cross-case inferences* with other typical cases of Russia's non-intervention based on process tracing findings.

Nevertheless, by linking the conjunction  $\sim PS \sim AL$  to the outcome  $\sim Y$  through a mechanism and then tracing them both empirically, the process tracing analysis developed a better understanding of *how* a conjunction produces an outcome within a bounded population of similar cases (Beach and Pedersen 2018). The basis of the process tracing analysis is to find out whether each of the conditions are genuinely causal in the sense that they 'do something' or whether they are merely scope conditions. In particular, basing my theoretical assumptions on Neoclassical Realism, I have found that one systemic condition (external pressure) and one intervening condition (status recognition), which are sufficient in the QCA of the negated outcome were better understood as scope conditions in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh 1994.

The result is that the two conditions have to be present for Russia's non-military intervention, yet 'they do not do anything' to trigger the mechanism.

At the systemic level, when ethnic separatist violence erupted in 1988 in Nagorno-Karabakh and then escalated in the early 1990s, the Western powers were mostly occupied with leading Russia through the complicated process of democratic and economic reforms. At the same time, such marginal interests in the new periphery of the post-Soviet space produced a more permissive international environment for Russia that gave Moscow more room for manoeuvre in controlling policy outcomes in the South Caucasus. Therefore, although the marginal external pressure from Western powers in the post-Soviet space in the early 1990s did not cause Russia's non-military intervention over Nagorno-Karabakh, it surely facilitated and even contributed to its realisation.

At the state-level, the mixed strategies undertaken by Russia for rehabilitating its status among the other great powers has enabled Moscow to enmesh its foreign policy both with the Western partners and with its neighbours. On the one hand, Russia briefly strove to demonstrate its commitment to democratic and liberal values by aligning its international interests with those of the democratic world. On the other hand, being highly suspicious of NATO's enlargement intentions without its fundamental transformation for the partnership between the alliance and Moscow, Russian elites adopted a more realistic foreign policy. One of the main consequences of this switch in foreign policy has been Russia's engagement in post-Soviet 'affairs' including ethno-separatist conflict. Within this context, Russia considered itself to be the natural choice not only for the main diplomatic mediator in the Karabakh conflict but also to lead any peacekeeping operation planned for the troubled region.

Contrary to scope conditions, the absence of any credible military alliance for Azerbaijan *did* have a causal inference in Russia's decision-making. Although Azerbaijan has attempted to please all regional and global powers by playing the card of energy resources in

exchange for political and military support against Armenia, the dynamic and the settlement of the Karabakh conflict kept Azerbaijani foreign policy strongly in the Russian orbit. Therefore, the absence of a military alliance and the pressure on Azerbaijan over the Karabakh issue has allowed Russia to be in full control of the situation. At the same time, the threat posed by other great powers jumping into the conflict was marginal. The combination of these conditions either contributed to or even had a causal impact on Russia's privileged position in the peace process in Nagorno-Karabakh – a position gained without resorting to the use of force. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that Russia's management of the frozen conflicts within the post-Soviet space through the use of diplomatic tools has been the exception rather than the rule. Despite displaying the same conjunction – ~PS~AL – the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia 1993 presents Russia's most assertive policy outcome, namely military intervention.

The next chapter traces the mechanism under which Russia decided to intervene militarily in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the early 1990s in order to settle the ethnic separatist conflict in Georgia rather than resorting to diplomatic tools as done in Nagorno-Karabakh.

## CHAPTER 6

# RUSSIA'S MILITARY INTERVENTION OVER ABKHAZIA AND SOUTH OSSETIA

Gerring defines a deviant case as one 'that, by reference to some general understanding of a topic (either a specific theory or common sense), demonstrates a surprising value [outcome]' (2007, 105). Tracing mechanisms in deviant cases can help us revise theories about causal conditions. However, this tracing does not stand alone; it is done by systematically comparing a deviant case with a typical case. A deviant case is therefore defined in relation to existing knowledge. The outcome of a deviant case may prove to have been caused by mechanisms that have been previously overlooked but whose effects are well known from other research (Bennett and George 2005, 111). In process tracing, deviant cases are of relevance where the cause and known scope conditions are present but the outcome does not occur. This type of deviant case can tell us about *omitted* causal and/or scope conditions that have to be present for a relationship to occur and can also be used to refine existing causal theories when their mechanism does not work as expected on similar cases.

In Chapter 4, the comparative method of fsQCA theorised that  $\sim P^*S^*\sim AL$  is a sufficient cause for  $\sim A$ ; yet deviant cases have emerged from the comparative analysis. Studying deviant cases where  $\sim P^*S^*\sim AL$  is present but where  $\sim A$  is not present is useful for investigating the contextual conditions that have to be present in order to trigger the mechanism that will produce the outcome. It is important that the process tracing of a deviant case is done *after* we have positive results when tracing a mechanism in one or several typical cases. The reason for such a methodological choice is that once we are confident about what is going on in typical cases, investigating this type of deviant case is very important for developing better causal theories (Beach and Pedersen 2018).

This chapter aims to better understand *how* the conjunction  $\sim P^*S^*\sim AL$  of the conservative solution of the fsQCA analysis produces the outcome of intervention despite the

conjunction for intervention not being present. In particular, I am interested in unpacking the mechanism that led Russia to intervene in Georgia when the separatist conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia erupted during the break-up of the Soviet Union. Since the conditions are the same as those analysed in the previous chapter, the first section analyses the steps involved in developing a theory-driven mechanism of Russia's decision-making as post-QCA process tracing, but it focuses on how we combine comparative and within-case methods in order to uncover omitted causal or contextual conditions that could address the outcome of intervention. The second section provides guidance for presenting the actual function of the deviant case mechanism. The concluding section discusses these insights so as to inform our comparison of the deviant and typical case.

## **6.1 Searching for 'the Omitted Condition': the Mechanism of Russia's Military Intervention**

The within-case component of a condition-centred design involves tracing a mechanism using in-depth process tracing in a deviant case until the mechanism breaks down. Finding out when and why a mechanism breaks down gives us clues about omitted contextual or causal conditions despite the fact that the tracing component here is auxiliary; the main analytical method is a systematic paired comparison of the deviant case with a typical case (Beach and Pedersen 2016, 326–28). After having found the 'omitted condition', it would be possible to engage in a form of in-depth case study that focuses on this new candidate for a cause, thus attempting to discern whether the new condition is causally related to the outcome. A revising theory process-tracing design therefore relies on a two-step analysis, where we use a deviant case first to trace where and why the theorised mechanism breaks down and then take these insights to inform our comparison of the deviant and typical case in order to uncover omitted causal and/or contextual conditions. In order to do this, we isolate the component parts of the mechanism it produces and delineate how they operate together in order to see whether the

conjunction is a causal or spurious relationship. As in the analysis of the typical case, this is done by applying a neoclassical realist framework to a mechanism of foreign policy decision-making – Russia’s intervention in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the early 1990s. Therefore, in operationalising the single conditions of the sufficient term  $\sim P * S * \sim AL$  into a mechanism of decision-making, a five-step causal chain is utilised.

In line with neoclassical realist assumptions, the mechanism starts with external pressure in the shared neighbourhood exerted by other great powers (P). As argued in the previous chapter, the condition of military alliance (AL) is the second systemic condition that works as a moderating factor in the mechanism. The intervening variable that acts as a ‘further transmission belt’ between the international system and foreign policy decisions is the perception from the foreign policy executive regarding status recognition as great power (S). In the typical case, we have seen that both external pressure (P) and status recognition (S) from the conjunction cannot logically be a cause in a mechanistic sense, because it was difficult to see what they could actually do beyond acting as a scope condition. Although this is also true in the deviant case, the outcome (A) is very different from the typical case ( $\sim A$ ). Since we are unable to explain what caused the outcome with existing theories, there is a need to build a new theorised mechanism that can account for the deviant case, starting from the known conditions ( $\sim P * S * \sim AL$ ). It is then hoped that the new theorised causal mechanism derived from studying the deviant case is applicable to other similar (deviant) cases (Beach and Pedersen 2018).

The upper part of Figure 6.1 illustrates the theorised parts of the mechanism, while the lower part depicts observable implications that can be used to test whether the mechanism was present or absent in the case. In the theorised mechanism, conditions are bold, whereas activities are in italics. Conditions that are not causally related to Russia’s intervention in the ethnic-separatist conflict but are rather merely conditions that have to be present for the

mechanism to function properly are indicated with a colon instead of an arrow. The observable implications are used to confirm or reject the theorised inference of the conditions (Beach and Pedersen 2013; Jeffrey T. Checkel and Bennett 2014).

As with the mechanism of the typical case, the eruption and escalation of ethnic-separatist violence (X) represents what the neoclassical realists would call ‘the independent variable’, which departs directly from the structural realist baseline (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, chap. 2). The independent variable, which refers to a condition of marginal external pressure from other great powers ( $\sim P$ ), works as a *scope condition*. Thus, we would expect Russia to act as the main regional power in a context with low external pressure from other great powers. At the domestic level, a second scope condition is identified, namely Russia’s perception of the recognition its status enjoys on the part of other great powers (S). In this case, we would expect to find evidence for Russia’s commitment to ‘catching up’ with the elite group of Western great powers by accepting the post-Cold War hierarchy and even by embracing the legitimacy of the Western-led international order.

The second systemic condition Alliance (AL) captures the first causal effect of the independent variable: the foreign policy executive evaluates the risks of intervening in a violent separatist conflict in a neighbouring state by assessing the likely intervention of other third parties; and consequently, by checking any alliance options available to the target state that could escalate the conflict. Empirical fingerprints of this part would include any strategic/military dialogue between the target state dealing with the ethno-separatist conflicts and other regional powers or alliances organisations. In this case, the target state has no military alliance ( $\sim AL$ ), and therefore the post-QCA mechanism theorises that Russia will deal with the conflict/crisis taking place in its immediate regional neighbourhood (X) by adopting a non-intervention stance ( $\sim A$ ). However, this was not the case for Georgia in the early 1990s, when Russia intervened militarily to ‘freeze’ the conflict, whilst, in practical terms,



establishing its troops on the Georgian territory. Therefore, the task here is to find out why and how the next part of the mechanism was not present.

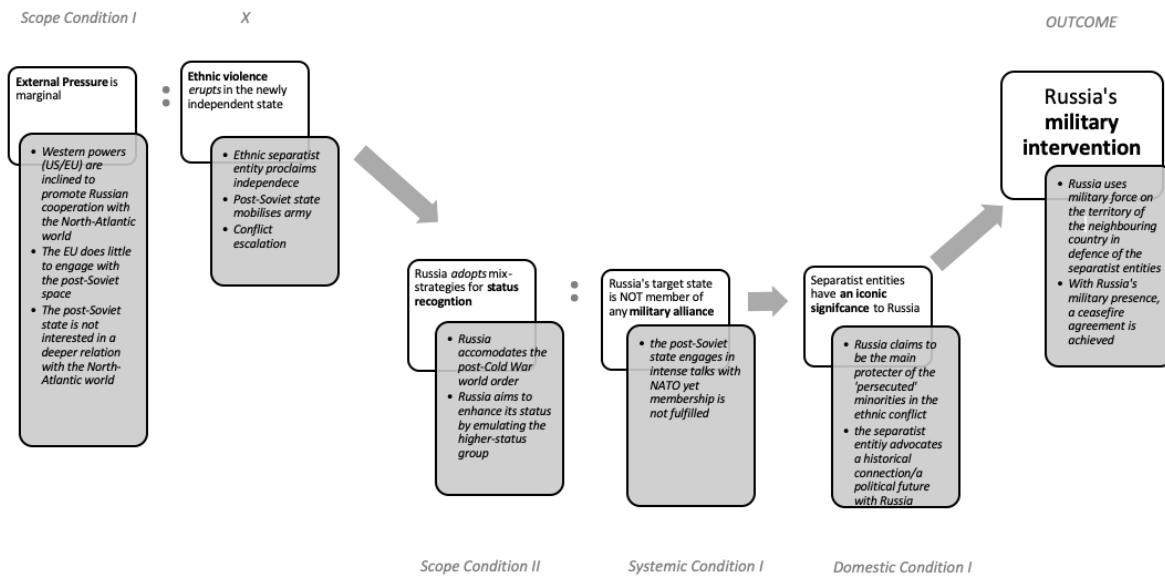
As the main analytical method is a systematic paired comparison of the deviant case – Russia’s intervention in Georgia 1989-1994 – with a typical case – Russia’s non-intervention in Azerbaijan 1989-1994 – of the negated outcome (~A), a prior cross-case knowledge of the population of the given theoretical relationship can be useful in addressing the omitted condition (Beach and Pedersen 2018). We have seen that, despite Russia using the conflict in Karabakh as a regulatory tool in the region to avoid Azerbaijan’s close cooperation with NATO, Russia has always reiterated its official position of supporting the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, in line with the OSCE resolution and the CIS (see e.g., Commonwealth of Independent States 1995; OSCE - Lisbon Summit 1996). Moreover, the ‘demonstrated will of the people’ as legitimacy for their independence has mobilised little support within the domestic Russian debate except amongst the Russian intelligentsia and the Armenian minority (De Waal 2003, 66). In contrast to this, Russia has depicted the separatist conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia – both those back in the 1990s and then later in 2008 – as a ‘humanitarian catastrophe’ (Green 2010); a ‘tragedy’ that left Russia ‘no other way’ to intervene in order to avoid the violence recurring in a more atrocious form (see e.g., Niedermaier 2008). As Helena Rytövuori-Apunen (2019) reports, “‘Genocide’ was the term used in June 1992, in the statement on South Ossetia by Ruslan Khasbulatov, the Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet, at a time when Russia was in the process of trying to broker a ceasefire in the conflict which had flared up violently in late 1989.’ (2019, 39). Therefore, the next question is: why did Russia employ a different public discourse to depict the separatist conflicts happening on its southern borders?

A likely explanation for this difference on the part of Moscow’s political elites in addressing violent conflicts equally endangering Russia’s regional primacy in the South

Caucasus is that Nagorno-Karabakh bears the least ‘iconic significance’ to Russia itself in comparison with other conflict regions. Russia’s control over the two political entities of South Ossetia and Abkhazia is not only vital for maintaining a barrier against military insurgency in the North Caucasus, and thus to prevent the weakening of the Russian state (Lynch 2006, 50; Souleimanov 2013, 147), but it is also a way to institutionalise ‘the historical relationship of collaboration and protection which Russia has had especially with the Ossetians but also with the ethnically diversified population in Abkhazia’ (Rytövuori-Apunen 2019, 67). In contrast to that, Nagorno-Karabakh is a symbol of Russia’s presence and capacity to control South Caucasus’s policy outcomes in opposition to Turkey, Iran and other regional powers (Romashov and Rytövuori-Apunen 2017).

In addition to the three conditions, the mechanism presents the episode triggering the chain of events and adds the ‘new’ condition of iconic significance. Therefore, the mechanism works as follows: external pressure from other great powers in the post-Soviet space is marginal: ethnic-separatist violence erupts in the newly independent state → Russia’s hunt for status recognition is fulfilled: the target state is not part of any military defensive alliance → the secessionist region has an iconic significance to Russia → Russia’s intervention. According to the conceptualisation of ‘assertiveness’ in chapter 2, ‘military intervention’ is the most assertive of the foreign policy instruments available. In this case it refers to Russia’s use of force in order to settle the conflict. Since we are tracing the same conditions, the test of directional expectations from the typical case analysed in Chapter 5 will be applied to the deviant case, and the new condition of iconic significance will be added.

Figure 6.1: Russia's intervention mechanism



On this matter, before moving to the actual mechanism and to its observable implications, it is helpful to better specify the concept of 'iconic significance' and to address how it has been applied in the case of Russia.

