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RUSSIA'S INTERVENTIONS IN POST-SOVIET STATES ON BEHALF OF RUS-
SIAN MINORITIES

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ABSTRACT

States closely monitor their surrounding territories. When a military block expands its membership to include countries next to a rival state's borders, those rivals feel threatened and tend to respond. One of the ways states respond to losing influence over their border-states, which are not only their direct spheres of influence but serve as a protective buffer zone, is by declaring that their national or ethnic minorities who live in these territories are in danger. The likely result is that states will interfere in these border nations on behalf of ethnic minorities.

Since the end of the Cold War, Russia has been warning that it perceives NATO enlargement eastward as a threat to national security. After Moscow's "soft" balancing strategy towards NATO of the 1990s and the beginning of 2000s did not bring the desired outcome, the Kremlin turned to much more coercive policies towards its neighboring states, which had sought NATO membership. The Five-Day War between Russia and Georgia in 2008 and the current Russian-Ukrainian crisis took place only after Georgia and Ukraine made concrete steps towards NATO membership and served as a balancing strategy for Russia towards the Alliance's enlargement. This perceived threat is the root cause of the Kremlin's intervention in post-Soviet states on behalf of the Russian diaspora. In this light, the Five-Day War between Russia and Georgia of August 2008 and the current Ukrainian crisis are consequences, not causes, of Russia's conflict with the West.

"Our Western partners, led by the United States of America, prefer not to be guided by international law in their practical policies, but by the rule of the gun. They have come to believe in their exclusivity and exceptionalism, that they can decide the destinies of the world, that only they can ever be right. They act as they please: here and there, they use force against sovereign states, building coalitions based on the principle "If you are not with us, you are against us... They have lied to us many times, made decisions behind our backs, placed us before an accomplished fact. This happened with NATO's expansion to the East, as well as the deployment of military infrastructure at our borders. They kept telling us the same thing: "Well, this does not concern you."¹

Vladimir Putin (speaking on Russia's recognition of Crimea, 2014)

"The collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century. As for the Russian nation, it became a genuine drama. Tens of millions of our co-citizens and compatriots found themselves outside the Russian territory."²

Vladimir Putin

1 INTRODUCTION

The current Ukrainian crisis brings back memories of the Five-Day War between Russia and Georgia of 2008. In both conflicts, Moscow intervened militarily into sovereign states—located in Russia's historic sphere of influence, yet, today seeking European integration and NATO membership—to protect Russian minorities. Was it an unjustified act of aggression and a clear manifestation of Moscow's revisionist aims? Or, was it an act of self-preservation against the impending threat of the military alliance's tremendous expansion? This thesis argues that Russia perceived NATO enlargement as a threat to national security. This perceived threat is the root cause of the Kremlin's intervention in post-Soviet states on behalf of the Russian diaspora. Feeling threatened by the possibility

¹ Masha Lipman, "How Putin Plays With the Law," *New Yorker*, March 19, 2014, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/how-putin-plays-with-the-law> .

² *Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, The Kremlin*, Moscow, April 25, 2005, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931> .

of Georgia and Ukraine becoming NATO members, Russia used the idea of protecting its compatriots abroad as an excuse to interfere in these two neighboring countries.

Russia's behavior illustrates a larger phenomenon. When a military alliance expands next to the borders of non-member-states, neighboring states feel increasingly threatened. Under certain conditions, states will respond to these threats with strategies designed to counterbalance the expanding alliance. Here, I show that Russia's military interventions in Georgia and Ukraine are an attempt to balance NATO expansion into states that Russia perceives as strategically important.

For several decades, Moscow has declared that it fears—or, at least, opposes—NATO's expansion eastward. Yet, NATO expansion persists. After non-military balancing strategies to stop the alliance's expansion did not bring the desired outcome, Russia chose a military response. From the West's perspective, the protection of the Russian diaspora is nothing but a pretext for Russia's aggressive military intervention. However, from the point of view of the Russian Federation, it is the preservation of its sphere of influence and an act of defense, of the Russian diaspora abroad. These minority populations therefore serve as a valuable policy instrument in ensuring Moscow's security interests.

Before providing the main analysis, I explain the importance of Georgia and Ukraine for Russia's security, and why their possible NATO membership is perceived as a threat by the Kremlin, in accordance with Stephen Walt's four sources of threat. Further, I explain Russia's balancing strategy towards NATO expansion in accordance with the neorealist idea of four different balancing strategies, shaped by the level of threat perception regarding the state's adversary. The current project is divided by time periods:

first, I describe Soviet balancing strategies towards NATO; second, I examine Russia's balancing strategy after the end of the Cold War, followed by elaboration of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia of 1999 as a turning point of Russia-West relations; third, I describe Moscow's balancing strategy towards NATO after Vladimir Putin came to power; and fourth, I analyze the Five-Day War between Russia and Georgia as the first clear signal of Russian balancing against NATO expansion through the use of force. Finally, I explain why the current Russian-Ukrainian crisis is the latest example of such Moscow military balancing strategy. In both conflicts, protection of Russian minorities residing in Georgia and Ukraine is the official reason for the Kremlin's military interventions.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Traditionally, alliance literature has mainly focused on two questions: Why do alliances form? And, what keeps alliances together?³ There is a gap in the literature on how alliance enlargement affects nonmember states. Expansion of a military alliance next to the borders of a non-member-state is a sign of future unrest. This is likely even if the latter is a great power. My research will attempt to address this gap within alliance literature.

I derive my argument from Walt. Walt changed Waltz's balance-of-power theory, according to which states align with (or against) the most powerful states by balancing against countries that are not only powerful, but threatening.⁴ His theory became known as the balance-of-threat theory, and many political scientists have further developed this (Schweller,⁵ He,⁶ Sprecher,⁷ Kimball,⁸ Bock and Henneberg⁹).

³ Robert B. McCalla, "NATO's Persistence After the Cold War," *International Organization* 50, no. 3 (1996): 445.

⁴ Paul Viotti and Mark Kauppi, *International Relations Theory*, 5th ed. (New York: R.R. Donnelley and Sons, 2012), 65.

⁵ Randall Schweller, *Unanswered Threats* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁶ Kai He, "Undermining Adversaries: Unipolarity, Threat Perception, and Negative Balancing Strategies after the Cold War," *Security Studies* 21, no. 2 (2012): 154-191.

⁷ Christopher Sprecher, "Alliances, Armed Conflict, and Cooperation: Theoretical Approaches and Empirical Evidence," *Journal of Peace Research* 43, no. 4 (2006): 363-369.

⁸ Anessa Kimball, "Political Survival, Policy Distribution, and Alliance Formation," *Journal of Peace Research* 47, no. 4 (2010): 407-419.

⁹ Andreas Bock and Ingo Henneberg, "Why Balancing Fails: Theoretical Reflections on Stephan M. Walt's 'Balance of Threat' Theory," *Arbeitspapiere zur Internationalen Politik und Außenpolitik*, no. 2 (2013), accessed December 8, 2016, http://www.jaeger.uni-koeln.de/fileadmin/templates/publikationen/aipa/AIPA_2_2013.pdf.

Randall Schweller, in line with Walt's balance-of-threat theory, suggests that "balancing means the creation or aggregation of military power through internal mobilization or the forging of alliances to prevent or deter the territorial occupation or the political and military domination of the state by a foreign power or coalition."¹⁰ However, Kai He points out that military alliances and arms buildups are not the only balancing strategies states can use.¹¹ Andreas M. Bock and Ingo Henneberg agree with He's points, defining balancing as "a state strategy designed to counter a perceived external threat by either military or nonmilitary means that are internal or external and that aim to reduce threat and maintain security."¹²

The current project narrows the focus on balances and alliances between Russia and NATO. The balance-of-threat theory can be used to explain Russia's balancing strategy towards the Alliance's enlargement. Most of the Western literature on Russia's foreign policy blames the Kremlin for the Five-Day War between Russia and Georgia in 2008 and the current Russian-Ukrainian crisis, calling Russian actions aggressive

¹⁰ Schweller, *Unanswered Threats*, 166.

¹¹ He, "Undermining Adversaries," 156.

¹² Bock and Henneberg, "Why Balancing Fails," 9.

(King,¹³ Budjerun,¹⁴ Galeotti¹⁵). However, some literature calls the Kremlin's foreign policy rational, explainable, and logical (Roberts,¹⁶ Mead,¹⁷ Gibler,¹⁸ Steff and Khoo¹⁹). According to Mearshimer, the West, not Russia, is responsible for the Ukrainian crisis. Specifically, he argues that the root of this conflict is NATO enlargement.²⁰ The author declares great powers are always sensitive to potential threats near their borders. NATO tried to turn Ukraine into a Western stronghold on Russia's border, threatening Moscow's core strategic interests. Mearshimer asks the reader: "Imagine the outrage in Washington if China built a military alliance and tried to include Canada and Mexico in it?"²¹ Hence, Moscow's balancing strategy towards NATO enlargement should come as no surprise.

