The Agency of Smaller Powers: Belarus in International Relations

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Abstract

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Smaller powers wield agency in the international system and they do so in many cases independently of institutions. This is problematic not only from the perspective of realism, where 'might is right,' but also from the perspective of liberalism which argues that smaller powers use institutions to obtain policy objectives. This thesis considers this problem in respect of the new states that emerged from the former Soviet Union at the end of 1991, with particular focus on Belarus which is a least-likely case for smaller power agency given its alliance with Russia and few institutional memberships. Through a detailed case study of Belarus's foreign policy, I first argue that smaller power agency has been articulated in a regional context when the smaller power withdraws its consent to the regional order. While Belarus has generally consented to Russia's regional primacy or hegemony since 1991, this consent is not unconditional, and the violation of regional interstate norms by Russia caused Belarus to make efforts to renegotiate the rules underpinning the regional order. My second, related argument is that differentiation from the regional power, Russia, proved crucial for the formulation of independent policy positions by the smaller power's officials, and, in turn, that differentiation of opinions among the smaller power's elite granted flexibility to monitor and adapt its actions (that is, allowed the smaller power to wield agency). It did so without outright provoking the regional power to intervene in the smaller power, and instead kept the regional power engaged. The findings receive tentative support from auxiliary study of other post-Soviet smaller powers, and recapitulate the merits of the neoclassical realist research agenda.

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Note on spellings

In the main body of text, I have transliterated the names of Russian politicians, other individuals, and places using a variant of the Library of Congress system. The names of Belarusian people I generally transliterate from the Belarusian spelling (hence the president is Aliaksandr Lukashenka [from: *Аляксандр Лукашэнка*]), although when listing sources in footnotes I transliterate from the source language, which is often Russian (hence in footnotes Aleksandr Lukashenko is frequently found [*Александр Лукашенко*]). The exception is where a different English transliteration is standard (hence I refer to Vadim Gigin [Russian: *Вадим Гигин*], and not Vadzim Hihin [Belarusian: *Вадзім Гігін*]). My transliterations from Belarusian are made without diacritical marks, and so I transliterate *дж* as 'dzh' and the letter *ў* (unique to Belarusian) as 'w.'

For all other languages in the region, I transliterate from the Russian version of names. This applies to languages such as Turkmen and Uzbek which are officially written in a variant of Latin script. Hence the former president of Turkmenistan is referred to as Saparmurat Niyazov rather than Saparmyrat Nyyazow, and the capital of Uzbekistan is Tashkent rather than Toshkent (as it would be in Uzbek). In both cases, the former remains standard in English, although this is likely to change with time. However, where names of places and people have a standard English derived from the original rendering I use that. For example, it is increasingly the norm to refer to Kyiv [Ukrainian: *Київ*], rather than Kiev [Russian: *Киев*], although I refer to the dish as 'chicken Kiev' in Chapter 3 because I have never seen the collocation spelled otherwise in English.

I refer to the disputed region in the Caucasus as Nagorno-Karabakh, since this name was current during the work on the thesis, though I note that as of spring 2017 the local authorities refer to the territory as the Republic of Artsakh.

Abbreviations

BSSR	Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic
CAU	Central Asian Union
CIS	Commonwealth of Independence States
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
CST	Collective Security Treaty
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
EaP	Eastern Partnership (European Union)
EAU	Eurasian Economic Union
EC	European Community
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy (European Union)
EU	European Union
FPA	Foreign Policy Analysis [sub-field of academic scholarship]
GU(U)AM	Georgia-Ukraine-(Uzbekistan)-Armenia-Moldova [regional grouping]
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
P5	Permanent 5 members of the United Nations Security Council
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
UN	United Nations
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Chapter 1: Introduction

During the Cod Wars between Iceland and the United Kingdom the smaller power surprised and prevailed again and again. A series of disputes beginning in 1952 over the extent of exclusive fishing waters saw the UK deploy up to thirty Royal Navy frigates protected by Nimrod spy planes against its rival, and vessels from the two sides engaged in several skirmishes.[1] Despite the UK's obvious material advantages, territorial waters were a salient issue for the Icelandic economy, more so than for the UK, and this toughened Icelandic resolve. The first two disputes ended with Iceland achieving a four, and then twelve, nautical mile limit for exclusive fishing rights. Buoyed by these successes, two of the four main Icelandic political parties went into the 1971 parliamentary elections campaigning on a pledge of a 50-mile limit.[2] In 1976, signalling earnestness in the pursuit of its perceived national interests, the Nordic island broke off diplomatic relations with the UK. A few months later the UK ended nearly six hundred years of fishing in the waters off Iceland, and conceded to Iceland a 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone; an outcome that has been described as an 'unconditional surrender.'[3]