## 6.2 Iconic Significance: an 'Interrelational' Process of Hegemony

To understand the more general concept of significance in IR, it is useful to refer to a similar concept – namely, salience (Hensel 2000; 2001). Salience has been mainly analysed for studying territorial conflicts in order to refer to 'the degree of importance attached to that issue by the actors involved' (Diehl 1992, 334). In particular, territorial issues have proved to be especially salient for states and more likely to have a significant impact on violent conflicts because of states' claim for sovereignty and security (Diehl 1991; Vasquez, 1993, 1995, 1996; Hensel, 1996b). Although scholars have suggested that territory is perhaps the most salient issue in world politics, the type of salience of a territorial issue affects the actions taken to resolve such claims. In order to rank the likelihood that a territory will generate conflict, Hensel (2001) and Hensel and Mitchell (2005b) have created an index of territorial salience

by distinguishing between tangible and intangible factors. The tangible salience of a territory measures the presence of a permanent population, natural resources, and the strategic value of a territory, whilst the intangible salience includes the presence of ethnic kin, historical control over a territory, and the widespread belief that the contested territory is part of the homeland. I argue that such conceptualisation of territorial salience as well as the distinction between tangibility and intangibility can be similarly adapted to the role of the significance (whether material or iconic) that a state attaches to a territory in defining its national interest and, consequently, its foreign policy.

Defining a territory beyond national borders as ‘significant’ or even ‘vital’ to national interests follows two similar yet separated assumptions. On the one hand, the state claiming sovereignty or indirect control over a foreign territory has the ability to do so as the ‘direct consequence of an asymmetrical distribution of power’, which results in hegemony (Prys 2010, 26).<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, the central state uses its power to project influence by means other than the use of force in an area or a ‘sphere’ that is considered significant. Unlike hegemony, the concept of a ‘sphere of influence’ is ‘explicitly spatial in nature’ (Ortmann 2018a, 407) and can be considered a foreign policy strategy rather than an outcome. Nevertheless, both concepts – hegemony and sphere of influence – underpin a Westphalian interpretation of international relations, where power is depicted as exclusionary control exercised by autonomous state-agents (Osiander 2001). Both these concepts assume the dominance of the (imperial) great powers and their global competition for space. As a consequence, this focus on direct agreements between great powers has not only legitimised control over neighbourhood regions as a matter of national interest; it has erased the agency of smaller states (Hast 2014a, 113).

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<sup>79</sup> Here, ‘hegemony’ is understood as a form of political order rather than a foreign policy ‘strategy’ *per se*. See Szostek, Joanna. 2018. ‘The Mass Media and Russia’s “Sphere of Interests”: Mechanisms of Regional Hegemony in Belarus and Ukraine’. *Geopolitics* 23(2): 307–29.

After a brief disappearance of sphere-of-influence vocabulary from the discipline of IR, the language of geographical determinism was brought back by scholars and policymakers following Russia's reluctance to accept the post-Cold War order (Ferguson and Hast 2018). Indeed, Russia's policy goal has been to reclaim control over the post-Soviet space. In her analysis of the evolution of Russia's National Security Strategy, Pynnöniemi (2018, 249) states that, despite its internal weakness, Russia has always addressed the former Soviet Union as a matter of national interest. However, these documents portray Russia as an actor that is not fully able to realise its national interests due to attempts by the West to further weaken Russia. Moreover, the states bordering Russia are viewed by Russia as a platform for potential military aggression. At the same time, according to a formulation in a 1997 document, Russia pursues its 'national interests in the military sphere through the protection of independence, sovereignty, state and the territorial integrity of Russia *and its allies* against military aggression, and by creating conditions for the peaceful and democratic development of the country' (Concept of National Security Strategy 1997, emphasis added). Despite these statements, Russia has reacted in various ways in the face of external threats to its national interests in the former Soviet Union. In this regard, the ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus that erupted in the early nineties were both addressed as questions of national interest (Kazantsev et al. 2020; Antonenko 2005). However, Russia has adopted different solutions in order to deal with each of them. Therefore, Russia's ambition to draw neighbours into its natural orbit must have also been informed by the narratives on Russian identity and subjectivity, as well as by Russia's own geopolitical thinking, both of which shift the notions of national interest to a more ideational, 'iconic' kind of significance that these states have for Russia.

The notion of iconic significance can therefore be related to the wider literature of critical geopolitics, which refers to collective understandings of places and peoples and their

social construction via the media and popular culture (Ó Tuathail 1999).<sup>80</sup> While acknowledging given geographical and territorial realities, critical geopolitics argues that personal conceptions and interpretations of these realities play a crucial role in constructing ‘ontological claims’ with regard to foreign policy practices (Kuus 2010). These are important features of critical geopolitics, since the social construction of space serves to legitimise the imagined boundaries that position a country’s collective self in relation to friendly or hostile others (Sharp 1993). While classical geopolitics and realist approaches in IR mainly account for the ‘sphere of influence’ narrative as merely a process of power projection and control without considering – and in fact neglecting – the shared legitimacy in which a state’s influence is perpetrated (Agnew 1994), critical geopolitics shifts the discussion of foreign policy from an exclusively materialist and ideological foundation to ‘the realm of cultural constructions and power structures, historic-spatial inheritances and contemporary challenges’ (Toal 2014, quoted in Omelicheva 2016, 721). Against this background, scholars have attempted to overcome this kind of geopolitical determinism – understood as competition for control over territory – and have called for investigation not only of the agency of other actors in the incessant struggle for power but also of how this shifting of images about global affairs are constructed and reproduced (Hast 2014). Indeed, the relationship between a local polity and an external centre of power attempting to establish its domination is by necessity more complex, definitely controversial, and essentially unstable.

In questioning the linear reading of power as exclusive control over a territory associated with a sphere of influence, Ortmann (2018b) refers to the performance of the state in producing ‘seductive power’ that works to yield particular political subjectivities and which is effective precisely because it draws on mutually constitutive understandings of state and

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<sup>80</sup> The concept can also be found under several other labels such as ‘cultural geopolitics’ or ‘popular geopolitics’ Matsuzato, Kimitaka. 2010. ‘Cultural Geopolitics and the New Border Regions of Eurasia’. *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 1(1): 42–53.; Dittmer, Jason, and Klaus Dodds. 2008. ‘Popular Geopolitics Past and Future: Fandom, Identities and Audiences’. *Geopolitics* 13(3): 437–57.

space. In the specific case of Russia's influence in the post-Soviet space, the multiple ways in which imperial and Soviet legacies are conceived and reproduced in the space result in a blurring of the boundary between domestic and foreign when it comes to representations of Russia (Ortmann 2018b). Similarly, Szostek (2018) introduces the Gramscian understanding of centre-periphery relations in reproducing hegemony, which is then based on common cultural and civilisational inheritance rather than (only) on coercion. Specifically, she argues that Moscow-based mass media broadcasting in Belarus and Ukraine contributed to the construction of a pro-Russia regional order but *only* insofar as the hegemonic ideas promoted are shared and taken for granted by the 'dominated' population.<sup>81</sup> Finally, in addressing the existential issue for Russia's border security following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Rytövuori-Apunen (2019) encapsulates the factual and existential experience of Russia's practices in frozen conflicts by employing the concept of 'deep borders', which are considered constructed places that legitimise the presence of external power in a foreign country based on ethnical connections and historical relationships (2019, 4).

Therefore, since spheres of influence are products of the social construction of spaces, identities, and actors mainly through discourse and practice (Aalto 2013, 42–44), how has Russia constructed its geographic imaginary? Despite some variations over the decades, Russia's official foreign policy discourse has mainly favoured a Westphalian international order based on principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-intervention (Omelicheva 2016). According to Rytövuori-Apunen, (2019, 10) 'the kinds of arrangements needed [after the break-up of the Soviet Union] in order to maintain stability outside Russia's formal borders of state sovereignty' was the most urgent security issue confronting Russian policymakers in the early nineties. However, at the same time, the collapse of the Soviet Union

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<sup>81</sup> On the social construction and on the reproduction of hegemonic ideas, see Hopf, Ted. 2013. 'Common-Sense Constructivism and Hegemony in World Politics'. *International Organization* 67(2): 317–54.

forced Moscow ruling elites to reconfigure those imperial-style relations that once were valid within the Soviet multinational space into a relationship between equal sovereign states.

Although recent events tell us that the Kremlin's attempts to re-construct the special relationship with its post-Soviet neighbours have not always been successful (and sometimes even detrimental), the post-Soviet relationships between Moscow and other post-Soviet states have produced associated logics of spatial ordering – e.g. mutual expectations, joint benefits and reciprocal obligations – that transcend the internal/external dichotomy of the idea of sovereignty. Nevertheless, since the end of the Cold War has completely dismissed the ideological legitimation for Russia's presence in other countries, we should ask what is or has been geopolitically significant to Moscow's policymakers when arguing – and indeed continuing to argue – that internal affairs in the post-Soviet space are of 'Russia's concern' (Trenin 2009).

With this aim, it would be fair to recognise that Russia's geopolitical imaginary has often combined a pragmatist approach to foreign policy derived from a great power mode of thinking with more civilisational/ideological stances, one of which is the fate of ethnic Russians living abroad. Since its conceptualisation in the middle of the 1990s, the concept 'Russian world' (русский мир, *ruskii mir*) has absorbed different, sometimes diametrically opposite meanings (Suslov 2018). However, what has made the Russian 'compatriots abroad' ("соотечественники за рубежом", *sootchestvenniki za rubezhom*) so popular among Russian policymakers is the assumption that these people have some kind of emotional attachment to a common Soviet past, some kind of loyalty to the Russian culture and some knowledge of the Russian language (Nikonov 2007). Seen in this way, the presence of the Russian diaspora posits questions about borders and the essence of 'Russianness' as a tool of influence in the region and beyond (Hast 2014b). At the same time, the lack of fixity regarding this concept has allowed the Kremlin to endlessly construct and reconstruct the boundaries of



‘compatriots abroad’ – whether on an inclusive imperial basis or an exclusive ethnocultural one – in a highly convenient way. The difference between the two approaches has important implications for Russia’s geopolitical imaginary. As Suslov (2018, 332) states:

‘The imperial approach relates Russia to the whole host of the post-Soviet people who would express *an interest* in such a relation. [...] By contrast, supporters of the ethno-cultural construction of diaspora decisively rule out former Soviet citizens from the Muslim countries of Central Asia, running with the tide of Islamophobia and migrantophobia in society’ [emphasis added]

While the construction of the Russian world in *sensu strictu* had widespread support among Russian public opinion regarding Russia’s military campaign in the North and South Caucasus in the early nineties, its construction in *sensu lato* was used by the Kremlin in order to frame Russia as a moral light that stressed the importance of international law, as well as the need to protect Russians living abroad under serious threat (Hopf 2005).

Another very important concept that strongly influenced Russia’s geopolitical imaginary and its policy making is Eurasianism. This loose concept is based on the idea that Russia is not a conventional state but rather a civilisation in its own right, opposed to and superior to that of the West (Tsygankov 2007, 7). As for the concepts of the Russian world and compatriots abroad, Eurasianism provides interpretive elasticity that accommodates civilisational, geopolitical, nationalist, religious, anti-globalist, anti-Western and other ideas. Although none of these are officially determinative of Russia’s foreign policy choices, working as an umbrella-term, Eurasianism was able to gather support from diverse quarters from the early nineties until the present day, including former communists, imperialists, Russian nationalists, and all those who rejected the idea of taking Western Europe and the US as models for Russian reforms (Katzenstein and Weygandt 2017). Although civilisationalist Eurasianism is grounded in non-hierarchical fraternal relations between Russians and ‘Steppe

people' sharing deep linguistic affinities, a certain degree of domination on the periphery is accepted and even promoted (see e.g., Laruelle 2008). While remaining mainly in the intellectual Russian milieu, this argument has been recently used by Russian leaders to reinforce the ideological basis for the regional integration project of the Eurasian Economic Union (Pryce 2013b).

What emerges from the ideation and further development of these geopolitical concepts that were at first the prerogative of the Russian intellectual elites and later came to be embraced by Kremlin official discourse is the attempt by post-Soviet Russia to fill not only the ideological gap left by the fall of the Soviet Union in order to maintain the previous regional order but also to fill the subsequent geopolitical space that modified the centre-periphery hierarchy. In this sense, Russia had to find a way to cultivate its regional primacy through diplomacy and foreign policy rather than (only) through coercion. With this aim, Russia has been apt to promote stability and continuity in the region. While some neighbours have responded positively to Russia's call for constructing a common civilisational, geopolitical space, others have seen this strategy as nothing more than a tool to destabilise internal policy and to avoid any rapprochement of the post-Soviet states to the West (Sherr 2013; Tsygankov 2007).

Once iconic significance has been conceptualised, it is necessary to delineate what role it has in the mechanism of Russia's intervention. In this sense, the second domestic condition in Figure 6.1 theorises that if the region/people involved in the ethnic-separatist conflict has iconic geopolitical significance, Russian foreign policy executive would consider intervening directly in the conflict with the argument of 'defending' the minority group from post-Soviet state violence. The aim here is not to quantify iconic significance, but rather to see whether there is any ideational and emotional attachment that Russia claims to have toward the region/people involved in the conflict.

In this case, the critical geopolitics perspective can help us find evidence supporting the hypothesis. Critical geopolitics focuses on discourse (Aalto 2013, 42–44) as well as on practice (Adler and Pouliot 2011) as the main media for the construction and reproduction of meanings in international relations. Regarding the presence of iconic significance to Russia, we should expect an emotional discourse about an ethnic conflict occurring in another post-Soviet state. Thus, if there is iconic significance to the great power, we should expect mention of the conflict to follow a ‘humanitarian emergency’ narrative in Russia’s official discourse – one that requires an external intervention to stop violence (Baranovsky and Mateiko 2016).

Nevertheless, the construction of iconic geopolitical significance is not a top-down process of control; instead it is constituted by a mutual recognition and is amplified both by the great power and by the smaller neighbouring entity. Therefore, in order to find evidence of the presence and/or absence of iconic significance in the mechanism of Russia’s military intervention, we should look at the *interrelational* process of geopolitical significance. In the part of the mechanism regarding iconic significance for Russia, we would expect to find account and even trace evidence about the separatist entity’s request of help and logistic support to the great power, which would be generally framed either as a traditional ally or even a patron state with whom the separatist entity would like to reunite.

### **6.3 Russia’s Policies in Abkhazia and South Ossetia 1989-94: Too Late To Prevent It; Too Biased To Mediate It**

In August 2008, fighting broke out between Georgian forces and South Ossetian militias after several years of mounting friction and intermittent clashes with the separatist republic. Within hours, the Russian Federation had deployed nearly 20,000 combatants to South Ossetia, whilst dispatching another 20,000 to Georgia’s other secessionist republic, Abkhazia, overwhelming the relatively small Georgian military. Russia eventually expanded operations beyond

Abkhazia and South Ossetia, mounting a devastating invasion of Georgia proper (see e.g. Asmus 2009; Mouritzen and Wivel 2012).

After the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, the Russian government nominally recognised South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states; nevertheless Moscow continues to control their territory, government, economy, and even the biological lives of their citizens. The economic, intergovernmental, technocratic and social links between Russia and the two regions are extraordinarily deep, and they directly undermine the autonomy of the regions (Toal (Gearóid Ó Tuathail) and O'Loughlin 2013). Moreover, the protection of the regions' borders is carried out by Russian troops. In particular, Russia promoted a mass distribution of Russian passports to the residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia following the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia. This policy gave Russia a discursive claim to populations of South Ossetia and Abkhazia by constructing them as part of the Russian political community (Artman 2013). Economic, trade, investment and other ties have gradually integrated Abkhazia and South Ossetia into the Russian economy (Gerrits and Bader 2016, 5–6). Russia has also been crucial in providing support for state and institution building in the secessionist regions. In fact, some of the security institutions of the de facto states – e.g. the local 'security' institutions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia – are 'outsourced' to the Russian Federation (Popescu 2006). Since 2008 in particular, the two regions have essentially become protectorates of the Russian Federation rather than independent states, and Russia's role towards the regions has been that of a powerful patron. Meanwhile, the Georgian government maintains that the separatist states are legitimately part of its own territory. The existence of near-exclusive bonds between Russia and the breakaway regions is still one of the main obstacles to conflict resolution today (Gerrits and Bader 2016).