¹³ Charles King, "The Five-Day War. Managing Moscow After the Georgia Crisis," *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 6 (2008): 2-11.

¹⁴ Marianna Budjerun, "Did the West Provoke Putin? Apologists and Facts," *World Affairs*, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/did-west-provoke-putin-apologists-and-facts> .

¹⁵ Mark Galeotti, "Putin's Chaos Strategy Is Coming Back to Bite Him in the Ass," *Foreign Policy*, October 26, 2016, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/10/26/putins-chaos-strategy-is-coming-back-to-bite-him-in-the-ass/> .

¹⁶ Paul Craig Roberts , "Vladimir Putin Is the Only Leader the West Has," *Foreign Policy Journal*, July 15, 2016, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2016/07/15/vladimir-putin-is-the-only-leader-the-west-has/> .

¹⁷ Walter Russell Mead, "The Return of Geopolitics. The Revenge of the Revisionist Powers," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 3 (2014): 69-79.

¹⁸ Douglas Gibler, "East or Further East?" *Journal of Peace Research* 36, no. 6 (1999): 627-637.

¹⁹ Reuben Steff and Nicholas Khoo, "Hard Balancing in the Age of American Unipolarity: The Russian Response to US Ballistic Missile Defense during the Bush Administration (2001–2008)," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37, no. 2 (2014): 222-258.

²⁰ John Mearshimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2014): 82.

²¹ Ibid.

The view of literature published in Russia is that Moscow is protecting its national interests against NATO's aggression. In the beginning of the 21st century, there was hope that NATO and Russia could become equal partners (Golubeva²², Kalachev and Polulyakh²³). Yet, the illusion quickly vanished. Today, the Russian government perceives NATO as a direct and immediate threat to security, particularly in light of NATO deploying an antimissile system right next to Russia's (Kozin²⁴ and Giniyatov²⁵).

Sergei Voronin²⁶ and Elena Garbuzarova²⁷ claim that, for the last five hundred years, it has been the Western mission to "kill the Russian bear."²⁸ In Voronin's eyes, it has been a long-standing dream of Western politicians, such as Halford Mackinder, Henry Kissinger, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, to organize and provoke a war in the Slavic

²² Julia Golubeva, "Problema Ozenki Rezultativnosti Sotrudnichestva v Otnosheniah Rossiya-NATO" [The Problem of Assessing the Effectiveness of Cooperation in NATO-Russia Relations], *Vlast*, no. 5 (2011): 81-84.

²³ Dmitri Kalachev and Dmitri Polylyah, "Osnovnie Protivorechia v Sisteme Otnoshenii Rossiya - NATO" [The Main Contradictions in the System of Relations between Russia and NATO], *Izvestia MGTU MAMI*, no. 3 (2014): 93-98.

²⁴ Vladimir Kozin, "Globalnyie Ambitsii NATO" [NATO Global Ambitions], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, May 24, 2012, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.redstar.ru/index.php/newspaper/item/2483-globalnyie-ambitsii-nato>.

²⁵ Farit Giniyatov, "Rasshirenje NATO na Vostok I Poziziya Rossii" [Expansion of NATO in the East and the Position of Russia], *Vestnik Ekonomiki, Prava i Sociologii*, no. 1 (2012): 176-178.

²⁶ Sergey Voronin, "Rasshirenje NATO na Vostok. Zelyatsa v Ykrainy, a Popadayt v Rossiy" [NATO Enlargement Eastward. Aiming at Ukraine, Hitting Russia], *Vestnik Rossiyskogo Yniversiteta Dryzhbi Narodov*, no. 2 (2014): 7.

²⁷ Elena Garbuzarova, "Rossiyskaya Ugroza Postsovetskomu Prostranstvu: Mif ili Real'nost'?" [Russian Threat to the Post-Soviet Space: Myth or Reality?], *Istoricheskaya i Sotsial'no-obrazovatel'naya Mysl* 8, no. 2 (2016): 16.

²⁸ Voronin, "Rasshirenje NATO," 7.

world, in order to, for example "by the hands" of Ukraine, start a confrontation with Russia.²⁹ These political scientists believe that the current Ukrainian crisis is just the latest attempt of this Western mission.

Elena Garbuzarova joins Voronin's argument by adding that there is a substantial growth of activity of NATO near the Russian borders, giving Moscow the right to protect its national security.³⁰ Angelina Ivashkina's work focuses on military bases of NATO, which are gradually surrounding Russia.³¹ Except maintaining NATO presence in the traditional areas of the Alliance's influence, such as Western Europe, the bases are increasing NATO presence in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

One of the latest works devoted to Moscow's policies towards the Russian diaspora abroad is Agnia Grigas' *Beyond Crimea: The New Russian Empire*. The author declares that "Russian history is a history of empire,"³² and the Russian diaspora abroad has become the instrument of Moscow's new-imperial aims and a tool to challenge the sovereignty of post-Soviet states.³³ In Grigas' eyes, Moscow's hold on Russian minorities abroad serves as a pretext for the Kremlin's expansionist foreign policy.³⁴ Furthermore,

²⁹ Ibid., 8.

³⁰ Garbuzarova, "Rossiyskaya Ugroza," 17.

³¹ Angelina Ivashkina, "Geopoliticheskiy Analiz Otnosheni Rossyii i NATO" [Geopolitical Analysis of NATO-Russia Relations], *Vestnik Penzenskogo Gosugarstvennogo Yniversiteta* 11, no. 3 (2015): 77.

³² Agnia Grigas, *Beyond Crimea: The New Russian Empire* (London: Yale University Press, 2016), 12.

³³ Ibid., 3.

³⁴ Ibid.

the aim of the latter is to "opportunistically grab land and gradually rebuild its historic empire when domestic and international conditions are favorable."³⁵

This project disagrees with her main argument about aggressive imperialist policies of the Russian Federation. The main argument here is that states closely monitor their surrounding territories. When a military block expands its membership to include countries next to a rival state's borders, those rivals feel threatened and tend to respond. One of the ways states respond to losing influence over their border-states, which are not only their direct spheres of influence but serve as a protective buffer zone, is by declaring that their national or ethnic minorities who live in these territories are in danger. The likely result is that states will interfere in these border nations on behalf of ethnic minorities. Thus, Russia's interference in Ukraine and Georgia are rather caused by Russia's fear of NATO expansion and self-preservation than desire to rebuild the Russian Empire. The Five-Day War between Russia and Georgia in 2008 and the current Russian-Ukrainian crisis took place only after Georgia and Ukraine made concrete steps towards NATO membership and served as a balancing strategy for Russia towards the Alliance's enlargement.

³⁵ Ibid., 9.

3 ARGUMENT

In this section, I develop an argument about how states react to the expansion of national security alliances. The latter play a central and constant phenomenon in international relations.³⁶ As Liska stated, "it is impossible to speak of international relations without referring to alliances; the two often merge in all but name."³⁷

According to Walt, alliances are most commonly viewed as "a strategic response to external threats."³⁸ When entering an alliance, states may either ally in opposition to the principal source of danger or ally with the state that poses the major threat.³⁹ The distinguishing character of alliance is that states will ally with or against the most threatening power.

However, alliance formation generates a security dilemma. As states endeavor to protect their interests, other countries respond. This is especially true of formal alliances. When a military alliance expands next to its adversaries' borders, rival states in the region feel an increased threat. One strategy adversaries in the region may pursue is balancing against the expanding alliance. Balancing typically involves forming a competing alliance to counterbalance against the principal source of threat. However, balancing is not limited only to joining another alliance or, indeed, to building up arms. Balancing can also refer to any state strategy that aims to reduce a perceived threat by improving its own

³⁶ Stefan Bergsmann, "The Concept of Military Alliance," accessed December 8, 2016, http://www.bundesheer.at/pdf_pool/publikationen/05_small_states_04.pdf.

³⁷ George Liska, *Nations in Alliance* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1962), 3.

³⁸ Viotti and Kauppi, *International Relations Theory*, 65.

³⁹ Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Powers," *International security* 9, no. 4 (1985): 4.

security situation.⁴⁰ It occurs commonly in history, dating back to the Peloponnesian war (431 - 404 BCE) and, as I argue, through to the present day Ukrainian crisis.

When do states balance and what kinds of policy strategies do they pursue? States' strategies are informed by two issues — the likely effectiveness of the strategy and its costs.⁴¹ These factors do not influence states equally. When states are exposed to greater threats, they are more likely to weight the effectiveness over the cost of balancing strategies. This is because the increased threat poses a more imminent risk to the rival state, and the relative costs of protecting their own interests decrease.