The war in 2008 and its developments are the most tragic consequence of the very blurred arrangement following the ceasefire in the early nineties. In 1994 a peacekeeping

mission was established in the separatist regions. Despite the fact that the Russian peacekeeping forces comprised many of the same military units that had been fighting alongside the secessionists, the then-president of Georgia Eduard Shevardnadze initially welcomed their presence as a necessary step toward achieving long-term stability in the conflict (Goltz 2009). Nevertheless, the deployment of Russian peacekeeping forces was perceived by Georgia as an imposition and only maintained a fragile peace that was far from capable of providing a meaningful resolution to the conflict (Lynch 2000; Trenin 1996).

Throughout 1992 and 1993, Russia had no single policy with regard to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. On this matter, Alexei Zverev (1996) quotes Andrei Kortunov, Head of the Foreign Policy department of the Institute for US and Canadian Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, who described the Russian inconsistencies as follows: ‘For Russia, the problem is not how to prevent these conflicts or mediate them. It is too late for the former, and the latter may backfire. Russian diplomacy is not mature enough to keep the proper balance between the conflicting sides. It tends to be politically biased and subject to lobbying from ethnic-centred communities’ (Zverev 1996, chap. 1).

In the following subsections, the role of each mechanism component presented in Figure 6.1 is analysed in order to trace the process of Russia’s military intervention with the aim of establishing the ceasefire in South Ossetia in 1992 and in Abkhazia in 1993. Since the conditions are the same as those of the previous mechanism, except for the ‘new’ condition of iconic significance, I will focus on the repercussions that each of them had for Georgia’s management of the subsequent domestic ethnic conflicts and the following Russian intervention.

#### **6.4 External Pressure: the EU as a Weak Player**

As has already been mentioned, in the early nineties both the US and Russia were apt to cooperate in order to manage the drastic consequences of the break-up of the Soviet Union

and the arrangement of the ‘new’ world order (Kozyrev 2019; Sarotte 2019). This kind of rapprochement between the great powers allowed Russia to navigate in a more permissive international environment (Lynch 2002). Meanwhile, the EU’s policy towards Russia was initially guided by the vague idea of providing economic support for Russia’s systemic transformation. Only later did the EU realise the limited impact of its assistance to Russia’s transition to the post-Cold War international order, which led it to shift from the idea of market transformation to building a strategic partnership with Moscow that included energy, development within a common economic area as well as within security issues (Giusti 2017).

However, during the 1990s, the EU proceeded rather reluctantly in Russia’s Caucasian periphery. Despite its interest in stabilising the region, the South Caucasus had always been distant enough, geographically speaking, for the threats that emerged there not to be perceived as immediate (Lynch 2003). In particular, the EU took a long time to differentiate the post-Soviet space in its policies. With regard to this regional approach (or ‘non-approach’) it might not be surprising that during the 1990s the EU was not perceived as an international political player in the region (Coppieters 2004). At the same time, the West was happy that Russia was unable to intervene in the Balkans – one of the West’s top priorities at that time – and was therefore disinclined to criticise Russia for its role in the post-Soviet conflicts in the name of stability. Consequently, the EU urged the post-Soviet republics to maintain close economic links with Russia, electing not to consider the offer of EU membership, or any sort of association at all, to any of the Eastern neighbours at this time (Zagorski 2001). Nevertheless, the EU and its member states, with various projects of technical assistance – e.g. TACIS, TRACECA, EIDHR – have been a major donor in the post-Soviet space ever since the end of the Cold War (Fischer 2006).

With respect to this policy, Georgia was not the exception but the rule. Georgia’s fundamental relevance to the EU has lain in the transit route for energy goods from the Caspian

Sea region, which helps the EU in pursuing the diversification of its energy supplies. Energy interests and proximity have generated a set of corollary stakes in peace and stability in the South Caucasus, which could not be reached without a resolution of the conflict (Bilateral Relations – South Caucasus, Bulletin EU 6- 1999). The US's efforts to organise an international consensus for a Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline through Georgia to Turkey and thence to Europe should have been accompanied by an effort on the part of the EU institutions to mediate the conflicts around Georgia, yet no such initiative took place (Blank 2009).

Through various communications and several Commission staff working documents, the European Community participated in arguing for the primary importance of conflict settlement so that external assistance is effective in the South Caucasus region. It also emphasised the need for the Union to lay down broad strategic objectives for the whole region (Jawad 2006). However, only later did a series of debates take place within different EU bodies on how best to approach the region, especially since the coming into force of the so-called Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) in 1999 (Jawad 2006).

In the middle of the crisis, despite EU actors calling for a sovereign, democratic, well-governed and peaceful Georgia (Coppieters 2000), the EU not only rejected the use of force as a means to re-establish Georgia's territoriality, (Tocci 2007, 129) it also manifested the desire to actively contain the influence of Russia (Coppieters 2004). After the 'freezing' of the conflict, it became clear that no longer-lasting solution in Georgia could be achieved without Russia (Simon and Rumer 2005, 16). Nevertheless, the EU has continuously tried to strengthen its presence and increase its foreign policy activities vis-à-vis Georgia. During the 'hot phase' of the conflicts with South Ossetia and Abkhazia after 1992, the EU provided humanitarian financial assistance through the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) and food aid through its Food Security Program (FSP) (Dov Lynch 2006). In addition, in 1992 Georgia became a partner country in the EU's TACIS program, whose main contribution was to

promote regional cooperation whilst attempting to link assistance levels to progress in conflict resolution. Interestingly, while Georgia's current European orientation is a fairly established narrative, in the first few years following independence there was hardly any public discussion about European orientation (see e.g. Beacháin and Coene 2014). After the Russian-brokered ceasefire in the mid-1990s, things slowly began to change when EU assistance to Georgia gained importance through the PCA.

Therefore, despite European activities focused on economic transition, an EU policy, especially in conflict settlement efforts in the Georgia's separatist conflicts, remained more rhetoric than reality (Popescu 2010, 71). On the other hand, Russia had many interests in being present in the region. Here it is important to stress that at the time of Georgian conflicts against the two separatist entities the Chechen war was rapidly escalating into a threat that had the potential to inflame the wider North Caucasus and create spillover effects in the Krasnodar Territory (край, *krai*) and its Black Sea coast. Therefore, the EU's and the US's weak engagement with the Caucasus region and the proximate separatist threat on the southern borders gave Moscow total freedom of manoeuvre during the wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

## **6.5 Another 'Confusing Ethnic Conflict'? Chronology of Escalation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia**

Both the Georgian-South Ossetian (1991-1992) conflict and the Georgian-Abkhaz (1992-1993) conflict had a distinctly ethnic character. Eventually, such conflicts were seen by many as 'another confusing ethnic conflict in a confusing part of the world', which should be discussed only in the context of the 'Russian orbit' (Petersen 2008, 188). Nevertheless, these conflicts distinguished themselves as some of the bloodiest and most unresolved in the post-Soviet space at least until the Russo-Georgian war of 2008. They caused tens of thousands of casualties and led to the displacement of c. 250,000 people (Antonenko 2005; Nodia 1996).



Like the other post-Soviet conflicts, their roots lie partly in the Soviet period. Historically, Georgia had within its borders a number of regionally-tied ethnic minority groups, including Armenians, Avars, Azeris, Greeks, Ossetians, Russians and Abkhazians (Jones 1993). Among them, the Abkhazians became a minority in their own land through waves of mass emigration to the Ottoman Empire in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century as Russia slowly took control of the Caucasus (Derluguian 1995, 267). After 1917, Abkhazia maintained a relationship of treaty association until it was incorporated in the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (GSSR) in 1931. Under Stalin's rule, Georgians were forcibly resettled in 'empty' parts of Abkhazia, leading to Abkhaz fears of losing their homeland (Zverev 1996). The Abkhaz intellectuals and party leaders repeatedly – in 1956, 1967 and 1978 – petitioned the Central Committee of the Communist Party to separate Abkhazia from Georgia and attach it to Russia. In response to this pressure, Moscow made a number of concessions to the Abkhaz in personnel and cultural policy. Thus, by 1988, Abkhazia had its own radio and TV stations, which were outside Tbilisi's control (Zverev 1996). Nevertheless, in 1989, ethnic Georgians made up 70.1% of the population of GSSR, while ethnic Abkhazians made up only 1.8% (Jones 1993, 289).

In contrast to Abkhazia, in 1989, the autonomous oblast of South Ossetia within Georgia had a population of nearly 100,000, of whom 66.2% were Ossetes and 29% Georgians. In 1922, after the Sovietisation of Georgia in 1921, the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast was formed, separating it from the North Ossetia, which remained the other side of the Russian border. During the Soviet period, South Ossetes were resettled and, according to local authorities, they were barred from entering higher education. The response from South Ossetia was then either to try to secure federal status within Georgia or, failing that, to seek to be reunited with North Ossetia (Zverev 1996).

As in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, ‘the mechanism of Soviet ethno-federalism’ is deemed responsible for most of the ethnic conflicts of the post-Soviet space, including the Georgia-Abkhazia and the Georgia-South Ossetia wars (Zurcher 2005, 98–101). Nevertheless, this argument ignores the complexity of ethnic realities in the region, which were in place long before Soviet rule (Petersen 2008, 191). At the same time, the political arrangement of the Soviet Union functioned as a balance needle or as a tool of control in the region. Indeed, as Georgian nationalism flourished in the late 1980s, Abkhazians and South Ossetians feared their possible ethnic disappearance within an independent Georgia (Derluigian 1995, 272). Nevertheless, despite their similarities, the two conflicts followed separated dynamics.

South Ossetia's geographical position – a mountainous region surrounded on three sides by Georgian settlements – made the Ossetes more vulnerable than other separatist entities in the event of hostilities. Conflicts in South Ossetia became a political issue when, in November 1989, the Supreme Soviet of South Ossetia approved a decision to upgrade the Autonomous Oblast to an Autonomous Republic still within Georgia. As a result, the first stage of the conflict started on 23 November 1989 with a march of more than 20,000 Georgians to the capital Tskhinvali organised by the nationalist opponent Zviad Gamsakhurdia. On 26 April 1990, the USSR Supreme Soviet passed a law providing for a notable enhancement of the rights of Soviet autonomous entities. Although Gorbachev supported the minority movements within the independence-seeking Republics as a way of struggling against the disintegration of the Soviet Union, this law encouraged the autonomous entities to fight for their sovereignty against the majority in some multinational Union republics, which in effect accelerated the demise of the Soviet Union (Nodia 1996). As the Georgian parliament prevented regional parties from running in the August 1990 election, South Ossetia declared independence from Georgia and appealed to Moscow to recognise it as an independent subject within the Soviet federation.

Figure 6.2: Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia



Source: Wikipedia at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgian%E2%80%93Ossetian\\_conflict](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgian%E2%80%93Ossetian_conflict)

After Zviad Gamsakhurdia won the election, all autonomous entities were abolished and violent reprisals started in Tskhinvali even as Gorbachev ordered the two sides to withdraw all military formations – except those of the USSR Ministry of the Interior. In the referendum on the survival of the Soviet Union, whilst South Ossetes voted 99% in favour of keeping the Union, hoping that such a vote would induce the Centre to take measures to protect them, Georgians voted for an independent republic. As a result, Georgian retaliation simply increased (König 2004). Ossetes began to be expelled from their villages and militia groups on both sides committed war crimes with impunity (Human Right Watch 1992). The Kremlin initially showed no willingness to intervene, preoccupied as it was with other ‘hot spots’ of the disintegrating Soviet Union and with political rivalries in Moscow (Birch 1995). Nevertheless, towards the middle of June 1992, Russia was on the brink of war with Georgia over South Ossetia when a ceasefire was agreed on 22 June 1992 and a trilateral peacekeeping operation, led by Russian forces, was deployed. The overall consequences of the war were

devastating, especially for hundreds of thousands of civilians, who had been migrating periodically from Tskhinvali to Vladikavkaz in North Ossetia and back again (O'Loughlin, Tuathail (Gerard Toal), and Kolossov 2008).

The course of the conflict in Abkhazia is similar but more significant in scale. In response to rising Georgian nationalism, Abkhazia maintained a pro-Soviet stance in favour of Moscow and against Georgian independence. While the People's Forum of Abkhazia called for the creation of a Soviet Socialist Republic of Abkhazia in 1989 (Suny 1994, 321), Georgia was declared a sovereign nation and opposition parties were legalised in March 1990 (Zurcher 2005, 90). After the fall of the Soviet Union, Georgia ended up in a civil war between the 'Zviadists', backed by the nationalist Zviad Gamsakhurdia, and forces supporting Eduard Shevardnadze.

On 23 July 1992, taking advantage of the weakness of the Georgian state, the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet passed a resolution, without the participation of the Georgian deputies, restoring the 1925 Abkhaz constitution and Abkhazia's status as a sovereign republic within what was then the Soviet Union (Chervonnaya 1994, 112). War flared up on 14 August, 1992 when Georgian forces entered Abkhazia in an attempt to re-establish Georgian territorial integrity. However, as the Abkhazian leadership sought to reinforce its political and military position whilst the war was already raging in South Ossetia, Abkhaz resistance proved much stiffer than anticipated and heavy fighting broke out in and around Sukhumi.

While the prospect of the total disintegration of the Georgian state represented a serious potential threat to Russian security, Russian forces were also unofficially providing support to the rebellious republics of Abkhazia, and until 1992 to South Ossetia, which were struggling to secure their independence from Tbilisi (Antonenko 2005). With the help of volunteers from the North Caucasus – including Circassians, Ossetians and Chechens – and the Russian army, an Abkhaz offensive expelled all Georgian forces from Abkhazia in 1993 (Lynch 2006).

Shevardnadze's pleas for Russian help produced only condemnation and nominal sanctions of the Abkhazians, as they routed the remaining Georgian forces and drove some 200,000 Georgian civilians across the Inguri River into Georgia proper (Chervonnaya 1994, 167).

With violence threatening to spill over the border into the volatile North Caucasus, Moscow offered a sort of Faustian bargain to Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze: in return for military support against the fiercely nationalist, anti-Russian Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze would pledge to bring Georgia into the Russian-dominated CIS and allow Russia to continue using Soviet-era military bases on Georgian soil (Gordadze 2009). Following a ceasefire in 1994, Russian peacekeeping forces under mandate of the CIS were deployed along the line of contact. Nevertheless, not much was done either to avert low-scale violence or to allow internally displaced persons to return safely home. Finally, no progress on a settlement of the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia was reached.

## **6.6 Russia strives for Status Recognition: Liberal with the West, Realist with the Near Abroad**

Following the demise of the Soviet Union, the ideological debate that hit Russia about the kind of foreign policy and, consequently, the kind of status that Russia should seek to gain at the international level profoundly influenced Moscow's foreign policy in the early 1990s. We have seen that in the early 1990s three different 'Russias' – the liberals, the statist/realists and the civilisationalists – were competing for control of the Russian state. As a consequence, what Russia considered to be a legitimate neighbourhood policy by a great power depended on the identity that was produced by both domestic and external interactions from each of these groups (Hopf 2005).

However, as already seen in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, the picture is much more complicated. Even when Russia was subjected to internal turmoil, leaving it to search for highly conciliatory policies toward the West, Russia was never totally unresponsive in the

post-Soviet space. If it is true that the civilisationalist discourse did not take its place because it was still identified with the Soviet project and was perceived to be radically against the United States and the West, nevertheless, even when a Liberal discourse of Russian identity predominated – stressing the centrality of economic power as Russia's only route to restoration of great power status – Russia never abandoned the idea of maintaining a special influence outside its borders. Throughout the civil conflicts of southern CIS members, Russia successfully managed to maintain privileged relations mainly because of enduring military, economic and political legacies of the Soviet Union that would not be overcome overnight.

At the same time, the internal competition among Russian governing elites shaped the way in which Russia dealt with the post-Soviet space, in this case with Georgia and its separatist entities. While Russia's liberal identity was institutionalised by the appointment of Andrey Kozyrev to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the different intelligence and security branches under the Ministry of Defence represented by General Pavel Grachev institutionalised the statist-nationalist narrative (Hopf 2005). It is important not to overlook the subtle yet significant shift in the perception of the West and of Russia itself that these two branches made. While the early liberal face of Russia's nascent foreign policy was, at least rhetorically, critical toward the Soviet past and aimed to embrace the US's international role and posture, General Pavel Grachev and the military elites believed deep and unnecessarily rushed concessions were being made to the West without extracting a comparable price for the enormous political investment made by the Soviet Union in the previous two decades (Mesbahi 1993).

At the start of the Abkhaz war there was no consensus in Russia as to how it should be treated. Nor, for that matter, was there any consensus on the identity and orientation of the new Russian state. Those most opposed to Georgia were the military, conservative Communists and nationalists, whose influence was steadily growing. In Abkhazia the Russian

Ministry of Defence continued to support the separatists whilst the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and President Yeltsin were negotiating an agreement with Shevardnadze. As Zverev reports (1996, part 4): ‘The Russian officers in Gudauta likewise sympathised with the Abkhaz. Besides their hostile attitude to Shevardnadze, whom they saw as the initiator of the break-up of the Soviet state, they were embittered against the Georgians for the “barbarous” pillage of the property of the Russian forces in Georgia and even the killing of Russian soldiers.’ It was impossible for either Yeltsin or Shevardnadze to overcome this problem because neither of them had control of the situation over which they negotiated. Eventually, Yeltsin decided to leave the issue of Abkhazia to those with a ‘special interest’ in it, while keeping an intense dialogue with the US and EU member states in order to integrate Russia within the post-Cold war international order.

Willing to confront neither the military nor an assortment of North Caucasian nationalists, pro-Soviet restorationists, and ‘red and brown’ patriots, the Kremlin let itself be dragged into a policy of active support for the Abkhaz secessionists. Abkhazia was Yeltsin’s first significant concession to the civilisationalists/neo- Eurasianists. As Thornike Gordadze (2009, p.33) states: ‘many similar steps were to follow, including the war in Chechnya and the rampant evolution towards authoritarianism.’ Therefore, the Abkhazia war signalled the end of the liberal approach in Russia’s foreign policy, and a return to imperial notions of regional politics and great power status. As a comment in *Izvestia* (Nikitinsky 1993, 53) about Russia’s attempts to guide peace talks in the Transcaucasian region reports:

[...] peace is lacking in Russia itself, where the skirmish between the country’s leaders continue. While the presidential camp is holding talks with official Georgia, the parliamentary opposition [...] is demonstrating its anti-Georgian sympathies as openly as possible. For this reason, [...] the [Russian] soldiers and troops are by no means unbiased.

## 6.7 Military Alliance: Georgia's Wait for the External Saviour

Located in the South Caucasus, Georgia sits at a crucial geographical and cultural crossroads and for centuries it has proven itself to be strategically important for military and economic reasons. During the Cold War, Georgia had been something of a buffer between Soviet Russia and NATO member state Turkey. With the almost total political retreat of Russia and the envisioned retreat of its military from Georgia, a power *vacuum* came to exist which temporarily characterised Georgia as a type of no-man's land, a relatively neutral territory, in the early 1990s. These conditions contributed to making Georgia a squeezed state between competing major powers. In particular, Georgia's relations with Russia were characterised by necessity and ambivalence: necessity because Russia represented a powerful Christian and modernizing neighbour, capable of protecting Georgia from hostile Muslim empires to the south and Caucasian raiders from the north; ambivalence because Russia was culturally dominant and imperial (Jones 2003). This position has demanded flexible and pragmatic foreign policies from the Georgian state. Despite a pro-Western population and elite, Georgian foreign policy under the president Eduard Shevardnadze, especially after the civil war against Gamsakhurdia (1991-1993), aimed for a regional balance of interests including good relations with the West, Russia, Iran, China and Central Asia. In relation to the separatist conflicts, despite Shevardnadze's very active role in putting the Abkhaz question and its interests on the agenda and lobbying for the involvement of various actors in a number of forums available, Georgia was fixated on the notion of an external *deus ex machina* to solve the conflicts in Georgia's favour (Lynch 2006).

Therefore, the initial overarching goal under Shevardnadze was that Russia would solve Georgia's problems in Abkhazia. Starting from the time when the ceasefires had been signed for South Ossetia (in June 1992) and for Abkhazia (in July 1993), the Georgian leadership and parliament expected Russia to provide substantive assistance in building up the



armed forces, and its cooperation and assistance in ending the separatist conflicts. Moreover, by mobilising other actors, rallying international support for the Georgian position and raising awareness of the fact that Russia was indeed committed to a solution to the problem, Georgia pushed Russia into internationally sanctioned commitments and thus into a position of being held accountable by actors other than Georgia for the development of the conflict in Abkhazia, and for making progress on a resolution to it (Graalfs-Lordkipanidze 2015, 116). Because of the uncontrolled situation in Abkhazia and the continuing threat of Gamsakhurdia's armed supporters and their strongholds in Western Georgia, Shevardnadze was forced to officialise Georgia's membership in the CIS, and allowed the deployment of Russian peacekeeping forces and of Russia's Black Sea Fleet (Wivel 2016). Despite fierce debates in the Georgian Parliament, Georgia entered the CIS on October 21, 1993, and in February 1994 even joined the Collective Security Treaty. In exchange, the Georgian government took no steps to move any closer to NATO for several years. But despite this 'good conduct', Georgia failed to receive any benefits from Russia in terms of steps toward the restoration of its territorial integrity (Rytövuori-Apunen 2019, 49). Ending the support of the separatists was the necessary element in repairing relations with Shevardnadze, yet Russia was unable to do this at a crucial moment in the bilateral relationship with Georgia because this would have opened an extremely complex battlefield given the fact that at this time the Chechen war was accelerating (Lynch 1998).

With an increasing sense of betrayal, Shevardnadze fixed his hopes on military assistance from the US and other members of NATO. However, Georgia's initial subjection to Russia had a very negative impact on its already timid cooperation with the West. The only form of cooperation with the West that Russia initially permitted Georgia to pursue was humanitarian and financial aid (Gordadze 2009). Nevertheless, after realising that Russia would not help Georgia in regaining its territorial integrity, Shevardnadze increased the

country's dialogue with the West and with NATO in particular. Importantly, in 1994, the year of the ceasefire in Abkhazia, Georgia joined the NATO Partnership for Peace programme, whose goal was to promote security partnerships between NATO and non-NATO nations in the broader region. Following this, the US and Georgia signed a State Partnership Programme that actively deepened cooperation with the aim of improving Georgia's military capabilities (Coffey 2018). While President Shevardnadze's position with respect to Georgia's potential NATO membership was ambivalent, NATO paid little attention to the South Caucasus in general during the 1990s. Only after the declaration of the following NATO Summit that took place in 2006 in Riga did Georgia and its very emphatic NATO ambitions receive more attention (Malek 2008). Therefore, despite the fact that Shevardnadze stuck to his pursuit of a balance-of-power policy, the legacy of a close political and cultural alliance in which Russia had generally been associated with stability was stronger than any other feasible alternative. As Jones states regarding Georgia's alliance dilemma during the early 1990s: 'The West is desirable but not fully attainable; Russia is undesirable but not fully alienable.' (Jones 2003, 104).

## **6.8 The iconic significance of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to Russia: Claiming Tradition of Protection**

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, Russia has often claimed to be a stabiliser of conflicts in the post-Soviet space through its role as the guarantor of separatist regions because of ethnical and historical connections with them. At the same time, the idea that Russia has a geographic area of responsibility outside its formal borders has not been recognised by Moscow's political elites in terms of normative conventions of the international community – e.g. the Responsibility to Protect – but rather as part of Russia's history (Rytövuori-Apunen 2019, 37). Because of the historical background of the violence and suppression of the Ossetian people it was easier for the new emergent Russia to appeal to its tradition – both

imperial and Soviet – of protecting smaller ethnic groups who had an affiliation to Russia. In particular, what emerged from the Russian political discourse and media coverage of the ethnic conflicts that occurred in South Ossetia and, to a less extent, in Abkhazia during the early 1990s was the recurring argument of local people’s suffering that left Russia ‘no other way’ but to intervene.

In an article in the journal *Izvestia* from December 1991, the Tass correspondent from Vladikavkaz reports a joint message by the Chairman of the North Ossetia SSR, Boris Yeltsin and the Chairman of the Russian Soviet Federated Social Republic that says: ‘[...] the region’s residents (Ossetians) place their only hope in the Russian president and the parliament of the Russian Federation and in their resolve to protect human dignity and the right of national minority’ (Shanayev 1991). Moreover, in another *Izvestia* article from June 1992, R. Khasbulatov, Chairman of the Russian Supreme Soviet, states that ‘[...] the Russian parliament may be put in a position in which it will be forced to immediately consider this question in accordance with the expression of the people’s will and the South Ossetian authorities’ request to the Russian Supreme Soviet’ (Chugayev 1992).

Another very important *topos* of Russian narrative is the recurrence of terms such as ‘aggression’ and ‘genocide’, which also denote the blaming of persecutors of violence – i.e. the Georgian people. In the aforementioned *Izvestia* article from June 1992 R. Khasbulatov blames Georgian armed forces for violating the peace talks mediated by Russia and for continuing to expel ‘the South Ossetians from their historical homeland’ (Chugayev 1992). The statement concludes that ‘the policy and practise of *genocide* and the provoking complications with Russia cast a shadow on the Georgian people [...]’ (1992, 41, emphasis added). In a similar way, the *Moskovskiye novosti* reports: ‘Certainly Russia can and must stop the genocide of the South Ossetians. Certainly it has a stake in preventing the war in the Transcaucasus from spreading from its own territory. But the decisive use of military force is

a last resort, one that is capable of freezing the conflict, not of resolving it.’ (Shevelev 1992a). At the same time, Russia’s foreign policy with regard to the protection of South Ossetians was harshly criticised, especially in the media, for not advocating the same mobilisation as it had for Transnistria among the Russian authority. Accordingly, the rationale behind this ‘obliviousness’ to the South Ossetian problem relied on the fact that Ossetians were unable to generate feelings of ‘brotherhood’ reserved for Russia’s ‘compatriots abroad’. Hence, despite an appeal to protect the local population from further violence, Moscow’s official language about the conflict remained on ‘Georgian-Ossetians’ terms (Minasyan 1992). Therefore, although the public connected the greatness of the Russian state with its capacity to protect those who are affiliated with it, there was no direct use of the concept of ‘compatriots abroad’ as was done in the case of the Transnistrian conflict (Rogstad 2018).

Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, iconic significance and the consequent exercise of hegemony function at an interrelational level. According to the (critical) geopolitical sources of foreign policy, Russia has been able to claim legitimacy in a sphere of ‘exclusive interests’ not only due to its hegemonic role and (possibly coercive) control over the post-Soviet region, but also through an interrelational process of ‘negotiated hegemony’ with the neighbouring states (Costa Buranelli 2017). In this process, the weaker country may accept, accommodate, and even reproduce or reject ideas and discourses of a (regionally) hegemonic Russia in relation to other friendly or hostile external actors. Therefore, even political discourse intended to be manipulative cannot be deemed merely instrumental if, at the same time, it is meant for a (receptive) audience. At the same time, such centre-periphery relations where Russia occupies the role of patron state and even protector have been far from uncontroversial, especially in the South Caucasus. On the one hand, across the centuries, Russia has presented itself as an alternative to Georgia’s regional dominance; on the other, Russia has allied with Georgia in suppressing smaller peoples. Therefore, while the separatist

entities rely on Russia for protection, their relation with the centre is also quite ambiguous and diversified.

When the Russian empire gained control of the South Caucasus in 1864, Ossetians had not been among those groups who resisted Russia's predominance. On the contrary, Ossetians relate part of their national identity to the immense suffering caused by Georgian suppression. One striking episode: large-scale violence occurred during the turmoil of civil war (1918-1920) when pro-Bolshevik Ossetians rebelled against Menshevik Georgians. As a result more than 5,000 Ossetians were killed (Saparov 2010). A compromise that was forged between Ossetian leadership demands for unification with North Ossetia and Georgian reluctance to create any special Ossetian district led to the creation of the South Ossetia Autonomous Oblast. Because of the presence of North Ossetia within the Russian borders, Ossetians perceive themselves not only as a 'divided nation' but also as having a strong connection to Russia. When violence flared up in early 1990, South Ossetia declared its status as part of the Soviet Union in order to distance itself from the emergent new Russia, and it also boycotted elections for the Georgian Supreme Soviet that was pushing for independence from the Union. Georgia declared a state of emergency in South Ossetia – in Georgian referred to as the 'Tskhinvali region' – and put it under Tbilisi's military control. In 1991, when the fighting in South Ossetia had reached all-out war, Georgia declared independence from the Soviet Union and accused Moscow of supporting the separatists. Meanwhile, nationalist and anti-Russia sentiment pervaded Georgia: Ossetians were addressed as 'ungrateful guests' on historic Georgian soil, outsiders whose real home was across the Caucasus in North Ossetia (Gordadzé 2001). Atrocities committed by Georgian nationalists under Zviad Gamsakhurdia against Ossetians were left unpunished. The violence of January 1991 pushed South Ossetia and the surrounding regions of Georgia into a negative spiral of ethnic polarisation, violence and displacement. The wounds from the violence in 1989–1992 are also one of the reasons that close political

and economic cooperation with Moscow is widely supported in South Ossetia today (Toal (Gearóid Ó Tuathail) and O'Loughlin 2013). Therefore, South Ossetians remained loyal to Russia, and before that, to the Soviet Union and the tsarist empire. Against this historical background, the discourse of Russia's intervention is accommodated and reproduced by Ossetians, yet more in the framework of re-unity with its sister-land North Ossetia. In an interview in the journal *Pravda* in January 1992, Z. Gassyev, the leader of the South Ossetian Republic declares: 'if that devil Gamsakhurdia wins, and if Russia doesn't let us in, our people will have to fight to the finish. And we will die. [...]' (Ovcharenko 1992, 33). When being asked about the likely unification with Russia, Gassyev states: 'Incidentally, it's not just that we need Russia, but Russia needs South Ossetia for strategic, economic, ecological and other reasons' (1992, 34). Similarly, when being asked about the possible unification of North and South Ossetia, T. Kulumbegov, Chairman of the South Ossetian Supreme Soviet, answered: 'it will happen sooner or later' (Shevelev 1992b, 47).

In terms of specific relations with Russia, Abkhazia differs from South Ossetia in some aspects. Firstly, whilst Ossetia was split in two parts, Abkhazia had already become a mixture of ethnicities during the Tsarist empire. Nevertheless, the Abkhaz have always considered themselves as a separate, north-western Caucasian ethnicity. As a consequence, they have fought for the pursuit of a greater symmetry with Georgia since the early Soviet experience, when Abkhazia was reduced to an Autonomous Republic within the SSR of Georgia. Secondly, similarly to South Ossetia, in 1989 Abkhazia appealed to Gorbachev to remain under Soviet rule at a time when Georgia was actively advocating independence; however, the situation was becoming extremely complex for Russia. On the one hand, Russian troops never abandoned their base in Gudauta, Abkhazia, and they allowed the Abkhaz rebels to extend their line of control. On the other hand, when violence erupted in 1992, the Abkhaz cause for independence gained the sympathies of a large number of small ethnic groups through the

Caucasus – among them the Chechens – that mobilised volunteers to oppose Russian dominance in the region. Therefore, Russia has not always had control over the ways in which the conflict has developed. Abkhazia has exhibited the most energetic and politically sensitive debate on the nature of its relations with Russia. No Abkhazian politician doubts the need for close relations with the patron that provides more than two-thirds of the income for the republic's budget. Nevertheless, most Abkhazians, particularly ethnic Abkhaz, strongly support independence rather than unity with Russia, and are wary of the economic and political asymmetry of relations with Russia (O'Loughlin, Kolosov, and Tuathail) 2011).