Balancing can take on several forms, either “hard” or “soft” (through military or nonmilitary means) and can be positive (directed to strengthen a state’s own power in world politics) or negative (directed against the threatening state).⁴² Thus, one can categorize four different balancing strategies which are shaped by the level of threat perception regarding the state’s adversary⁴³:

1. **Internal or positive nonmilitary balancing.** For example, strategic technology transfer and strategic economic aid to allies. An example of this is President Truman's policy of providing economic aid to countries threatened by communism or totalitarian ideology, such as Greece and Turkey.

⁴⁰ Andreas Bock, Ingo Henneberg, and Friedrich Plank, "If You Compress the Spring, It Will Snap Back Hard: The Ukrainian Crisis and the Balance of Threat Theory," *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 70, no. 1 (2015): 101.

⁴¹ He, "Undermining Adversaries," 169.

⁴² Bock and Henneberg, "Why Balancing Fails," 9.

⁴³ He, "Undermining Adversaries," 170.

2. **External or negative nonmilitary balancing.** This includes, for example, trade embargos, strategic non-cooperation, and economic sanctions such as those against Russia, Iran, and Cuba.

3. **Internal or positive military balancing.** For example, this might entail arms races like those during the Cold War, military mobilizations, and alliance formation.

4. **External or negative military balancing.** For example, detaching or alienating a rival's allies, arms sales to the "enemy of the enemy," and arms control efforts targeting the enemy. Kissinger's detente strategy toward Russia and China during the Cold War is one example of alienating a rival's allies.⁴⁴

Table 1. The Typology of State Balancing Strategies

~~~~	Nonmilitary (soft) balancing	Military (hard) balancing
Internal (positive) balancing	<b>Internal nonmilitary balancing</b>	<b>Internal military balancing</b>
External (negative) balancing	<b>External nonmilitary balancing</b>	<b>External military balancing</b>

Thus, there are a variety of ways in which states can balance against an external threat. As I note, these vary in their costliness. States normally do not want to provoke

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⁴⁴ Ibid., 166.



their rivals by military means. This leads to escalation and raises the risks to both sides. When a military alliance expands in a rival state's neighborhood, this state's first step is likely to be some nonmilitary means, such as coercive diplomacy, in order to prevent the enlargement. If a military alliance continues to expand into what the threatened state considers to be its natural sphere of influence, the state's strategy then might start including positive military balancing, such as military buildup and even use of force.

One of the conditions under which states balance against expanding alliances is when they are compelled to protect their national or ethnic minorities living elsewhere. This behavior occurs when the expansion of an alliance includes countries with strong ethnic minorities related to the rival state.

States have a particular interest in protecting their minority populations in foreign countries. It has been noted that "a 'kin-state' with strong ethnic, cultural, religious, or linguistic links to a minority population abroad, may be well-placed to assist in its minorities' protection."⁴⁵ Yet, states can treat the protection of rights and interests of their minorities abroad much more as an instrument of securing leadership in the neighboring territories rather than as a goal in itself.⁴⁶ States might interfere into bordering states not only in order to protect their minorities from genocide or ethnic cleansing, but to achieve their own goals, such as protecting their own territory from the unrests in the neighboring states, influencing internal politics of the latter, creating frozen conflicts and using them

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⁴⁵ Nicholas Turner and Nanako Otsuki, "The Responsibility to Protect Minorities and the Problem of the Kin-State," *ICRtoP*, April 2010, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/index.php/component/content/article/35-r2pcs-topics/2778-the-responsibility-to-protect-minorities-and-the-problem-of-the-kin-state> .

⁴⁶ Igor Zevelev, "Russia's Policy Toward Compatriots in the Former Soviet Union," *Russia in Global Affairs* 6, no. 1 (2008): 55.

as Trojan horses for their own benefits, or stopping the neighboring states from joining military alliances. Overall, states see infringements on their bordering territories as a particularly salient threat. These states' perceptions of threat can be explained by Walt's four sources of threat:

1. Aggregate power: the greater a state's total resources (such as, population, industrial and military capability), the greater of a potential threat it can pose to others.⁴⁷ Thus, the more members in an alliance, the more capabilities it possesses.
2. Proximity: because the ability to project power declines with distance, states that are nearby pose a greater threat than those that are far away.⁴⁸ Hence, the closer the alliance to the non-member state, the more threatened the latter feels.
3. Offensive capability: states and alliances with large offensive capabilities are more likely to provoke others.⁴⁹ The high mobility of military capabilities is an example of alliances' offensive power.
4. Offensive intentions: states or alliances that appear aggressive are likely to provoke others to balance against them.⁵⁰ Growth of an alliance is definitely a sign of its offensive intentions.

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⁴⁷ Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 22.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

The result is that we will see states declaring that their minorities are in danger and that they have the right to protect their compatriots. If "soft balancing" of diplomatic statements in the United Nations Security Council, a negative nonmilitary balancing strategy, is not sufficient enough, the states can move from words to actions.⁵¹

First, these states can provide strategic technology transfer and strategic economic aid to their minorities residing abroad, a positive, non-military balancing strategy. Second, they can switch to negative, military balancing, such as "divide-and-conquer" strategies or military support to separatist rebels in these neighboring states. Finally, if the states' perception of threat has reached its highest point and no other balancing strategy has stopped the alliance's enlargement, the threatened states can occupy these surrounding territories where their ethnic minorities are living: a positive military balancing strategy. The further escalation of the conflict can even lead to a full scale war.

I argue that this latter strategy is happening today between NATO and Russia. My hypothesis is that Russia's military interference to protect Russian citizens and compatriots residing in former Soviet states is a way to balance NATO expansion into states that Russia perceives as strategically important.

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⁵¹ Nathan A. Sears, "China, Russia, and the Long Unipolar Moment," *The Diplomat*, April 27, 2016, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/04/china-russia-and-the-unipolar-moment/>.

## 4 RESEARCH DESIGN

My research consists of a case study of Russia's perception of NATO enlargement as a security threat, and Russia's strategies of protecting Russian minorities in Georgia and Ukraine in order to balance the Alliance's expansion. Testing my argument through a case study will help me, paraphrasing Halperin and Heath, to develop arguments that are relevant to other contexts, and say not only something important about the case in question, but also declare something meaningful about general political phenomena.⁵²

I chose the case of Russia vs. NATO enlargement for a couple of reasons. First, it is a strikingly strong example of how a military alliance expansion next to an adversaries' borders causes fears in these rival states and pushes the latter to respond. For example, the Russian National Security Strategy of December 2015 declared:

The buildup of the military potential of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the endowment of it with global functions pursued in violation of the norms of international law, the galvanization of the bloc countries' military activity, the further expansion of the alliance, and the location of its military infrastructure closer to Russian borders are creating a threat to national security.⁵³

Second, the conflict between NATO and Russia is contemporary and highly salient. The Five-Day War between Russia and Georgia took place only in 2008, while the Ukrainian crisis is still unfolding, having begun in 2014. Today, some of the post-Soviet states officially declare

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⁵² Sandra Halperin and Oliver Heath, *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 205.

⁵³ *Russian National Security Strategy, The Kremlin*, Moscow, December 31, 2015, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf>.

that they fear Moscow's focus on Russian minorities living in neighboring states.⁵⁴ As such, tensions have already been generated between Russia and three Baltic states. Latvian Defense Minister, Raimonds Vejonis, declared that "Russia is trying to use the Russian-speaking minority as a tool to aggressively promote its objectives."⁵⁵ While Russian Foreign Ministry announced that "there are whole segments of the Russian world" that might require Russia's protection, they singled out Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia by saying that Russia would not tolerate an "offensive" against the Russian language there.⁵⁶

Third, further destabilization in Eastern Europe can be a danger to international peace and security. Political analysts already declare that the relations between Russia and the West have not been so bad since the Cuban Missile crisis of 1962. As of today, neither Russia nor NATO-member-states seem to be willing to back up and change their strategies that keep on escalating the existing conflicts.

This research employs a variety of data-gathering strategies, such as policy documents, work by prominent political analysts, speeches and statements by Russian and Western politicians. Throughout the work, I try to follow an unbiased approach. The Russian and Western de-

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⁵⁴ Vera Zakem, Paul Saunders, and Daniel Antoun, "Mobilizing Compatriots: Russia's Strategy, Tactics, and Influence in the Former Soviet Union," *CNA*, November 2015, accessed December 8, 2016, [https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/DOP-2015-U-011689-1Rev.pdf](https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/DOP-2015-U-011689-1Rev.pdf) .

⁵⁵ Michael Birnbaum, "In Latvia, Fresh Fears of Aggression as Kremlin Warns about Russian Minorities," *The Washington Post*, September, 27, 2014, accessed December 8, 2016, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/in-latvia-fresh-fears-of-aggression-as-kremlin-warns-about-russian-minorities/2014/09/26/b723b1af-2aed-44d1-a791-38cebbbadbd0_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/in-latvia-fresh-fears-of-aggression-as-kremlin-warns-about-russian-minorities/2014/09/26/b723b1af-2aed-44d1-a791-38cebbbadbd0_story.html)

⁵⁶ Anna Dolgov, "Russia Sees Need to Protect Russian Speakers in NATO Baltic States," *The Moscow Times*, September 16, 2014, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/russia-sees-need-to-protect-russian-speakers-in-nato-baltic-states/507188.html> .

scriptions of the Five-Day War between Georgia and Russia and the current Ukrainian crisis differ widely and are highly politicized. Thus, taking into consideration these contrary viewpoints on NATO's enlargement and protection of Russian minorities in post-Soviet states, I look through both Western and Russian sources of information and try to reach independent conclusions.

#### **4.1 *Georgia and Ukraine's Importance***

The histories of Russia and Ukraine are deeply interconnected. Both states originated from Kievan Rus, founded in approximately 879,⁵⁷ and until this day Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, has been called "the mother of all Russian cities."⁵⁸ In the 12th century, the first cultural, economic and political ties between Georgia and Kievan Rus took place.⁵⁹ Yet, the importance of Ukraine and Georgia for Russia lies not only in their deep historic ties, but in the fact that both countries are vital for Russia's security interests. Bearing in mind Walt's four sources of threat and the fact that Russia is not considered an Alliance member in the future, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's expansion eastward is perceived by Russia as threatening. Why? First and foremost, by accepting these two post-Soviet states as members, NATO will greatly enlarge its border-territory with Russia. The latter already borders five NATO members (Norway,

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⁵⁷ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Kievan Rus."

⁵⁸ Jacobus Delwaide, "Identity and Geopolitics: Ukraine's Grappling with Imperial Legacies," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 32-3, part 1 (2011-2014): 179.

⁵⁹ "The History of Russian-Georgian Relations," *Sputnik*, September 2, 2010, accessed December 8, 2016, <https://sputniknews.com/analysis/20100902160438446/>.

Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland), equivalent to 1,215 kilometers of borderland.⁶⁰ If NATO accepts three more states—Georgia, Ukraine, and Azerbaijan—the border between Russia and NATO will effectively double in size.⁶¹

The geographic position of Georgia and Ukraine is critically important for Russia. The Caucasus represent the boundary between Russia and Turkey. The region constitutes the barrier that Russia must dominate in order to be safe from the political and religious unrests of the Middle East.⁶² By losing its position in the Caucasus, Russia puts itself in strategic trouble by creating a territorial security gap between Ukraine and Kazakhstan a few hundred miles wide.⁶³ Whereby, keeping Georgia under Russia's control or at least not letting it become a member of any military alliance, is vital to Moscow.