Despite such ambiguity and as a result of Russia's involvement in the war against Georgia in 2008 and the recognition of Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's sovereignty, the two de facto states are not only heavily dependent on Russia's economic and security guarantees; they are also inevitably part of Russia's political and cultural sphere of influence. As O'Loughlin et. al. demonstrated in several surveys conducted in both separatist republics, 80% of Abkhazia and 75% of South Ossetians agreed that they are part of *Russkiy Mir* (O'Loughlin, Toal, and Kolosov 2016). Interestingly, the respondents have higher levels of trust for the Russian leadership than for the respective leaders of their de facto states and only derisory amounts for the leadership of the parent state of Georgia from which they separated. Not surprisingly, the overwhelming majority of Abkhazian and South Ossetian citizens strongly approve of the Russian military presence in their territories (O'Loughlin, Kolosov, and Toal 2014).

## **6.9 Outcome: Russian Military Intervention as Way to freeze the Conflicts**

In the early years of the emerging Russian Federation, c. 15,000 Russian soldiers were stationed on Georgian territory. This heavy military presence gave Russia the initial impetus to support the secessionist regions in order to raise its negotiating power with Georgia. This strategy of keeping Georgia weak and actively supporting the separatist military forces proved

to be successful, at least in the early phase of conflict freezing. On 22 June 1992, Yeltsin and Shevardnadze met in Dagomys and, together with North and South Ossetian representatives, they signed the Sochi agreement on a ceasefire and the deployment of joint Russian, Georgian and Ossetian peacekeeping forces, as well as a joint control mission. This structure was ideal for Russia because the joint peacekeeping forces were under Russian command, whilst the CSCE monitored the ceasefire, with the joint peacekeeping forces lending an international legitimacy to Russia's military presence on the territory of a foreign sovereign state.

Whilst this strategy was successful in South Ossetia, the ceasefire in Abkhazia was far more difficult to achieve. On 1 December 1993, the first round of talks between Georgia and Abkhazia under UN auspices and with the participation of the CSCE, with Russia as facilitator, ended in Geneva with the signing of a memorandum of understanding. On the one hand, the mediation effort allowed Russia to increase its influence on both sides and safeguard its own interests. Parallel to the Russian mediation, UN mediation was in progress, as the international community tried to monitor Russia's moves. On the other hand, the achievement of a precarious peace in 1993 that established a peacekeeping operation under the mandate of the CIS was not without problems for Russia's relations with either side.

Firstly, the Duma was reluctant to give the Ministry of Defence, which was pushing for deploying heavy military forces in Georgia, a free hand in using the country's scarce resources for supporting the Abkhaz cause. On 3 February 1994, President Yeltsin paid a visit to Tbilisi and signed a Treaty on Friendship, Neighbourliness and Co-operation with Georgia. The treaty provided for the establishment of five Russian military bases in Georgia and the stationing of Russian border guards along Georgia's borders with Turkey. Russia pledged to aid Georgia in organising and re-equipping its army after the settlement of the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The ratification of the treaty by the Russian side was made conditional on the settlement of these conflicts. However, the following spring, the State Duma



refused to ratify the Treaty, thus worsening the already precarious Russo-Georgian relations. Because Georgia had already made great concessions – e.g. entering the CIS – despite the fall of Sukhumi, the refusal to sign the Treaty prevented any chances of fully recreating the Soviet-style centre-periphery hierarchy (Rytövuori-Apunen 2019, 49).

Secondly, Abkhazia failed to secure an internationally recognised independent status, including recognition by Russia (until 2008), with the result that it was impossible to rebuild the war-ravaged republic. At the same time, Russian pressure, exerted on Abkhazia in order to solve the refugee problem, led to a gradual worsening of Russian-Abkhaz relations. Meanwhile Georgia made little progress with constructing a coherent state machinery and a viable economy. Nevertheless, a radical switch in Russia's policy in the conflict was unrealistic: Russian troops on the ground had already allowed the rebels in Abkhazia to consolidate their position. Turning against them would not only have committed Russian soldiers to a direct military clash with them, but it could also have increased the involvement of the 'Mountainous people' in the North Caucasus since sympathy for the Chechens and hostility to the Russian actions were strong in Abkhazia (Francis 2011; Dov Lynch 1998). Importantly, Russia's objective in supporting the separatist entities was not the independence of the rebellious provinces. Instead, by making itself the sole 'peacekeeper' in the conflicts which Moscow had itself fuelled, Russia could dominate the newly independent states and prevent their rapprochement with the West. Generally, as in the case of Karabakh, Georgia's secessionist regions were used to apply pressure on Tbilisi in order to gain favourable conditions for Russia's military presence and to induce Georgia to participate in collective CIS cooperation (Francis 2011; Dov Lynch 1998). Therefore, despite the difficulties in controlling the conflict dynamics, especially in the Georgian-Abkhaz war, Russia's interventionist policy was successful in constraining Georgia's future foreign policy strategies.

## 6.10 Conclusion

This chapter has conducted an in-depth analysis of a deviant case – South Ossetia 1992 and Abkhazia 1993 – following a QCA analysis of the negated outcome – Russia’s non-assertive foreign policy. Importantly, the process tracing analysis has been conducted by systematically comparing a deviant case with a typical case – Nagorno-Karabakh 1994. The reason behind this methodological choice is that we should first be confident about the actual mechanism linking X ( $\sim PS \sim AL$ ) and Y ( $\sim A$ ) in one or more typical cases, and only after that go on to investigate the deviant case. The within-case component of a condition-centred design involves tracing a mechanism using in-depth process tracing in a deviant case until the mechanism breaks down in the case. Indeed, the fsQCA conducted in chapter 4 has included the two cases within the same conjunction  $\sim PS \sim AL$  as sufficient for Russia’s non-assertive foreign policy ( $\sim A$ ). Nevertheless, their outcomes as well as their location in the x-y plot substantially differ: while Russia mediated the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh without resorting to military force despite its ambiguous diplomacy with both belligerent parties, Moscow aimed to be the principal shaper of politico-military development in South Ossetia and Abkhazia through the deployment of Russian peacekeeping forces. The aim of this chapter has been to uncover when and why the mechanism breaks down in the deviant case.

The mechanism has followed neoclassical realist assumptions starting from the systemic conditions and integrating them with intervening conditions. As in the typical case, one systemic condition (external pressure) and one intervening condition (status recognition), which are sufficient in the QCA of the negated outcome, were better thought of as scope conditions, whilst the second systemic condition of alliance of the target state was found to be causally relevant to the mechanism. At the systemic level, in the aftermath of ethnic-separatist turmoil, the EU’s engagement in the South Caucasus and, specifically in Georgia, was politically and strategically not relevant enough to represent a threat to Russia’s regional

primacy. At the same time, under a liberal-oriented ruling elite, Moscow showed ‘good will’ to integrate in the post-Cold War international order. Nevertheless, Moscow’s official discourse of ‘westernising’ Russia clashed with more conservative domestic forces that opposed further concessions to the West and reclaimed a hegemonic role for Russia in the near abroad. In this context, when violence erupted first in South Ossetia and later in Abkhazia, Georgia was torn apart by an internal struggle for power and could not rely on credible military support against the separatist entities except from Russia. Nevertheless, non-assertive Russian foreign policy did not occur due to the lack of other relevant causal conditions that produce the outcome together with ~PS~AL.

In addition to the three conditions sufficient for the typical case, this chapter has advanced a new condition – iconic significance – that has likely been ‘omitted’ in the cross-case comparison and could reconnect the broken mechanism. The concept of iconic significance goes beyond the assumption of dominance of great powers over smaller states. It implies rather an interrelational process of hegemony between the patron state and the neighbouring countries that may accept, accommodate, and even reproduce or reject ideas and discourses at the base of the geopolitical imaginary that bound together the population. In the case of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Russia has advocated the role of ‘saviour’ in the name of a historical tradition of protecting minorities from ethnic-based persecutions. While the Caucasian people did not mobilise the Russian audience as much as in the case of the Slavic brothers of Transnistria or even in the case of Crimean Tatars, Moscow’s governing elite did, instrumentally, appeal to its tradition – both imperial and Soviet – of protecting smaller ethnic groups that had an affiliation to Russia.

The inclusion of iconic significance not only allows us to find out when and why a mechanism breaks down; it also suggests that its presence/absence is an important causal condition between the eruption of ethnic conflict (X) and Russia’s non-intervention (~A)

through a regional primacy mechanism. On the one hand, the inclusion of an omitted condition enables us to remedy the puzzle that emerged from the fsQCA by refining the theoretical model for further research; on the other, it means we should modify the cross-case analysis accordingly.

## CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION

This study has sought to explain under what conditions regional powers pursue an assertive foreign policy in their neighbourhood as opposed to a cooperative one. To explore these conditions, the research examined why Russia has adopted an assertive foreign policy with some post-Soviet states and a more cooperative approach with others. Recently, Russia has become increasingly assertive, and sometime even conflictual, towards other post-Soviet republics, the most striking example of which has been the annexation of Crimea and its meddling in Ukraine since 2014. Given that Russia's position regarding its neighbours since the end of the Cold War has deeply influenced relations with the EU, the US and other regional powers, several studies have attempted to map Russia's foreign policy by focusing on individual sources, on domestic features or on systemic variables alone, to name only some of the approaches. Nevertheless, by focusing on one main source driving Russia's foreign policy and omitting or even neglecting possible interactions with other factors, these approaches have proved to be individually insufficient to address the diversified outcomes of Russia's foreign policy across almost three decades. Only recently have some studies begun to offer integrated theoretical account. However, their causal inference is limited to specific cases and does not address Russia's regional policy on a more general scale and on a longer term.

To address these limitations, this study has developed a neoclassical realist framework of regional primacy and applied it to Russia's foreign policy in some states of the post-Soviet space – specifically, the neighbourhood contested by Russia and the European Union – between 1992 and 2015. By using insights from structural realist theories and geopolitics, the theoretical framework started from power preponderance and geographic proximity as scope conditions to regional primacy. The approach then identified four sources of regional policy outcome – external pressure and any military alliances of a target state as the main systemic stimuli and status recognition and the capacity for regional power as domestic conditions. The

approach conjoins factors that previous studies have identified as important in explaining Russia's foreign policy in particular and great powers' policy outcomes in general, but whose *interaction* has gone largely unobserved in comparative study.

Therefore, in the first section of the conclusion, I sum up the patterns of Russia's regional primacy based on the analytical results of the cross-case analysis. In the second part, I first review the theoretical contributions of this study before going on to discuss the methodological contribution of set-theoretic multimethod research in the context of neoclassical realism and IR. Finally, I explore more recent cases as avenues for further research.

## **7.1 Patterns of Russia's regional primacy**

Based on the analysis of 27 cases of Russia's interactions with EU's 'contested neighbourhood' as part of the post-Soviet space – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine – plus the three Baltic states between 1992 and 2015, this study has found consistent pathways of Russia's assertive regional policies as well as Russia's non-assertive or less assertive regional policies. The interaction of the four conditions mentioned above allows us to derive concrete theoretical propositions by specifying *how* Russia has pursued its regional primacy – from regional integration or even underbalancing right the way through to military intervention. Throughout the fsQCA it was shown that several of the anticipated relationships based on neoclassical realist assumptions could indeed be identified, while others had a theoretical foundation but were not detected empirically in the Russian case.

Each of the post-Soviet states analysed in this study has its own internal features that not only differ from each other's historical and political background but also differ in how they impinge on Russia's national interest. Moreover, across the period of time under analysis, Russia went through political and economic reforms that profoundly changed its internal structure as well as its role in the global arena: from the economic default of 1998 to the economic boom of the energy sector of the first decade of the 2000s; from the 'Westernisation'

of Russia under the liberal wave of the early 1990s to the promotion of Russia as a unique civilisation after 2008; from the ‘common European home’ of Gorbachev to the ‘new dividing lines’ between Russia and the EU that exacerbate latent conflicts in the common neighbourhood, etc.

Despite its internal struggles, Russia has repeatedly stated in several official documents a political ambition to be ‘a regional leader with global projection’ – seen also, for example, in its membership of international organisations such as the EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, the NATO-Russia Council, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Eurasian Economic Union, and the BRICS. At the same time, despite Russia’s attempts at engagement with the international community on an equal terms, the post-Soviet states still play an active role in defining Russia’s regional primacy outside its formal borders. Specifically, in Moscow’s eyes the post-Soviet republics represent one of their country’s most urgent security dilemmas, one that has remained present ever since the break-up of the Soviet Union and which concerns the kind of arrangements needed with these republics in order to maintain regional stability. Therefore, the analysis of Russia’s interaction with several states within the post-Soviet space over a longer perspective not only gives us clues about the sources of Russia’s *immediate* response to a perceived threat but also addresses Russia’s grand strategy in the common neighbourhood it shares with the EU in the post-Cold War era. Still, the question remains: why has Russia adopted an assertive foreign policy towards some post-Soviet states and a less assertive one with others in its pursuit of regional primacy?

After empirical analysis, the following observations can be made. Firstly, the fsQCA has demonstrated the analytical utility of the conception of assertiveness as an act of imposition on neighbouring states rather than one of cooperation with them. Rather than using a vague negative notion of assertiveness when addressing non-Western regional powers, I identify three sets of assertive foreign policy. Depending on the rationale according to which

diplomatic, economic and military instruments are used, foreign policy outcomes can result in socialisation, coercion and intervention. These sets have been understood as a *continuum* from the least assertive (socialisation) to the most assertive (military intervention). This distinction has been useful in detecting differences between the various foreign policy instruments adopted by Russia towards several post-Soviet states in situations spanning a period of more than two decades – from rhetorical threats to economic sanctions, and from the technical support of subversive troops to the actual use of force.

Secondly, the presence of a military alliance (AL) in a target state – i.e., NATO membership – is a sufficient condition for Russia's assertiveness that confirms (AL → A) the substantial tensions between Russia and the West. Nevertheless, this sufficient relation needs some explanation. If on the one hand, Russia's perception towards the enlargement of the North-Atlantic alliance in post-Soviet states was characterised by cautious scepticism and even open antagonism during the most strained crises; on the other hand, the presence of NATO served effectively to constrain Russia's assertiveness, at least to its most severe consequences. Following the Baltic states' accession to NATO, Russian actions towards these countries were geared toward achieving strategic aims, with the primary concern of staying *below* NATO's threshold for reaction. As a consequence, Russia used the Baltic states as a test case for a 'hybrid' assertiveness able to combine traditional military power with covert efforts to undermine an enemy government.

Despite the fact that this pattern underlines the importance of systemic conditions such as alliance preferences compared to domestic conditions, Russia's coercive regional policy cannot be totally understood without referring to Russia's threat perception of NATO enlargement at its formal borders. In support of this argument, several studies have compared the rapprochement of some post-Soviet states either with NATO or with China (Kropatcheva 2014; Samokhvalov 2017). In the latter case, despite the rising economic and military



influence of China in the post-Soviet space, especially in Central Asia, Russia has not resorted to the same assertive instruments as in the case involving NATO.

Thirdly, the combination of external pressure (P) and the presence of status recognition (S) as sufficient conditions to explain Russia's coercive regional policy ( $P*S \rightarrow A$ ) accommodates neoclassical realist assumptions of integrating systemic conditions with domestic ones. In the case of Russia, the EU's increased activity in the common neighbourhood as well as the pro-western orientation of neighbouring states' governments has been a major concern to Moscow ever since the fall of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, EU-Russia relations continued to remain at least at a level of 'strategic partnership' that recognised Russia's special status in the post-Soviet space. Consequently, Moscow continued to opt for hybrid foreign policy instruments, stopping short of the use of military force.

Fourthly, the analysis further shows that the combination of external pressure (P) and high state capacity (C) is sufficient for Russia's military intervention ( $P*C \rightarrow A$ ). Besides the EU's external pressure in the post-Soviet space, which gradually came to be perceived as an imminent threat, in all three cases of Russia's intervention – Georgia 2008, Crimea 2014, and Eastern Ukraine 2014 – Moscow was able to extract and mobilise resources in order to respond adequately and in a timely fashion. Nevertheless, military and economic capability are not sufficient in addressing Russia's state capacity. The Kremlin has been able to achieve a high state capacity thanks not only to a renewed economic stability based on the energy sector since the early 2000s, but also due to the construction of a common ideology able to unite and mobilise Russian society against 'the infamous policy management of containment' conducted by Western powers against Russia. As a consequence, when Russia resorted to the use of military force against some post-Soviet states, these decisions were based on the 'necessity' of intervening in order to stop Western attempts to isolate Russia.