Ukraine is more important to Russia than any other post-Soviet state, or, as George Friedman in his book *The Next 100 Years* puts it, "Ukraine is everything to Russia."⁶⁴ Territorially, Ukraine is less than two hundred miles from Russia's Volgograd (former Stalingrad). Thereby, if Kiev joins a military alliance that is a Russia's rivalry, Ukraine will cease to function as Moscow's long-standing buffer zone, and "Russia would be in mortal danger."⁶⁵ Russia defended against Napoleon and Hitler "with depth. Without Ukraine, there is no depth, no land to trade for

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⁶⁰ "NATO-Russia Relations: the Facts. Claim: NATO Is Trying to Encircle Russia," *NATO Official Website*, November 7, 2016, accessed December 8, 2016, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_111767.htm#cl101](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_111767.htm#cl101) .

⁶¹ Giniyatov, "Rasshirenie NATO," 176.

⁶² Robert D. Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography* (New York: Random House, 2012), 155.

⁶³ George Friedman, *The Next 100 Years* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 109.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

an enemy's blood."⁶⁶ Ukraine becoming a member of a military alliance means that this alliance's military bases will be in close proximity to Russia's borders.

Second, by adding Georgia and Ukraine's population, industrial and military capabilities, the Alliance's aggregate power will raise. The population of Ukraine is 44,209,733 people,⁶⁷ thus, if Ukraine stays under Russian domination, Moscow adds this amount of people "to its own Western-oriented demography, and suddenly challenges Europe."⁶⁸ Otherwise, NATO will have this advantage. After the break-up of the Soviet Union, Ukraine had better prospects for successful economic development than any other Soviet state, including Russia. Kiev inherited not only great agricultural resources, port and shipbuilding facilities, a machinery sector, and highly skilled workforce, but one-third of the Soviet defense industry.⁶⁹ Yet, Ukraine was not able to use all these advantages for its own benefit. Today, the industrial and military capabilities of Ukraine leave much to be desired. However, with the Western investments, which NATO states can provide Kiev with, the latter can return to its full potential. As such, Georgia, a small country of less than five million people, already received hundreds of millions of dollars from the US for reforming its military during 2000s.⁷⁰ Having a good technical and industrial basis, Ukraine can become NATO's stronghold on the Russia's border.

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⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ "The World Factbook. Ukraine," *Central Intelligence Agency*, accessed December 8, 2016, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/up.html> .

⁶⁸ Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography*, 180.

⁶⁹ "Ukraine Defense Industry," *Global Security*, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/ukraine/industry.htm> .

⁷⁰ "Georgian Military Reform," *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, February 3, 2009, accessed December 8, 2016, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/georgian-military-reform> .



Third, one of the biggest offensive capabilities that Ukraine possesses, or possessed prior to the Ukrainian crisis, is Crimea. The latter has always been not only regarded by Russians as its territory, and, in Moscow's eyes, part of Ukraine only as a result of "illegal" transfer by Khrushchev in 1954,⁷¹ but it is strategically important as a base for the Russian navy. The Black Sea Fleet has been based on the peninsula since it was founded by Potemkin in 1783, and remains crucial to Russian security interests in the region.⁷² Russia's capacity to reach the sea is limited by geography, and Sevastopol is Russia's only warm water base.⁷³ Obviously, NATO member states cannot have a Russian military base on their soil; thus, if Ukraine joins NATO, Moscow will lose its fleet - something, the Kremlin, or any other power, cannot accept.⁷⁴ If NATO can place its navy on the peninsula, the Alliance's ability to threaten territorial integrity of Russia will increase drastically.

Finally, Russia views NATO as a military alliance with offensive intentions due to the Alliance's constant enlargement and the fact that it was not dissolved after the end of the Cold War. Russian officials declare that NATO should have been disbanded or Russia should have been accepted as a member of the Alliance. Moscow does not stop repeating that, after the reunification of Germany in 1990, the Western leaders made promises to Mikhail Gorbachev that they

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⁷¹ Anatol Lieven, "Russian Opposition to NATO Expansion," *The World Today* 51, no. 10 (1995): 198.

⁷² Caroline Mortimer, "Ukraine Crisis: Why is Crimea So Important to Russia?" *The Independent*, March 3, 2014, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/ukraine-crisis-why-is-crimea-so-important-to-russia-9166447.html> .

⁷³ Alan Yuhas and Raya Jalabi, "Ukraine Crisis: Why Russia Sees Crimea as its Naval Stronghold," *The Guardian*, March 7, 2014, accessed December 8, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/mar/07/ukraine-russia-crimea-naval-base-tatars-explainer> .

⁷⁴ "Putin o Rasshirenii NATO: Situazia Napryyagaet" [Putin about NATO Enlargement: the Situation Is Worsening], *Izvestia*, November 21, 2016, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://izvestia.ru/news/646446> .

would not expand NATO eastward. Russian diplomats regularly assert that Washington made such a promise in exchange for the Soviet troop withdrawal from East Germany.⁷⁵ Today, most of the Western literature declare that this promise was never made. Yet, a number of the formerly secret documents from 1989 and 1990⁷⁶ and articles such as "Not One Inch Eastward? Bush, Baker, Kohl, Genscher, Gorbachev, and the Origin of Russian Resentment toward NATO Enlargement in February 1990" by Mary Elise Sarotte prove different.⁷⁷

Thus, according to the neorealist school of thought, Russia has every reason to perceive possible NATO membership of Ukraine and Georgia as threatening for Moscow's security interests. The next part of this thesis shows what Russia's balancing strategies towards NATO's enlargement are and what place Moscow's policies towards its compatriots abroad take place within them.

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⁷⁵ Mary Elise Sarotte, "A Broken Promise," *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2014): 90.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁷⁷ Mary Elise Sarotte, "Not One Inch Eastward? Bush, Baker, Kohl, Genscher, Gorbachev, and the Origin of Russian Resentment toward NATO Enlargement in February 1990," *Diplomatic History* 34, no. 1 (2010): 119.

## 5 ANALYSIS

I set out to prove that Russia's military interference to protect Russian citizens and compatriots residing in Georgia and Ukraine is a way to balance NATO expansion. This is particularly relevant for states that Moscow perceives as strategically important. To that end, I first describe Soviet balancing strategies towards NATO. Second, I examine Russia's balancing strategy towards the Alliance after the end of the Cold War, followed by elaboration of the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia of 1999 as a turning point of Russia-West relations. Third, I describe Moscow's balancing strategy towards NATO after the Kosovo crisis until the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008. Fourth, I analyze the Five-Day War between Russia and Georgia as the first clear signal of Russian balancing against NATO expansion through the use of force.

Finally, I explain why the current Russian-Ukrainian crisis is the latest example of such Moscow's military balancing strategy. In both cases, protection of ethnic Russians and Russian-speakers living in Georgia and Ukraine is the official reason for the Kremlin's military interventions. Yet, this work shows that the root cause of Moscow's interventions in these two states is the Kremlin's perception of NATO's enlargement as threatening.

### 5.1 *SOVIET BALANCING STRATEGY TOWARDS NATO, 1949 - 1991*

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization came into existence in 1949 and was born from the threat of Soviet imperialism,⁷⁸ or as Duignan puts it "to keep the Russians out, the Germans

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⁷⁸ Massimo Salvadori, *NATO. A Twentieth-Century Community of Nations* (New Jersey: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc, 1957), 3.

down, and the Americans in Europe."⁷⁹ According to the Alliance's official website, NATO's essential purpose is to "safeguard the freedom and security of its members through political and military means."⁸⁰ The heart of NATO is expressed in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, in which the signatory members agree that "an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all."⁸¹

In 1955, as a way to counterbalance NATO, the Soviet Union and its affiliated Communist nations in Eastern Europe founded the Warsaw Pact. Therefore, the history of the Cold War is largely a history of two alliances balancing each other, with the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 offering a well-known example of the threat perception and balancing strategies. Ultimately, the Cuban Missile Crisis became one of the most dangerous confrontations between the United States and the USSR during the Cold War. The US balanced against the deployment of Soviet nuclear missiles into Cuba, which would have then allowed Soviet missiles to reach and destroy Washington. From the US perspective, the Soviet move was both a provocation and a threat. However, this was a direct response to the US actions just three years earlier, when, in 1959, they installed nuclear missiles in Turkey. This aggressive action was perceived by the Kremlin as a security threat, which Moscow counterbalanced against by deploying missiles to Cuba.

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⁷⁹ Peter Duignan, *NATO: Its Past, Present and Future* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2000), 1.

⁸⁰ "What is NATO?" *NATO Official Website*, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html> .

⁸¹ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "North Atlantic Treaty Organization."

I argue that the Cuban Missile Crisis is reminiscent of the Russian-Georgian war of 2008 and the present Ukrainian crisis: in all three cases, Moscow warned Washington about its security concerns regarding US actions, which the Kremlin perceived as offensive. The United States did not take these complaints seriously, but instead perceived further Soviet/Russian actions as aggressive.⁸² These aggressions and perceptions led to heightened tensions between the nations.

Still, during the Cold War, instead of confronting each other openly and directly, the Soviet Union and the United States mostly chose to oppose each other through intermediary third parties, leading to numerous proxy wars. The Chinese Civil War, the Greek Civil War, the Suez Crisis, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict are just a few examples of proxy balancing during the Cold War. Despite these tensions, numerous agreements between Moscow and Washington were arranged over the deployment of troops along each respective power centers' borders. Respecting these agreements allowed for the maintenance of international peace and stability.

With the break-up of the Soviet Union, the situation drastically changed. No state or alliance of states was able to counterbalance the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Thus, the world turned out to be unipolar, with the USA becoming an unwavering world leader for decades to come.

## **5.2 RUSSIA'S BALANCING STRATEGY TOWARDS NATO, 1991-2000. KOSOVO**

After the end of the Cold War, Russia found itself in a political, economic, and social crisis. It was reduced to its smallest size since before the reign of Catherine the Great and even lost Ukraine, the original heartland of Kievan Rus.⁸³ Robert D. Kaplan declared that it never before

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⁸² Bock, Henneberg, and Plank, "If You Compress the Spring," 102.

⁸³ Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography*, 175.

in peacetime was Russia as geographically vulnerable as it was after the breakup of the USSR.⁸⁴ Despite having inherited the Soviet nuclear weapons and permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council, the Russian Federation lost its position as a super power and was not invited to join elite Western institutions.⁸⁵ Moscow believed that it should be treated as equal by the West, particularly Washington, and refused to adjust to this rapid decline in its status.

In 1994, the first Russia-NATO crisis occurred during the Sarajevo crisis, when NATO threatened air strikes in response to the market-place mortar explosion.⁸⁶ The same year the second Russia-NATO crisis happened, when Washington decided to enlarge the Alliance to include former members of the Warsaw Pact. In both situations, Moscow did not have any say in what it saw as interference in its historic spheres of influence. Russian President Boris Yeltsin's press secretary, Vyacheslav Kostikov, announced that "Russia's romantic embrace of the West was over, and that Russia increasingly saw itself as a great power with strategic interests different from those of the United States and Europe."⁸⁷ Yet, Russia was too weak and financially dependent on the West to challenge NATO.

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⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to U.S. Primacy," *International Security* 34, no. 4 (2010): 78.

⁸⁶ Jim Headley, "Sarajevo, February 1994: The First Russia-NATO Crisis of the Post-Cold War Era," *Review of International Studies* 29, no. 2 (2003): 209.

⁸⁷ Larson and Shevchenko, "Status Seekers," 80.

The NATO bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999 was the major turning point for the Kremlin: Russia came to believe that it "no longer mattered to the West, and Washington, for all its rhetoric about a cooperative world order, was making geopolitical gains at Russia's expense."⁸⁸ During the Kosovo crisis and until this day, Russia has held a very strong position against the NATO intervention. The Kosovo episode has turned into a paradigmatic and referential event shaping the foundations of the current Russia-West relations.⁸⁹

Russia perceived NATO intervention that way because, first, the Kremlin concluded that NATO's role was changing. Serbia was not a member of the Alliance, and NATO acted outside its immediate area of responsibility. Second, the Kosovo crisis not only showed that the international community allowed settling of the national conflict without the Security Council authorization, but NATO did not hesitate to threaten "an intractable" country with the Alliance's military capabilities.⁹⁰ Russian Foreign Minister, Ivanov, stated that the Balkan region had been chosen to road-test "a NATO-centrist" concept of world order, in which a group of states would claim the right to dictate, by force if needed, its will to the international community.⁹¹

Finally, the Balkans has always been a zone of special strategic interest for Moscow. Even today, Serbia is often called the last Russian ally in Europe. NATO intervention happened

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⁸⁸ Ibid., 81.

⁸⁹ Regina Heller, "Russia's Quest for Respect in the International Conflict Management in Kosovo," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47, (2014): 342.

⁹⁰ Elena Gus'kova and Elena Ponomareva, "Pyatnadzoteletie Bombardirovok Yugoslavii I Znachenie Kosovskogo Prezedenta dlya Sovremennoy Geopolitiki [15th Anniversary of the Bombing of Yugoslavia and the Kosovo Precedent in Today's Geopolitics], *Evraziyskiy Kommunikazionnyi Zentr*, March 25, 2014, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://eurasiancenter.ru/trend/yugoslavia/>.

⁹¹ Roy Allison, *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 56.

just a few days after NATO's New Strategic Concept was stated and three new members - the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary - joined the Alliance.

Thus, Moscow's general assessment of the conflict was that NATO was a growing alliance militarily interfering in the sovereign state. Moreover, NATO humanitarian intervention was an attempt to drive Russia out of the region⁹² and challenge its sphere of influence. The Kremlin concluded that the bombing would never have happened if the Soviet Union did not break up. Further, a popular belief that Russia itself was vulnerable to NATO intervention was captured in the alarmist catchphrase "Serbia today, Russia tomorrow."⁹³

Boris Yeltsin, the Russian President at the time, angrily spoke of "naked aggression" of the West against Serbia and announced that adequate measures, including military ones, would be taken by Russia to "defend itself and the overall security of Europe," if the situation in Kosovo were to worsen.⁹⁴ Anatoly Kvashnin, Chief of General Staff, considered a number of military steps and "did not rule out the possibility of Russia's using nuclear weapons to defend the country's territorial integrity."⁹⁵ Other military representatives also announced that the Russian forces would immediately be put in a state of alert.

Yet, it soon became obvious that the rage in Moscow had no effect on the policies of the West. Russia withdrew its mission to NATO and suspended participation in the Permanent Joint

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⁹² Vladimir Baranovsky, "Russia: Reassessing National Interests," in *Kosovo and the Challenge of Humanitarian Intervention: Selective Indignation, Collective Intervention, and International Citizenship*, ed. Albrecht Schnabel and Ramesh Thakur (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2000), 104.

⁹³ Allison, *Russia, the West*, 57.

⁹⁴ Heller, "Russia's Quest," 337.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 338.



Council (external nonmilitary balancing). Yet, on the wider diplomatic front, the Russian government maintained normal diplomatic relations with all members of the Alliance, including the US. Thus, even though Russia's interests were directly affected by the Yugoslav crisis, Russia's balancing strategy consisted of almost nothing but loud statements and warnings.

### **5.3 RUSSIA'S BALANCING STRATEGY TOWARDS NATO, 2000-2008**

In 2000, Vladimir Putin came to power. President Putin's principal foreign policy goal was to restore Russia's great power status.⁹⁶ In the beginning of his presidency, Putin continued using a soft balancing strategy towards the West and even made several unilateral concessions indicating that the geopolitical rivalry between the United States and the Russian Federation was over. For example, he accepted US bases in Central Asia (part of Russia's traditional sphere of influence), softly reacted to the US withdrawal from the Antiballistic Missile treaty (one of the few remaining symbols of Russian/Western equality), and accepted the creation of the NATO-Russia Council as a vehicle for cooperation, although it did not give Russia a vote.⁹⁷

Yet, the US-Russian partnership did not last. Although Putin expected Russia to be treated by the West as an equal partner, he soon concluded that Washington did not regard Moscow as such.⁹⁸ For the latter, it became especially obvious during the "color" revolutions in Georgia (the Rose Revolution of 2003), Ukraine (the Orange Revolution of 2004), and Kyrgyz-

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⁹⁶ Larson and Shevchenko, "Status Seekers," 88.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 89.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

stan (the Tulip Revolution of 2005). In the United States, all three were not only strongly supported, but financed.⁹⁹ In Russia, they were perceived as unlawful regime changes and a humiliating interference in Russia's backyard. Furthermore, in 2004, three former Soviet republics—Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania—became NATO members.¹⁰⁰ Hence, the Alliance's military facilities and armed forces could be brought right on the Russian border.

Right after the first "color" revolution took place, Russia switched to much more coercive diplomacy against its neighboring states in order to prevent further expansion of the European Union and NATO into what Moscow considered to be its natural sphere of influence. There are several examples of that coercive diplomacy. First, starting in 2005, Russia used "gas pipeline diplomacy" against Ukraine, increasing gas prices which Ukraine could not afford and consequently cutting gas supplies. Second, after the Estonian government removed the Bronze Soldier Soviet war memorial from central Tallinn in 2007, cyber-attacks against Estonia were carried out.¹⁰¹

At the same time, Russia's policies towards its diasporas abroad, launched in the 1990s, gained their momentum.¹⁰² According to Agnia Grigas, one of the most arguable policies related

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⁹⁹ "From Cold War to Hot War," *The Economist*, February 14, 2015, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21643220-russias-aggression-ukraine-part-broader-and-more-dangerous-confrontation> .

¹⁰⁰ "Member Countries," *NATO Official Website*, March 10, 2016, accessed December 8, 2016, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52044.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52044.htm) .

¹⁰¹ Sears, "China, Russia."

¹⁰² Agnia Grigas, "How Soft Power Works: Russian Passportization and Compatriot Policies Paved Way for Crimean Annexation and War in Donbas," *Atlantic Council*, February 22, 2016, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/how-soft-power-works-russian-passportization-and-compatriot-policies-paved-way-for-crimean-annexation-and-war-in-donbas> .

to Russia's compatriots in post-Soviet states, particularly Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, became Moscow's "passportization" policy — "the systemic distribution of Russian passports and citizenship to ethnic Russians, Russian speakers, and other minorities residing in particular territories of foreign states, often on the border with the Russian Federation."¹⁰³ The history showed that, soon after passportization occurred, calls for the protection of "these newly minted Russian citizens" in these countries would follow.¹⁰⁴

Russia's passportization policies were not unknown to the governments of the post-Soviet states. As such, in the early 2000s, representatives of Crimean Tatars presented evidence that Russian consulates in Simferopol and Sevastopol were massively handing out Russian citizenship,¹⁰⁵ even though the Ukrainian Law on Citizenship forbids dual citizenship. A similar situation happened in Georgia: the majority of the South Ossetians and Abkhazians were granted Russian citizenship in the early 2000s.¹⁰⁶ At least in Crimea, ethnic Russians constituted sixty five percent of the population, while only two percent of the population in South Ossetia identified themselves as ethnic Russians. Russia's passportization policy took place regardless of the ethnicity of the population but rather according to Moscow's security concerns.

In February 2008, the West recognized Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence without the UN approval, right away triggering Russian Duma to adopt a resolution, in which it called in the Russian President and the government to consider the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. About the same time, the United States decided to place an antiballistic missile

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¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Florian Mühlfried, "Citizenship at War: Passports and Nationality in the 2008 Russian-Georgian Conflict," *Anthropology Today* 26, no. 2 (2010): 8.

system in Poland and the Czech Republic. NATO asserted that the system would protect against Iran, but Russia thought differently and called it a direct threat. Defense experts declared that there was "little doubt that the real target of the shield" was Russia."¹⁰⁷ Russia's leading expert on antiballistic weaponry, General Vladimir Belous, stated that "The geography of the deployment doesn't give any doubt the main targets are Russian and Chinese nuclear forces. The US bases represent a real threat to our strategic nuclear forces."¹⁰⁸ Moreover, the antiballistic missile system could be quickly converted to deploy strike systems, in particular land-based cruise missiles.¹⁰⁹ Moscow responded to the situation according to the categorization of the four different balancing strategies shaped by the level of threat perception regarding the state's adversary and the Kremlin's balancing strategy started to include the threat and use of military force.¹¹⁰