Finally, the two paths of the conservative solution of the negated outcome ( $\sim P^* \sim AL^* S + \sim AL^* \sim S^* \sim C \rightarrow \sim A$ ) reflect respectively the two conceptualisations of non-assertive regional policy: the first is Russia's leadership of regional integration projects ( $\sim P^* \sim AL^* S$ ); the second is its inability to answer effectively and in a timely fashion to a perceived threat ( $\sim AL^* \sim S^* \sim C$ ). Regarding the former, one of the paths of the conservative solution suggests that Russia's non-assertive regional policy is implemented in the absence of external pressure as well as in the absence of military alliances on the part of its bordering territories. The solution, which nevertheless does not include counterfactuals, mainly confirms neorealist assumptions, according to which states must always seek to strengthen themselves and their position in relation to other states, even in the absence of a direct threat. However, a pivotal difference lies in how they strengthen their hegemonic position in the region. In fact, by exploiting its preponderant power as well as the absence of imminent threats, Russia has promoted and even implemented multilateral cooperation organisations where Moscow's regional primacy is not up for discussion. Nevertheless, non-assertive policies are also a function of Russian perception of the recognition of its status by Western nations.

The absence of state capacity has not proved to be as pivotal as the other conditions in addressing Russia's non-assertive policy. A likely explanation would be that ideological and geopolitical motivations trump the domestic constraints regarding policy implementation. Indeed, despite the economic and political turmoil through which Russia went during the 1990s, the most conservative and even interventionist branch of post-Soviet Russian elites – i.e. the military within the Ministry of Defence and the intelligence service (FSB) – gained control of the country's political and economic sectors soon after the failure of the liberal faction in 1993. Since then, Moscow has advocated for a leading role for Russia within the post-Soviet region rather than pursuing Euro-Atlantic consensus. At the same time, it is also true that cases of Russia's 'underbalancing' in the mid-1990s, which refer mainly to Russia's

assertive rhetoric against NATO's enlargement to the Baltic states, are included in the second path of the conservative solution reflecting a 'weakened' Russia; in absence of imminent deterrent factors, such as a military alliance of target state, did not resort to a coercive or interventionist regional policy.

## **7.2 Theoretical Contribution: Implications for Russia's regional primacy and Neoclassical Realism**

This study started with the observation that the individual causal factors of Russia's foreign policy are distinct in theory, yet they tend to overlap in practice. Although many scholars agree with this argument in principle, in practice few studies have offered integrated theoretical propositions or have attempted to assemble empirical evidence on the interaction between multiple factors. Building on these foundations, my research developed a theoretically informed framework based on neoclassical realism that sought to integrate systemic and domestic factors in studying states' regional policy on a longer-term perspective. By using induction as an 'ideal' approach, this dissertation brings new insights into Russia's foreign policy in the post-Soviet space, and identifies pivotal intervening variables for inclusion in a neoclassical realist theory of regional primacy.

In the theoretical framework, the preponderance of power and geographic proximity represent the *scope conditions* favourable to Moscow in pursuing regional primacy in the post-Soviet space. In this context, the external pressure exerted by other great powers, specifically the EU and the US, provides Russia with an *incentive* to use assertive means in the post-Soviet space. Nevertheless, geopolitical pressure is able more substantially to address Russia's regional primacy in the post-Soviet space if it is integrated with *moderating factors*, such as the target state's alliance options at the systemic level, and status recognition of the great power, that affect Russia's threat perception. Finally, foreign policy outcomes decided by the executive can be (quickly and effectively) implemented if Russia has a high state capacity.

This argument draws on previous attempts to develop a theoretically informed model of Russia's neighbourhood policy (Götz 2016), which have not been able to individuate the specific conception of 'assertiveness' in the Russian case, and the relative importance of some conditions and conjunctions compared to others. Firstly, many scholars agree that Moscow has adopted a more assertive policy both in the regional neighbourhood as well as in further flung regions such as the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Nevertheless, it is not clear which foreign policy instruments with what scope can be included in this category, not only with respect to Russia but also to other major regional powers. The categorisation of assertive foreign policy instruments has allowed me to argue for a more precise assessment of 'assertiveness'. Admittedly, the most challenging categorisation of Russia's assertive regional policy has been to distinguish between the actual use of military force against a target state in the regional neighbourhood – i.e. intervention – and the instruments used to influence a target state without actually intervening – i.e. coercion. Indeed, while resorting to military intervention was a 'last resort' for more than two decades, Russia developed several hybrid strategies in the post-Cold war era combining economic and irregular military means in order to undermine target states' territorial integrity, subvert its internal political cohesion and disrupt its economy. As a consequence, despite the absence of a direct intervention, most post-Soviet states in the European Eastern borderland consider themselves to be under 'Russian attack'. Another difficult task was to categorise 'non-assertive' behaviour by including two apparently different policy outcomes: Russia's underbalancing policies and Russia-sponsored regional integration projects. Both outcomes are here considered as manifestations of assertiveness, defined as the imposition of regional primacy to neighbouring countries, yet they are distinct in nature. A basic difference between the two policies is that Russian-sponsored regional integration encourages a perception of Russia as a 'normal state' able to generate political, economic and cultural attraction in the region, instead of one that resorts to

'hard power' policies. Despite their differences, the two policy outcomes are both included in the set of 'non-assertiveness' because they are both examples of Russia's non-use of force or coercion in regional competition.

Secondly, the presence of external pressure as well as of military alliance across the paths to assertive and non-assertive regional policies suggests that Russia's foreign policy is strongly responsive to shifts in the level of external threat, which, according to Walt's balance-of-threat theory, is a composite of other states' aggregate power, offensive military capabilities, proximity, and perceived intent. Therefore, we could potentially agree with those positions according to which Russia's intervention in neighbouring states is a function of the external pressure exerted by the EU, the US, and NATO (see e.g. Mearsheimer 2014). Nevertheless, although the analysis confirms that Russia's assertive regional primacy is pursued in order to avoid close ties between external actors and post-Soviet states, the ideational component emerges as a prominent intervening factor in the diverse outcomes of Russia's foreign policy. The intervening variable of perception works on two levels in the case of Russia. On the one hand, Russia's actions in the contested neighbourhood reflect whether Russia's significant Other(s), namely Western major powers, recognise or reject Russia's hegemonic role in the post-Soviet space. Accordingly, if the Russian foreign policy executive perceives that the Western powers do not recognise Russia's 'special status' in the post-Soviet space, Moscow would react more assertively against target states in order to re-establish a peer-relationship with the major Western powers. On the other hand, Russia considers some regions of the post-Soviet space as having an 'iconic significance' based on ethnical connections and historical relations, in addition to the usual interests of national security, which increase not only Russia's sense of responsibility towards its 'periphery' but also its legitimacy as the regional hegemon.

This study also carries implications for the broader theoretical debate concerning integrated models of regional primacy as well as the role of ideas as intervening variables in a neoclassical realist framework. Firstly, by developing a theoretical framework of why regional powers might use assertive rather than cooperative foreign policy instruments in order to pursue regional primacy, this study not only provided insights into the main theories of IR that have been previously deemed pivotal in addressing a state's foreign policy, but it also combined these conditions in a synthetic framework able to explain the processes behind major powers' responses to immediate threats, and also their vision of regional policy on a long-term perspective. With a rigorous understanding of why Russia has adopted some foreign policy instruments we have a template of regional primacy for explaining similar paths of other regional powers that may contribute most to the (in)stability of a regional subsystem. At the same time, the theoretical framework is flexible enough to allow experts to specifically tailor its approach to individual regional powers and regions.

Secondly, the analysis showed that the neoclassical realist model of regional primacy performs consistently better than the comparable alternative explanations based on single variables, specifically those offered by structural realism, regime type and roles of ideas. One main reason why this model outperformed the alternatives is that the neoclassical realist framework specifies *when* and *where* intervening conditions mediate a great power's strategy for regional primacy. Figure 7.1 depicts the performance of the neoclassical realist theory of regional primacy for each case of Russia's foreign policy. The only major misprediction is Abkhazia 1993/South Ossetia 1992, which the theoretical expectations anticipated in Chapter 4 should have been included in the set of non-assertive Russia foreign policy (e.g. socialisation). In fact, Russia did intervene in both ethnic conflicts of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the early nineties by basing military troops on Georgian territory. By exploring the deviant case in a post-QCA process tracing in order to see why the mechanism interrupted,

I discovered a frequently omitted condition that could address the foreign policy outcome. For this reason, I added a second path sufficient to Russia's military intervention (the green box on the right in Figure 7.1), which also includes the omitted condition of iconic significance as a main intervening condition.

As anticipated, the choice of a deviant case that emerged from the cross-case analysis and the inclusion of the omitted condition in the process tracing enables us to remedy the puzzle. At the same time, it is advisable to modify the cross-case analysis and consequently the theoretical framework accordingly, in order to measure which role demonstrates iconic significance in terms of sufficiency and necessity for the outcome (see Figure 3.1 in chapter 3). Notwithstanding this limitation, the inclusion of iconic significance in the framework and in the QCA cross-analysis would be a fruitful area for further work on the role of idea and perception within the neoclassical realist approach, not only in the case of Russia's foreign policy but also with the regional primacy of major powers more generally.

### **7.3 Methodological Contribution: what next for Set-Theoretic Multimethod Research and Neoclassical Realism?**

The empirical analysis of this research builds on set-theoretic multimethod research using fuzzy-set QCA (fsQCA) for the cross-case analysis and process tracing for the within-case analysis, as discussed in Chapter 3. While process tracing is largely used in neoclassical realism to make causal inferences and test discernible patterns about observable phenomena, fsQCA has recently begun to gain increased attention in IR. Nevertheless, its use in studying military intervention, conflict studies and states' foreign policy is still uncommon. Within neoclassical realist literature, to my knowledge, there is no study that applies set-theoretic multimethod research, and specifically fuzzy-set QCA, in order to investigate factors sufficient and/or necessary for a state's foreign policy. Most studies in neoclassical realism adopt comparative case-study approaches including qualitative methods, multimethod

methods, and historiography for studying foreign policy. Works in this tradition emphasise the historical circumstances and decision-making process in specific countries which were sometimes found to be at odds with the generalisations suggested by quantitative researchers in comparative foreign policy analysis. Against this backdrop, I argued in Chapter 3 that fsQCA has distinct advantages over these approaches, in that it matches well with the methodological assumptions of neoclassical realism.

First, despite the fact that case-studies in neoclassical realism have demonstrated the unique contribution of qualitative research in explaining the great empirical anomalies of international outcomes, they only reach a low degree of generalisability. Conversely, the use of fsQCA as a research method increases the possibility of reaching a middle-range generalisability without rejecting the ‘cause-of-effects’ approach which is at the base of both QCA and neoclassical realism (Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016, 109). In this study, the fsQCA has managed to distinguish some common patterns in Russia’s assertiveness that could be useful in predicting future foreign policy outcomes. Second, through its focus on Russia, the fsQCA enables a fine-grained qualitative assessment not only of the outcome – assertive regional policy – but also of the conditions that take into account case knowledge. For instance, although coercive foreign policy instruments are not considered military intervention, they are nevertheless assertive against another state and can contribute to mutual insecurity and crisis escalation. By contrast, statistical aggregation tends not to conceal the tiny variances that nevertheless have qualitative significance. Third, fsQCA is particularly consistent with the study of foreign policy through a neoclassical realist lens because fuzzy-set analysis attends to configurations of conditions rather than net effects of individual variables. At the same time, fsQCA has the important advantage over case-study methods that it can discard conditions that do not emerge as sufficient or necessary either individually or as a conjunction. The minimisation process of the fsQCA allows the researcher to make a parsimonious model easier

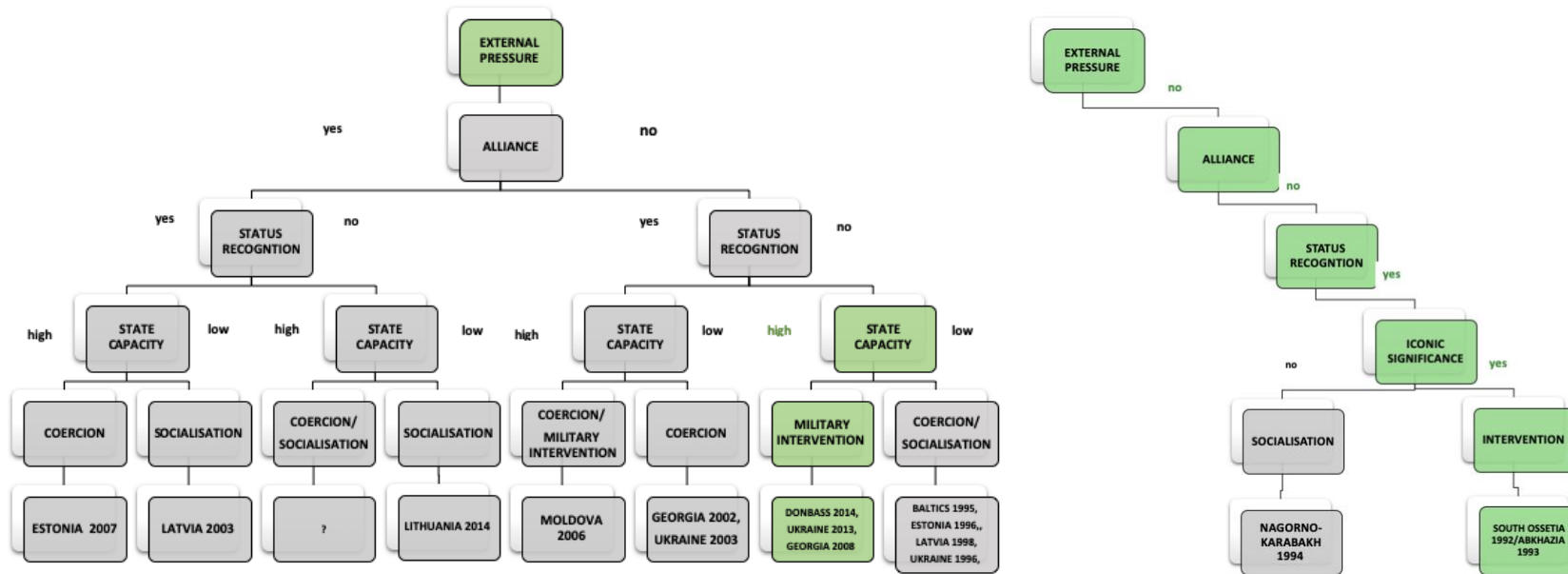


to manage. For instance, as the high state capacity did not emerge as a pivotal condition in addressing Russia's military intervention, it would have not made much sense to include it in the in-depth analysis of one case.

With regard to the limitations of this study, three points stand out. First, the neoclassical realist model presented in this study has included only three of the several potential intervening conditions that have been deemed as sources of Russia's foreign policy: e.g. leader's personality; regime type and elites cohesion, etc. This decision has been taken based on data availability. Given the long time frame considered for the research (1992-2015), the inclusion of other intervening variables that have still not been aggregated in any dataset, such as Yeltsin's, Medvedev's, or Putin's beliefs or personality, would have exceeded the time available for conducting research.

Second, the within-case analysis was carried out mainly using secondary literature. This methodological choice, selected because of time and capacity availability, has limited the causal inference in the process tracing as no *smoking-gun* test or *doubly decisive* test could be conducted.. Indeed, studies which have used a deeper post-positivist epistemology employing methods such as discourse analysis and interviews with leaders and experts of the topic could make deeper contributions to the literature, especially regarding the impact of identity and perceptions on foreign policy-making. At the same time, through the use of a neoclassical realist-inspired framework partnered with the process tracing method, my research was able, superficially at least, to illustrate how the interplay of systemic variables and identity/perception can be examined as an interlinked causal mechanism to explain foreign policy

Figure 7.1: Neoclassical realist framework of regional primacy against empirical record<sup>82</sup>



<sup>82</sup> The green area represents the paths to Russia’s military intervention, which derived from the cross-case analysis (on the left) and from the process tracing of the deviant case (on the right).

outcome. Third, the discrepancy between theoretical assumptions and empirical observations regarding the role of state capacity as an intervening condition necessitates some specification. It is likely that an aggregate measurement of state capacity would have ignored some specificities that emerged in the process tracing, such as the divide between the more accommodating faction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Kozyrev and the more assertive faction of the Ministry of Defence under Grachev, which secured most of the concessions from Yeltsin in dealing with the hotspots of the Soviet Space since end of 1992. Therefore, it would be useful to engage in a more in-depth discussion about the role and the measurement of state capacity in Russia's foreign policy literature.