The Five-Day War between Russia and Georgia was the first clear signal of Russian balancing against NATO expansion not through the "soft balancing" of diplomatic statements, but through the use of force (positive military balancing).¹¹¹ The present Russian-Ukrainian crisis is the latest example of such military balancing strategy. In both cases, protection of Russian minorities residing in Georgia and Ukraine was the official reason for the Kremlin's interventions.

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¹⁰⁷ Luke Harding, "Russia Threatening New Cold War Over Missile Defence," *The Guardian*, April 11, 2007, accessed December 8, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/apr/11/usa.topstories3> .

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ "Russia Has Right to Defend Against 'Aggressive' NATO – Kremlin on Baltic Missile Placement," *Russia Today*, November 22, 2016, accessed December 8, 2016, <https://www.rt.com/news/367820-russia-rockets-nato-buildup/> .

¹¹⁰ Sears, "China, Russia."

¹¹¹ Ibid.

## 5.4 THE RUSSIAN-GEORGIAN WAR, 2008

*"Russian citizens being attacked is an attack against the Russian Federation. If we are attacked, we would certainly respond. If our interests, our legitimate interests, the interests of Russians have been attacked directly, like they were in South Ossetia for example, I do not see any other way but to respond in accordance with international law."*¹¹²

*Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov*

*"I must protect the life and dignity of Russian citizens wherever they are. We will not allow their deaths to go unpunished. Those responsible will receive a deserved punishment."*¹¹³

*President Dmitry Medvedev (about the Five-Day War between Russia and Georgia)*

NATO relations with Georgia started shortly after the end of the Cold War. Georgia joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1992 and the Partnership for Peace in 1994.¹¹⁴ At the Bucharest Summit in 2008, the Heads of State and Government of the member countries of the North Atlantic Alliance agreed that Georgia will become a member of NATO.

At the same Summit, Vladimir Putin gave a speech calling the enlargement of the Alliance "a direct threat to Russia."¹¹⁵ Russia's President declared that NATO should not ensure its security at the expense of the security of other countries and that NATO, being a military alliance, should display restraint in the military sphere. Moreover, if NATO continued approaching the Russian borders, Moscow would take "necessary measures."¹¹⁶

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¹¹² Carol Williams, "Russia Warns it Will 'Respond' if Interests in Ukraine Attacked," *Los Angeles Times*, April 23, 2014, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.latimes.com/world/world-now/la-fg-wn-russia-ukraine-warnings-20140423-story.html> .

¹¹³ "Russian Tanks Enter South Ossetia," *BBC*, August 8, 2008, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7548715.stm> .

¹¹⁴ "Relations with Georgia," *NATO Official Website*, November 23, 2016, accessed December 8, 2016, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_38988.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_38988.htm) .

¹¹⁵ "Putin confronts NATO at Bucharest Summit," *Global Research*, April 4, 2008, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/putin-confronts-nato-at-bucharest-summit/8558> .

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

The Bucharest Summit took place from the 2nd to the 4th of April. The Russian-Georgian War started four months later, on August 7, 2008. Georgia and the West describe the war and the events leading to it in one light, Russia in another. The former side talks about Russia's aggression and military intervention in the sovereign state, the latter - about the Georgian aggression and Russia's right to protect its citizens abroad. Yet, from whichever side one looks at the conflict, it can be seen that the increase in the level of threat perception caused Russia and Georgia to choose balancing strategies.

A diplomatic crisis between Russia and Georgia preceded the Five-Day War. Right after the Bucharest Summit, as a direct response to NATO's promising Georgia to become an Alliance member, Russia lifted sanctions imposed on Abkhazia by the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1996, and began to cooperate fully with the governments of the breakaway regions (positive nonmilitary balancing). Later in April, Moscow increased the number of Russian peacekeeping troops in Abkhazia (negative military balancing).¹¹⁷ By early July 2008, the area became increasingly militarized. The Georgian side took part in the US-led military exercises near Tbilisi, while the Russian one began its own exercises next to the Georgian border (internal military balancing).¹¹⁸ While a delegation of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe was visiting Georgia and one day before US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice arrived to Georgia, four Russian military aircrafts entered Georgian airspace. While the Georgian Foreign Minister

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¹¹⁷ "August 2008 Russian-Georgian War: Timeline," *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, August 8, 2013, accessed December 8, 2016, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/august-2008-russian-georgian-war-timeline> .

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

called it an act of "open aggression," the Kremlin declared that the overflight was intended to deter a possible Georgian offense.¹¹⁹

Starting on August 1st, serious clashes occurred between Georgian troops and Ossetian separatist militias. On August 7th, an open combat broke out between Georgia and South Ossetia, which rapidly escalated into the full scale war between Georgian and Russian troops.

The Russian and Georgian descriptions of the events of those days differ widely and are highly politicized.¹²⁰ In September 2009, a report from an EU fact-finding mission determined that the 2008 war was caused by Georgia's illegal attack on the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali.¹²¹ At the same time, the commission stated that Russia's issuing of its passports to the populations of South Ossetia and Abkhazia violated international law.¹²² However, despite who or what triggered the conflict, Russia was motivated for intervention in Georgia by its loss of influence over it – Moscow's historic sphere of influence and a protective buffer zone. Furthermore, NATO was moving right next to Russia's borders. By declaring that Russian citizens living in Abkhazia and South Ossetia were in danger, Russia militarily intervened in Georgia. Russia's intervention in Georgia was meant to be a lesson for other post-Soviet states, particularly Ukraine, which chose to turn to the West. As Lilia Shevtsova puts it in her book *Lonely Power*: "Georgia had to become the whipping boy" as a reminder that the Kremlin could neither be ignored nor challenged.¹²³

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¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Roy Allison, "Russia Resurgent? Moscow's Campaign to Coerce Georgia to Peace," *International Affairs* 84, no. 6 (2008): 1148.

¹²¹ "2008 Georgia Russia Conflict Fast Facts," *CNN*, March 31, 2016, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/03/13/world/europe/2008-georgia-russia-conflict/> .

¹²² Mühlfried, "Citizenship at War," 8.

¹²³ Lilia Shevtsova, *Lonely power: Why Russia Has Failed to Become the West and the West is Weary of Russia* (Gwynn Oak, MD: United Book Press, 2010), 82.

## 5.5 RUSSIA'S BALANCING STRATEGY, 2008-2014. THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS

*"When the infrastructure of a military bloc is moving toward our borders, it causes us some concerns and questions. We need to take some steps in response...NATO ships would have ended up in the city of Russian navy glory, Sevastopol."*¹²⁴  
*Vladimir Putin (about the Crimea annexation)*

After the Five-Day War between Russia and Georgia, political analysts warned Kiev that it was the next in line to be punished by the Kremlin for its Western aspirations. Indeed, the current Ukrainian crisis in many ways resembles the conflict between Russia and Georgia six years earlier. As in the Georgian case, dialogue and cooperation between Ukraine and NATO started after the end of the Cold War, when newly independent Ukraine joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1991 and the Partnership for Peace programme three years later, in 1994.¹²⁵ Yet, even though Kiev sent troops to support the Alliance in Afghanistan and Iraq, the nature of the partnership remained loose.¹²⁶

By 2008, the relations between Russia and Ukraine had deteriorated. The worsening of relationships between the two countries started in 2004, after the Orange Revolution took place and pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko came to power. The Kremlin declared that the protests, which led to the "color" revolution, were a scam orchestrated by the West and financed by the

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¹²⁴ "Putin Says Annexation of Crimea Partly a Response to NATO Enlargement," *Reuters*, April 17, 2014, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-putin-nato-idUSBREA3G22A20140417> .

¹²⁵ "Relations with Ukraine," *NATO Official Website*, November 22, 2016, accessed December 8, 2016, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_37750.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_37750.htm) .

¹²⁶ Adam Taylor, "That Time Ukraine Tried to Join NATO — and NATO Said No," *The Washington Post*, September 4, 2014, accessed December 8, 2016, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/09/04/that-time-ukraine-tried-to-join-nato-and-nato-said-no/?utm_term=.75b1a8d6eb9c](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2014/09/04/that-time-ukraine-tried-to-join-nato-and-nato-said-no/?utm_term=.75b1a8d6eb9c) ./



United States.¹²⁷ The Yushchenko presidency and his personal commitment to integrate Kiev into the EU and NATO threatened Moscow. As a result, one can see a much more coercive diplomacy towards Ukraine carried out by the Kremlin starting from the beginning of Yushchenko's presidency in 2005. Regular gas disputes became Russia's strategy to keep Ukraine under its sphere of influence (negative nonmilitary balancing).

At the same time, public statements made by both Russian and Ukrainian politicians were growing increasingly hostile. On many occasions, Kiev stated that it planned to join the EU and NATO, while Russia threatened that these actions would lead to consequences. As such, in June 2006, Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, directly warned Ukraine not to join NATO. He stated that the former Soviet states could decide their own fate, but their entry into the Alliance would constitute a "colossal geopolitical shift for Russia."¹²⁸ At the same time, the Russian parliament passed a resolution which declared that "Ukraine's accession to the military bloc will lead to very negative consequences for relations between our fraternal peoples."¹²⁹

At the Bucharest Summit in 2008, President Putin told President Bush that "Ukraine is not even a state. What is Ukraine? Part of its territories is Eastern Europe, but the greater part is a

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¹²⁷ William Schneider, "Ukraine's Orange Revolution," *The Atlantic*, December 2004, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2004/12/ukraines-orange-revolution/305157/> .

¹²⁸ Nick Paton Walsh, "Russia Tells Ukraine to Stay Out of NATO," *The Guardian*, June 7, 2006, accessed December 8, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/jun/08/russia.nick-patonwalsh> .

¹²⁹ Ibid.

gift from us."¹³⁰ At this same Summit, the Heads of State and Government of the member countries of the North Atlantic Alliance would agree that Ukraine, together with Georgia, would become members of NATO.¹³¹