#### **7.4 Avenues for future research and recommendations**

Despite the limitations mentioned above, several empirical and theoretical trajectories might develop from the current research. A main empirical research perspective would be to apply the neoclassical realist model developed in this study to current developments in Belarus and Nagorno-Karabakh since 2020. The inclusion of these recent cases in the cross-case analysis would be of particular interest in this regard.

After the presidential elections in Belarus on 9 August, thousands of people took to the streets in many cities across the country, protesting broadly against perceived electoral fraud committed for the benefit of the incumbent President, Alexander Lukashenko, who has been in power since 1994. The regime has responded to the protests with brutal repression; special police forces have dispersed peaceful protesters in an unprecedented manner and there have been reports of thousands of protesters being beaten, and in some cases killed, at the hands of police (Chupryna 2020). Since then, the situation in Belarus has moved into a dangerous deadlock. Russia, which has long subsidised the Belorussian state financially, has strong strategic interests in and over Belarus that are in line with its foreign policy toward the post-Soviet space, namely preserving the coherence of the Collective Security Treaty Organization

(CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union, as well as preventing the eastward expansion of NATO and the EU. Nevertheless, the Kremlin has so far preferred to keep the costs of maintaining Belarus within its geopolitical sphere as low as possible instead of pursuing an interventionist policy. A likely explanation is the desire not to miss the chance of managing a political transition without bringing Belarus to breaking point (Rácz, Gherasimov, and Nič 2020). Here, it would be worth investigating under what conditions Russia opted for diplomatic foreign policy instruments during the protests of 2020 – which include multifaceted, well-institutionalised channels of immediate influence over the Belarusian regime, particularly over its security apparatus and considerable parts of its economy – rather than more coercive and interfering policies.

On September 27 2020, Azerbaijan took military action against the Armenian-majority region of Nagorno-Karabakh to reverse the defeat of 1994 and recover lost lands. The human cost of the new conflict has been immense: more than 5,000 soldiers and 100 civilians have died (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia sign Nagorno-Karabakh peace deal 2020). After six weeks of fighting in which Azerbaijan recaptured huge sections of lost territory, the Armenian leadership, facing a military collapse on all fronts, agreed to an agreement announced in Moscow on November 9 out of sheer desperation. This agreement, which is far from establishing an effective peace, constitutes a pivotal moment not only for Nagorno-Karabakh but also for the South Caucasus. While Azerbaijan succeeded in reconquering the lost territories of Kelbajar and Susha, which represented a humiliating defeat on the battlefield in the early 1990s, Armenia had little option but to accept this deal, paying the price for a poor military performance and years of inflexibility over the *de jure* Azerbaijani land they occupied in the early 1990s. The ‘other’ winner is Russia. As seen in Chapter 5, the former Soviet Union and the post-Soviet Russia never managed to secure troops on the ground in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict of the early 1990s as it did in Transnistria and in Abkhazia. At that time,

Russia faced the opposition of both Azerbaijan, which was trying to maintain as much as an independent foreign policy, and Armenia, which did not want any obstacles in what it thought would be an easy conquering of Nagorno-Karabakh. Now, this scenario has been realised: Russia was able to deploy c. 2000 peacekeepers, thus gaining an enormous influence in the region. At the same time, Russia has to share the ‘merit’ of this deal with Turkey, which, in exchange for decisive military support to Azerbaijan, has secured the promise of a transport corridor running from eastern Turkey to the Caspian Sea via the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhichevan (de Waal 2020). This project would dramatically expand Turkey’s eastern horizons by effectively opening a new trade route all the way to Central Asia and bypassing Russia.

Although differences with other frozen conflicts remain as Russia has not officially intervened militarily to stop the fight in Nagorno-Karabakh as it did in Abkhazia/South Ossetia or in Transnistria in the early 1990s, the presence of Turkey as an external power opens the space for investigating new players in the conflict resolution of the European common neighbourhood. Indeed, despite being the official mediators, the United States along with several European countries have been kept aside, paying the price of not engaging with the conflict for many years, especially in the early stages. At the same time, despite Turkey’s active role in the conflict as the main ‘other’ external power, Russia opted not to escalate the conflict to a regional level. One reason for this policy outcome could be that Russia and Turkey are deeply engaged on other fronts, like Syria and Libya, and that despite different strategic interests, they seem to have a good understanding of each other regarding their vision of a post-liberal international order.

This surprising outcome of Russia’s regional policy call on scholars and policy makers to recognise Russia’s diversified neighbourhood policy and to further investigate the various policy instruments Russia adopts in the face of similar crises. Relatedly, it could be fruitful to

enlarge the dataset of ‘external powers’ engaging with Russia in the shared neighbourhood(s) to also include the Central Asian republics. In this way, it would be possible to explore and compare the processes of Russia’s decision-making when facing pressure either from the United States and NATO, the EU, Turkey or even China.

Finally, one possible way to develop and expand the empirical aspect of this study could be to investigate the regional policies of *other* great and regional powers such as Iran, China, and India. Since neoclassical realism suggests that the pressures of the international system are mediated by unit-level variables, this allows for a contextualised analysis regarding norms, ideas, and cultures, which also depend on the state’s specificities. For instance, the identity and set-up of Iran’s regime facilitated a sub-optimal performance of policy outcome (Juneau 2015). Similarly, China’s foreign policy in recent years has been restrained by the level of the Chinese’s leadership legitimacy (Sørensen 2013). Nevertheless, these studies are limited to specific cases of major powers’ regional policy, which inevitably hold a low level of generalisability across similar cases. Based on its rigorous analytical framework, set-theoretic multimethod research using fsQCA for the cross-case analysis and process tracing for the within-case analysis can address the diverse foreign policy outcomes of a major power across space and time. For instance, by applying the set-theoretic multimethod research, it would be possible to address Iran’s regional policy in the Middle-East from the 1979 revolution until the present day by including the intervening conditions that have been addressed as pivotal by previous studies on the topic. This comparative dimension is a distinctive advantage over small-n studies of one or several cases within neoclassical realist literature because the set-theoretic multimethod approach attempts to formulate a generalisable neoclassical realist theory of regional primacy.

## APPENDIX

### Raw Data

Table A1. raw data of outcome and conditions

Case	Start	Considered Year	Intensity of violence	Foreign Policy instruments	External Pressure/Russia's regional project	Prospects of Membership (external interference)	STATUS RECOGNITION	STATE FRAGILITY INDEX	NATO MEMBERSHIP
ABK 1993	1989	1992	5	secession	–	Not-interested	MOBILITY (high)	10	0
AM 1994	1994	1995	0	multilateral cooperation	CIS	Aligned with the local great power	MOBILITY (high)	10	0
AM 2002	2002	2002	0	multilateral cooperation	CSTO	Aligned with the local great power	MOBILITY (high)	11	0
AM 2015	2013	2015	0	multilateral cooperation	EAEU	Aligned with the local great power	CREATIVITY (moderate)	9	0
AZ 1993	1993	1995	0	Multilateral cooperation	CIS	Aligned with the local great power	MOBILITY (high)	10	0
BL 1994	1994	1995	0	Multilateral cooperation	CIS	Aligned with the local great power	MOBILITY (high)	10	0

<b>BL 2001</b>	2001	2001	1	socialisation	—	Aligned with the local great power	MOBILITY (high)	10	0
<b>BL 2002</b>	2002	2002	0	multilateral cooperation	CSTO	Aligned with the local great power	MOBILITY (high)	11	0
<b>BL 2010</b>	2010	2010	0	multilateral cooperation	EAEU	Aligned with the local great power	MOBILITY (high)	7	0
<b>BLT 1995</b>	1995	1995	1	socialisation	BAFTA	Hard-law commitment	COMPETITION (low/absent)	10	0
<b>DONBAS 2014</b>	2014	2014	5	intervention	EaP 2.0	Hard-law commitment	COMPETITION (low/absent)	8	0
<b>EST 1996</b>	1996	1992	1	socialisation	BAFTA	Hard-law commitment	COMPETITION (low/absent)	9	0
<b>EST 2007</b>	1992	2007	2	coercion	EU MEMBERSHIP	Membership	CREATIVITY (moderate)	8	1
<b>GE 1994</b>	1994	1995	0	Multilateral cooperation	CIS	Aligned with the local great power	MOBILITY (high)	10	0
<b>GE 2002</b>	2002	2002	3	intervention	PCA	SOFT LAW COMMITMENT	CREATIVITY (moderate)	11	0
<b>GE 2008</b>	2008	2008	5	intervention	ENP	hard-law commitment	COMPETITION (low/absent)	8	0
<b>LT 2014</b>	2014	2014	2	coercion	EU MEMBERSHIP	Membership	COMPETITION (low/absent)	9	1
<b>LV 1998</b>	1998	1992	1	socialisation	BAFTA	Hard-law commitment	COMPETITION (low/absent)	10	0
<b>LV 2003</b>	1992	2003	2	coercion	EU MEMBERSHIP	Membership	CREATIVITY (moderate)	10	1



MD 1994	1994	1995	0	Multilateral cooperation	CIS	Aligned with the local great power	MOBILITY (high)	10	0
MD 2006	2006	2006	2	coercion	ENP	SOFT LAW COMMITMENT	CREATIVITY (moderate)	8	0
PNR 1992	1992	1992	5	secession	–	Not-interested	MOBILITY (high)	10	0
UA 1996	1996	1996	1	socialisation	PCA	Aligned with the local great power/not interested	COMPETITION (low/absent)	9	0
UA 2003	2003	2003	2	coercion	PCA	SOFT LAW COMMITMENT	CREATIVITY (moderate)	10	0
UA 2013	2003	2013	3	intervention	EaP 2.0	Hard-law commitment	COMPETITION (low/absent)	7	0
UA 1994	1994	1994	0	multilateral cooperation	CIS associate member	Aligned with the local great power	MOBILITY (high)	10	0

Table A2. Key reading of Table A1

HIK SCALE OF POLITICAL CONFLICTS	SCALE OF VIOLENCE (num. value)
WAR	5
LIMITED WAR	4
VIOLENT CRISIS	3
NON-VIOLENT CRISIS	2
DISPUTE	1
MULTILATERAL COOPERATION	0 <sup>83</sup>

PROSPECTS OF MEMBERSHIP of a neighbouring state	num. value
Hard-Law Commitment (reforms)	3
Soft-Law Commitment (rhetoric)	2
Not interested	1
Aligned with local great power OR already members of the external region-building project	0

STATUS RECOGNITION	num. value
SOCIAL MOBILITY (high/moderate recognition)	2
SOCIAL CREATIVITY (partial recognition)	1
SOCIAL COMPETITION (low/absent recognition)	0

STATE FRAGILITY INDEX	num. value
1 (min)	not fragile
25 (max)	very fragile (failed state)

ALLIANCE	num. value
yes	1
no	0

<sup>83</sup> As HIK analyses only political conflicts, I added multilateral cooperation (value 0) meant as the capacity of attract the neighbouring states instead of impose certain policies on them.

## Calibration strategy

Table A3. Calibration Thresholds for Outcome and Explanatory Conditions

Outcome/Condition	Code	Measurement	Fully Out	Cross-Over	Fully In
Assertiveness	A	Imposition instead of attraction	0	1.5	3/5
State Capacity	C	Fragility Index	7	8.5	11
External Pressure	P	Prospects of membership	0	1.5	3
Alliance	AL	Alliance	0	0.5	1
Status Recognition	S	Foreign Policy Executive's Perception about status recognition	0	0.5	2

## Calibrated Data

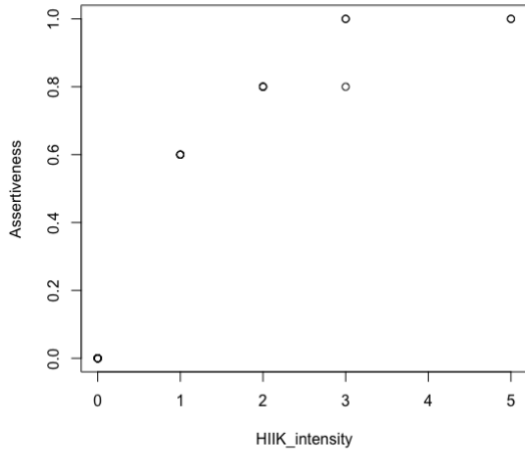
Table A4: Calibrated data

Case	P	AL	S	C	A
ABK 1993	0	0	1	0.2	1.0
AM 1994	0	0	1	0.2	0
AM 2002	0	0	1	0	0
AM 2015	0	0	0.6	0.4	0
AZ 1993	0	0	1	0.2	0
BL 1994	0	0	1	0.2	0
BL 2001	0	0	1	0.2	0.4
BL 2002	0	0	1	0	0
BL 2010	0	0	1	1	0
BLT 1995	1	0	0	0.2	0.4
DONBAS 2014	1	0	0	0.8	1
EST 1996	1	0	0	0.4	0.4
EST 2007	1	1	0.6	0.8	0.8
GE 1994	0	0	1	0.2	0
GE 2002	0.8	0	0.6	0	1
GE 2008	1	0	0	0.8	1
LT 2014	1	1	0	0.4	0.8
LV 1998	1	0	0	0.2	0.4
LV 2003	1	1	0.6	0.2	0.8
MD 1994	0	0	1	0.2	0
MD 2006	0.8	0	0.6	0.8	0.8
PNR 1992	0	0	1	0.2	1.0
UA 1996	0.8	0	0	0.4	0.4
UA 2003	0.8	0	0.6	0.2	0.8
UA 2013	1	0	0	1	1
UA 1994	0	0	1	0.2	0

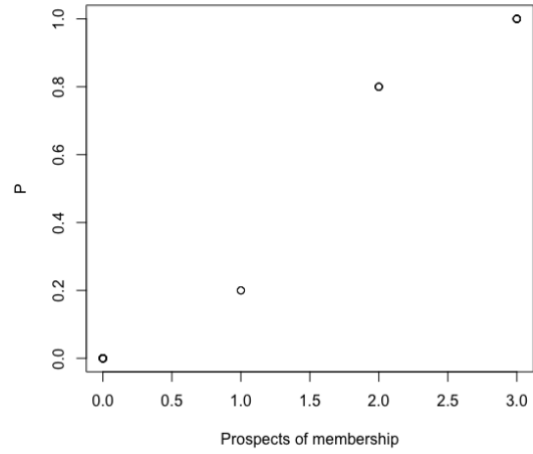
Azerbaijan 2016 (raw value 3) was calibrated as 0.8 and not as 1.0 because there was not direct intervention from Russia (see S1).