After the 2008 Summit, when the Five-Day War between Russia and Georgia took place, Kiev fully supported Tbilisi, condemned the Kremlin's military intervention, and, until the end of Yushchenko's presidency in 2010, sought EU and NATO membership. The same year, Kiev declared that it would not renew the lease of Russia's Black Sea Fleet base at Sevastopol when it expired in 2017,¹³² causing the security danger Moscow would not tolerate.

In 2010, pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich was elected the new Ukrainian President, and Kiev's hopes of joining NATO ended. Yanukovich announced that he did not see a need for further integration with the Alliance. Ukraine's parliament passed a bill that confirmed the country's non-aligned status and effectively canceled any prospect of joining NATO.¹³³ Moreover, Russian navy's lease got extended from 2017 to 2042.¹³⁴ As a result, the relations between Russia and Ukraine softened. Yet, Yanukovich did not fully stop Ukrainian integration with the West, but rather tried to pursue a balance between strengthening Ukraine's integration with Europe while maintaining a positive relationship with Russia.

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¹³⁰ James Marson, "Putin to the West: Hands off Ukraine," *Time*, May 25, 2009, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1900838,00.html> .

¹³¹ *Bucharest Summit Declaration, NATO Official Website*, April 3, 2008, accessed December 8, 2016, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm) .

¹³² Yuhas and Jalabi, "Ukraine Crisis."

¹³³ Taylor, "That Time."

¹³⁴ Yuhas and Jalabi, "Ukraine Crisis."

By the end of 2013, Kiev had to decide if it would sign the EU Association Agreement or stay under Moscow's orbit. Perceiving the Association Agreement as a pathway to future NATO membership,¹³⁵ Moscow warned that if Kiev signed the document, Ukraine would face "inevitable financial catastrophe and possibly the collapse of the state."¹³⁶ The Kremlin directly threatened Kiev with the possibility of stirring up separatist movements in the Russian-speaking east and south of the country.¹³⁷ Moscow declared that if Ukraine continued with the Agreement, Russia would consider the bilateral treaty that delineates the countries' borders to be void.¹³⁸ By that time, Russia already placed some import restrictions on many Ukrainian products (from steel pipes to cheese and confectionery) and threatened more sanctions if the free trade agreement with the EU was signed (negative nonmilitary balancing). This "trade war" cost Kiev billions of dollars.¹³⁹

What happened next became history: to the surprise of experts and the public, on November 21, 2013, the Ukrainian government declared that they suspended preparations for signing the Association Agreement with the EU and were reviving economic ties with Moscow, which

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¹³⁵ Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015), 40.

¹³⁶ Shaun Walker, "Ukraine's EU Trade Deal Will Be Catastrophic, Says Russia," *The Guardian*, September 22, 2013, accessed December 8, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/22/ukraine-european-union-trade-russia> .

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Roman Olearchyk, "Russia Accused of Triggering Trade War with Ukraine," *The Financial Times*, August 15, 2013, accessed December 8, 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/99068c0e-0595-11e3-8ed5-00144feab7de> .

promised Kiev a lavish bailout package of \$20 billion and cheap gas (positive nonmilitary balancing).¹⁴⁰ In reaction to this, protesters flooded Kiev. Yet, in Moscow's eyes, those protests were engineered by Washington to move NATO closer to Russia's borders, and, once they led to the sudden overthrow of the Ukrainian President on February 22, 2014, it was a clear sign that Moscow was losing power in its sphere of influence.¹⁴¹ Not only did Victoria Nuland, the US assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian affairs, and Republican Senator John McCain participate in Ukraine's antigovernment demonstrations,¹⁴² but also "American envoys offered Ukraine's interim government \$25 billion to place missile defenses on the Russian border."¹⁴³ Russia had no choice but to act.

After Moscow's strategic economic aid to Kiev (positive nonmilitary balancing) did not bring the desired outcome, the Kremlin provided teams of Russian police and secret service officers to support the pro-Kremlin government in Kiev (negative military balancing).¹⁴⁴ When Russia's perception of threat reached its highest point, Russia occupied the Crimea where its ethnic minority was living (positive military balancing).

One of the clear signs that Russia was not aggressive, but defensive, is the timing. The Ukrainian crisis was unfolding when the eyes of the international community were turned on Moscow: the protests in Kiev coincided with Russia's Winter Olympics of 2014, where Putin

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¹⁴⁰ "Timeline: Political Crisis in Ukraine and Russia's Occupation of Crimea," *Reuters*, March 8, 2014, accessed December 8, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-timeline-idUSBREA270PO20140308> .

¹⁴¹ "From Cold War to Hot War," *The Economist*.

¹⁴² Mearshimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis," 80.

¹⁴³ "From Cold War to Hot War," *The Economist*.

¹⁴⁴ Daniel Treisman, "Why Putin Took Crimea: The Gambler in the Kremlin," *Foreign Affairs* 95, no. 3 (2016): 50.

was celebrating with more than fifty presidents and prime ministers from around the world.¹⁴⁵ As Henry Kissinger famously declared, "It is not conceivable that Putin spends 60 billion Euros on turning a summer resort into a winter Olympic village in order to start a military crisis the week after a concluding ceremony that depicted Russia as a part of Western civilization."¹⁴⁶ Kissinger is correct to point out that if Russia wanted to initiate a conflict with Ukraine, it would have chosen a different moment. Bearing in mind that the Crimean parliament had voted more than once for greater autonomy and even independence from Ukraine and Russia's parliament had also voted to declare Sevastopol a Russian city well before March 2014,¹⁴⁷ Moscow was forced to react and it had to do it at a very uncomfortable time for itself.

As in the case of 2008 military intervention in Georgia, during the current Ukrainian crisis, Russia responded to the situation according to the categorization of the four different balancing strategies shaped by the level of threat perception regarding the state's adversary. After neither negative nor positive nonmilitary balancing strategies brought the desired outcome, Moscow had to adhere to the last resort - use of military force. Russia's "soft power" changed to "hard power." On March 1st, 2014, the upper house of the parliament of the Russian Federation unanimously authorized President Putin to resort to armed intervention in Ukraine in order to protect Russia's citizens and compatriots abroad.¹⁴⁸

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¹⁴⁵ Graham Allison, "U.S.-Russia Relations: What Would Henry Kissinger Do?" *The National Interest*, September 28, 2015, accessed December 8, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/us-russia-relations-what-would-henry-kissinger-do-13953> .

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Serge Schmemmann, "Russian Parliament Votes a Claim to Ukrainian Port of Sevastopol," *New York Times*, July 10, 1993, accessed December 8, 2016, <http://www.ny-times.com/1993/07/10/world/russian-parliament-votes-a-claim-to-ukrainian-port-of-sevastopol.html>.

¹⁴⁸ Delwaide, "Identity and Geopolitics," 179.

The case of Crimea annexation clearly shows that, when states are exposed to great threats, they are more likely to weight the effectiveness over the cost of balancing strategies. The possibility of Ukraine's new government joining NATO was intolerable for the Kremlin. NATO membership for Ukraine would be regarded by Moscow as "a catastrophe of epochal proportions" and a challenge to Russian vital interests, the most specific of these would be to Russia's control of the Black Sea Fleet base.¹⁴⁹ This clearly explains why Crimea was annexed, regardless of the cost of balancing strategy, which came to include economic sanctions, international isolation, the "reinvigoration" of NATO, and the alienation of most of the Ukrainian, if not European, population.¹⁵⁰ In this light, the Kremlin's present day diplomatic, economic and military support to "separatist rebels" in Eastern Ukraine is way to further balance NATO's enlargement eastward.

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¹⁴⁹ Lieven, "Russian Opposition," 198.

¹⁵⁰ Treisman, "Why Putin," 50.

## 6 CONCLUSION

Russia's balancing strategies towards NATO expansion illustrate a larger phenomenon. When a military alliance expands next to the borders of a non-member-state, the latter feels threatened and attempts to respond. States normally do not want to provoke their rivals by military means, particularly great powers, and pursue costly balancing policies only when they are forced to counter significant external threats.¹⁵¹ Thus, the first step the threatened state is likely to make, is to pursue nonmilitary means, such as coercive diplomacy, in order to prevent the enlargement. If a military alliance continues to expand into what this state considers to be its natural sphere of influence, the state's strategy might start including positive military balancing, such as military buildup and even the use of force.

Since the end of the Cold War, the West has been indifferent to Russia's fears of NATO enlargement. After Moscow's "soft" balancing strategy towards NATO of the 1990s and the beginning of 2000s did not bring the desired outcome, the Kremlin turned to much more coercive policies towards its neighboring states, which sought NATO membership. In this light, the Five-Day War between Russia and Georgia of August 2008 and the current Ukrainian crisis are consequences, not causes, of Russia's conflict with the West.

Even though NATO assures the Kremlin, that neither the Alliance's policies nor its actions are a threat to Russia,¹⁵² as John Mearshimer once famously put it, in the end, "it is the Russians,

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¹⁵¹ Paul Fritz and Kevin Sweeney, "The (de)Limitations of Balance of Power Theory," *International Interactions* 30, no. 4 (2004): 303.

¹⁵² "NATO-Russia Relations: the Facts. Claim: NATO Is a Threat to Russia," *NATO Official Website*, November 7, 2016, accessed December 8, 2016, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_111767.htm#cl201](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_111767.htm#cl201) .

not the West, who ultimately get to decide what counts as a threat to them."¹⁵³ Russia feels threatened by NATO expansion and wants to secure the buffer zone around itself. In this light, Moscow's perception of NATO as threatening is the root cause of Russia's balancing strategies regarding Russian minorities living abroad; and Russia's military interference to protect Russian citizens and compatriots residing in former Soviet states is a way to balance NATO expansion into states that Russia perceives as strategically important.

The 2008 Five-Day War between Russia and Georgia and the current Ukrainian crisis show how important it is, in order to keep regional peace and avoid military conflicts, to take other states' complaints and perceptions seriously. When insecurity is the root cause of a state's aggressive actions, making more threats just worsens the situation. The proper response should be addressing the insecurities that are motivating the threatened state's behavior. The Ukrainian crisis started with the West trying to move Ukraine out of Russia's orbit. What happened later was Moscow's response. Thus, today, when Russia clearly perceives NATO expansion as a threat to national security, the West should neither push for further integration of post-Soviet states into its military alliance nor indulge NATO aspirations of the states which Russia sees as strategically important. Rather, the alliance should find a new framework to cooperate with Russia as equal partners; and this feeling of equality, respect and partnership should be mutual and proven in practice.

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¹⁵³ Mearshimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis," 83.



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