A5. Raw Data and Calibrated Fuzzy Sets

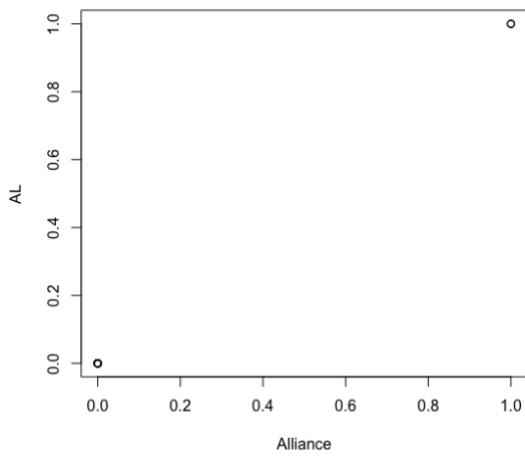
Assertiveness



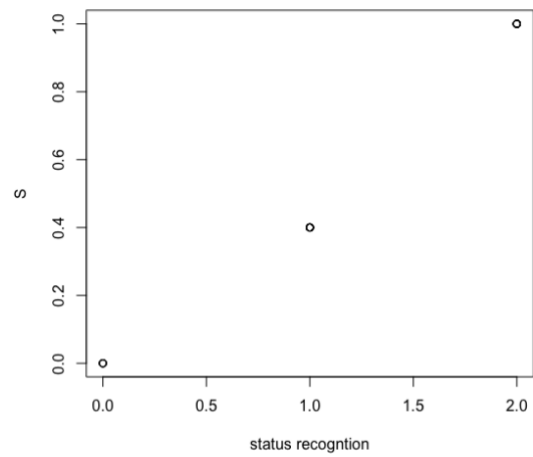
Prospects of Membership



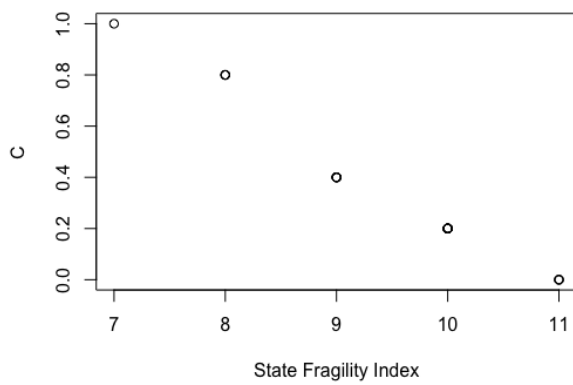
Alliance



Status Recognition



State capacity



### Necessary condition for outcome

	Cons.Nec	Cov.Nec	RoN
P	0.78	0.77	0.84
AL	0.20	0.80	0.97
S	0.45	0.33	0.50
C	0.56	0.70	0.86
~P	0.26	0.21	0.51
~AL	0.80	0.40	0.17
~S	0.61	0.67	0.81
~C	0.63	0.43	0.49

### Necessary condition for negated outcome

	Cons.Nec	Cov.Nec	RoN
P	0.26	0.34	0.649
AL	0.03	0.20	0.90
S	0.72	0.72	0.71
C	0.32	0.54	0.79
~P	0.77	0.83	0.83
~AL	0.96	0.64	0.25
~S	0.32	0.47	0.73
~C	0.80	0.73	0.67

### Sufficiency for single condition

	Cons.Suf	Cov.Suf	PRI	Cons.Suf(H)
P	0.705	0.782	0.654	0.646
AL	0.800	0.218	0.750	0.641
S	0.325	0.473	0.280	0.323
C	0.667	0.582	0.579	0.655
~P	0.203	0.273	0.157	0.201
~AL	0.358	0.782	0.319	0.344
~S	0.600	0.600	0.522	0.568
~C	0.379	0.600	0.299	0.370

## Truth Table for the Outcome Assertive Foreign Policy (A)

Threshold 0.85

	P	A	L	S	C	OUT	n	incl	PRI
10	1	0	0	1	1	1	3	1.000	1.000
11	1	0	1	0	1	1	2	1.000	1.000
12	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1.000	1.000
13	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1.000	1.000
15	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1.000	1.000
16	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.000	1.000
9	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	0.714	0.455
4	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0.188	0.000
3	0	0	1	0	0	0	10	0.114	0.025
1	0	0	0	0	?	?	0	-	-
2	0	0	0	1	?	?	0	-	-
5	0	1	0	0	?	?	0	-	-
6	0	1	0	1	?	?	0	-	-
7	0	1	1	0	?	?	0	-	-
8	0	1	1	1	?	?	0	-	-
14	1	1	0	1	?	?	0	-	-

### cases

10 DONBAS 2014,GE 2008,UA 2013

11 GE 2002,UA 2003

12 MD 2006

13 LT 2014

15 LV 2003

16 EST 2007

9 BLT 1995,EST 1996,LV 1998,UA 1996

4 BL 2010

3 AM 1994,AM 2002,AM 2015,AZ 1993,BL 1994,BL 2001,BL 2002,GE 1994,MD 1994,UA 1994

## Parsimonious, Intermediate and Conservative Solution Terms for Assertive foreign policy (A)

### Parsimonious

M1:  $AL + P*S + (P*C) \Rightarrow A$

M2:  $AL + P*S + (s*C) \Rightarrow A$

	inclS	PRI	covS	covU	(M1)	(M2)
1 AL	0.800	0.750	0.240	0.060	0.060	0.080
2 P*S	1.000	1.000	0.300	0.100	0.100	0.120
3 P*C	1.000	1.000	0.620	0.020	0.400	
4 s*C	0.931	0.889	0.540	0.000	0.380	
M1	0.932	0.909	0.820			
M2	0.889	0.853	0.800			

cases

- 1 AL LT 2014; LV 2003; EST 2007  
 2 P\*S GE 2002,UA 2003; MD 2006; LV 2003; EST 2007  
 3 P\*C DONBAS 2014,GE 2008,UA 2013; MD 2006; EST 2007  
 4 s\*C DONBAS 2014,GE 2008,UA 2013

### Intermediate

n OUT = 1/0/C: 9/15/0

Total : 24

From C1P1, C1P2:

Number of multiple-covered cases: 3

**M1:  $AL + P*S + P*C \Rightarrow A$**

	inclS	PRI	covS	covU	cases
1 AL	0.800	0.750	0.240	0.060	LT 2014; LV 2003; EST 2007
2 P*S	1.000	1.000	0.300	0.100	GE 2002,UA 2003; MD 2006; LV 2003; EST 2007
3 P*C	1.000	1.000	0.620	0.400	DONBAS 2014,GE 2008,UA 2013; MD 2006; EST 2007
M1	0.932	0.909	0.820		

The **directional expectation** of the intermediate solutions as a logical remainders is row 14 1 1 0 1, which are **simplifying assumptions** of the most parsimonious solutions. The intermediate solution is the same of the parsimonious solution M1 with the same consistency and coverage values:  $AL + P*S + P*C \Rightarrow A$



**Conservative**

n OUT = 1/0/C: 9/18/0

Total : 27

Number of multiple-covered cases: 2

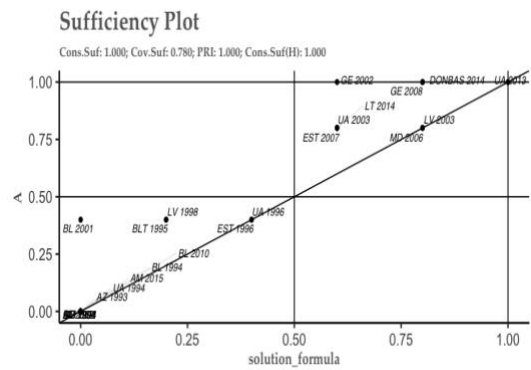
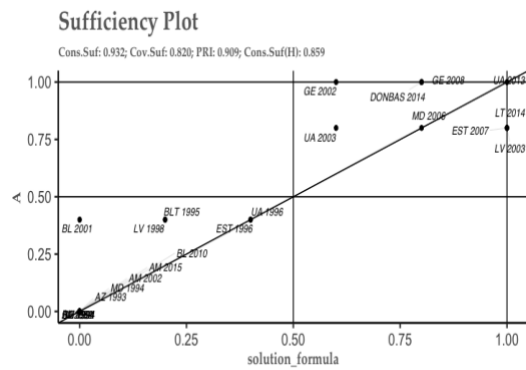
**M1: P\*S + P\*al\*C + P\*AL\*c => A**

	inclS	PRI	covS	covU	cases
1 P*S	1.000	1.000	0.250	0.117	GE 2002,UA 2003; MD 2006; LV 2003; EST 2007
2 P*al*C	1.000	1.000	0.400	0.333	DONBAS 2014,GE 2008,UA 2013; MD 2006
3 P*AL*c	1.000	1.000	0.133	0.067	LT 2014; LV 2003
-----					
M1	1.000	1.000	0.650		

**A6: XY plot of solutions**

Intermediate sol: AL + P\*S + P\*C => A

Conservative sol: P\*S + P\*al\*C + P\*AL\*c => A



## Truth Table for the negated outcome NON-Assertive foreign policy (~A)

Threshold 0.76

	P	S	C	AL	OUT	n	incl	PRI
7	0	1	1	0	1	1	0.882	0.857
1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.857	0.750
5	0	1	0	0	1	12	0.830	0.820
9	1	0	0	0	1	4	0.762	0.667
10	1	0	0	1	0	1	0.500	0.000
14	1	1	0	1	0	1	0.500	0.000
15	1	1	1	0	0	1	0.500	0.000
16	1	1	1	1	0	1	0.500	0.000
11	1	0	1	0	0	3	0.364	0.125
13	1	1	0	0	0	2	0.286	0.000
2	0	0	0	1	? 0	-	-	-
3	0	0	1	0	? 0	-	-	-
4	0	0	1	1	? 0	-	-	-
6	0	1	0	1	? 0	-	-	-
8	0	1	1	1	? 0	-	-	-
12	1	0	1	1	? 0	-	-	-

### cases

7 BL 2010

1 AM 2015

5 ABK 1993,AM 1994,AM 2002,AZ 1993,BL 1994,BL 2001,BL 2002,GE 1994,MD 1994,PNR 1992,UA 1994,NGK 1992

9 BLT 1995,EST 1996,LV 1998,UA 1996

10 LT 2014

14 LV 2003

15 MD 2006

16 EST 2007

11 DONBAS 2014,GE 2008,UA 2013

13 GE 2002,UA 2003

## Parsimonious and Conservative Solution Terms for NON-Assertive foreign policy (~A)

### Parsimonious

n OUT = 1/0/C: 11/13/0

Total : 24

Number of multiple-covered cases: 0

**M1: p => a**

inclS PRI covS covU

-----  
 1 p 0.949 0.944 0.800 -  
 -----

M1 0.949 0.944 0.800

cases

-----  
 1 p AM 1994,AM 2002,AM 2015,AZ 1993,BL 1994,BL 2001,BL 2002,GE 1994,MD 1994,UA 1994; BL 2010  
 -----

### Conservative

n OUT = 1/0/C: 18/9/0

Total : 27

Number of multiple-covered cases: 0

**M1: p\*S\*al + s\*c\*al => a**

inclS PRI covS covU

-----  
 1 p\*S\*al 0.824 0.815 0.700 0.675

2 s\*c\*al 0.792 0.722 0.238 0.213  
 -----

M1 0.820 0.805 0.912

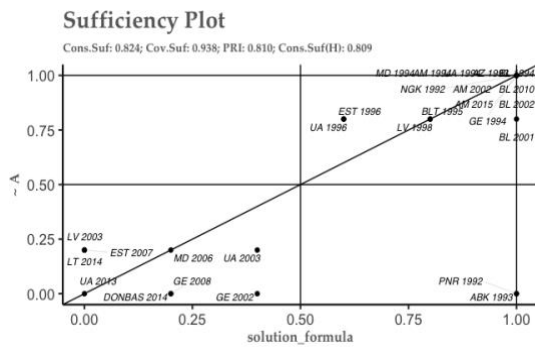
cases

-----  
 1 p\*S\*al ABK 1993,AM 1994,AM 2002,AZ 1993,BL 1994,BL 2001,BL 2002,GE 1994,MD 1994,PNR 1992,UA 1994,NGK 1992;  
 BL 2010

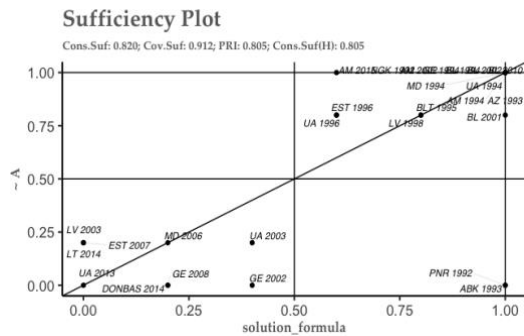
2 s\*c\*al AM 2015; BLT 1995,EST 1996,LV 1998,UA 1996  
 -----

A7: XY plot of solutions

Parsimonious



Conservative



**Parsimonious, Intermediate and Conservative Solution Terms for Assertive foreign policy (A)**

**Parsimonious**

M1:  $AL + P*S + (P*C) \Rightarrow A$

M2:  $AL + P*S + (s*C) \Rightarrow A$

	inclS	PRI	covS	covU	(M1)	(M2)
1 AL	0.800	0.750	0.240	0.060	0.060	0.080
2 P*S	1.000	1.000	0.300	0.100	0.100	0.120
3 P*C	1.000	1.000	0.620	0.020	0.400	
4 s*C	0.931	0.889	0.540	0.000	0.380	
M1	0.932	0.909	0.820			
M2	0.889	0.853	0.800			
cases						
1 AL	LT 2014; LV 2003; EST 2007					
2 P*S	GE 2002,UA 2003; MD 2006; LV 2003; EST 2007					
3 P*C	DONBAS 2014,GE 2008,UA 2013; MD 2006; EST 2007					
4 s*C	DONBAS 2014,GE 2008,UA 2013					

**Intermediate**

n OUT = 1/0/C: 9/15/0

Total : 24

From C1P1, C1P2:

Number of multiple-covered cases: 3

**M1:  $AL + P*S + P*C \Rightarrow A$**

	inclS	PRI	covS	covU	cases	
1	AL	0.800	0.750	0.240	0.060	LT 2014; LV 2003; EST 2007
2	P*S	1.000	1.000	0.300	0.100	GE 2002,UA 2003; MD 2006; LV 2003; EST 2007
3	P*C	1.000	1.000	0.620	0.400	DONBAS 2014,GE 2008,UA 2013; MD 2006; EST 2007
-----						
M1	0.932	0.909	0.820			

The **directional expectation** of the intermediate solutions as a logical remainders is row 14 1 1 0 1, which are **simplifying assumptions** of the most parsimonious solutions. The intermediate solution is the same of the parsimonious solution M1 with the same consistency and coverage values:  $AL + P*S + P*C \Rightarrow A$

### Conservative

n OUT = 1/0/C: 9/18/0

Total : 27

Number of multiple-covered cases: 2

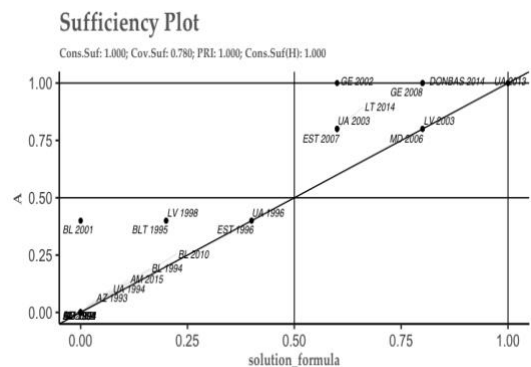
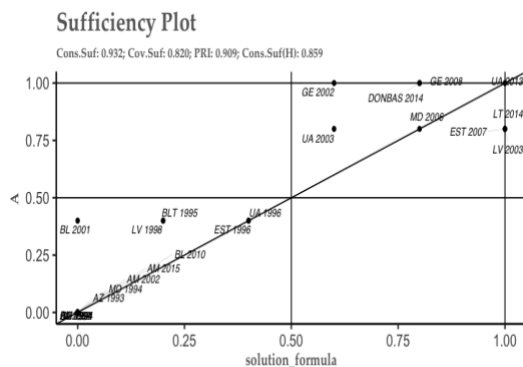
**M1: P\*S + P\*al\*C + P\*AL\*c  $\Rightarrow$  A**

	inclS	PRI	covS	covU	cases	
1	P*S	1.000	1.000	0.250	0.117	GE 2002,UA 2003; MD 2006; LV 2003; EST 2007
2	P*al*C	1.000	1.000	0.400	0.333	DONBAS 2014,GE 2008,UA 2013; MD 2006
3	P*AL*c	1.000	1.000	0.133	0.067	LT 2014; LV 2003
-----						
M1	1.000	1.000	0.650			

### A6: XY plot of solutions

Intermediate sol:  $AL + P*S + P*C \Rightarrow A$

Conservative sol:  $P*S + P*al*C + P*AL*c \Rightarrow A$



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