How was such an outcome possible? An island of 200,000 people defeated a rival with nuclear weapons and a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, which could be expected to afford it both material and diplomatic clout. Two NATO military allies were pitted against one another to the chagrin and helplessness of other members of the organisation, but it proved possible in part precisely because of Iceland's alignment. Iceland deftly played on the interests of the two superpowers. During the four-mile dispute of 1952-1956, Iceland signed a trade treaty with the USSR, and the latter remained a major trading partner for Iceland right up until 1991.

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[1] Gudmundur D. Gudmundsson (2006), 'The Cod and the Cold War' in *Journal of Scandinavian History, 31:2,* pp.97-118

[2] Gudmundsson (2006), pp.102-103

[3] Gudmundsson (2006), p.110

The United States fretted about access to the strategically important military base at Keflavik, and its nerves were tested by Iceland's threats to leave NATO in 1958, 1960, and again in the early 1970s.[4] As I shall demonstrate in a subsequent chapter, threatening to defect is a powerful card in the hands of a small power in an asymmetrical alliance relationship. Moreover, this sketch of the long-running dispute between Iceland and the United Kingdom against the background of the Cold War super-power rivalry is suggestive of the research question addressed in the following thesis: *in which situations do smaller powers wield agency?*

Agency is the capacity of an actor, in my case sovereign territorial states, to 'make history,' even if they do so 'not in circumstances of their own choosing' (to appropriate Marx). Actors grapple with genuine choices, both constrained and enabled by circumstances, and agency can be simply defined as the capacity to have acted otherwise.[5] Thus, if Otto von Bismarck's remark that politics is 'the art of the possible' holds true, then agency is a component of all politics. The capacity to act otherwise seems particularly interesting in the case of smaller powers because the possibility of being *overpowered* would seem to be ever present. Despite this, as the case of Iceland reveals, smaller powers do triumph, and they do so in both war and diplomacy. This proves undeniable if power is defined in terms of material capabilities, whereby the Vatican – despite its financial wealth – could hardly be expected to have any marked influence, whereby Scotland should never have defeated the English at Bannockburn, and whereby North Korea could not be expected to obtain nuclear weaponry. In each of these cases one would reasonably expect the smaller power to be overpowered by others, whether that means having its influence curbed, its armies defeated, or its ambitions suppressed.

It will be fairly objected that attributing agency to a 'power' is tautological. Or that to speak of the power of smaller actors, typically conceived of as *powerless*, is a contradiction. All

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[4] Gudmundsson (2006), pp.100, 102, 107

[5] Anthony Giddens (1984), *The Constitution of Society* (Cambridge), pp.14-16; Barry Barnes (2000), *Understanding Agency: Social Theory and Responsible Action* (London), pp.25-28. For Giddens, to be an agent is 'to be able to deploy a range of causal powers' (p.14)

that can be said on these points is that I have selected the label 'smaller power' from a range of unsatisfactory possibilities, and it can be treated synonymously with the more common term 'small state.' I prefer 'smaller' because I consider that power needs to be understood in relative terms; one state is more, or less, powerful than another. If one were to compare the states of contemporary politics with the city states of Italy during the Renaissance, one might find that the smallest powers of today appear powerful alongside the principalities of the past. Moreover, in later chapters I will discuss the cases of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan: to call these states small defies geography: Kazakhstan is the ninth largest country in the world. As other have noted, the boundary between small and medium powers in somewhat arbitrary, though this need not concern me for the purposes of this thesis.[6]

The International Relations literature falls into two camps on the matter of smaller powers' agency. Most realists, for whom brute power determines outcomes, think that smaller powers are inconsequential, which is to say that they wield minimal agency. Smaller powers may enter alliances with larger powers, but they cannot be expected to wield any truly significant agency in international relations. Liberal IR theory provides a different reading of smaller powers' agency according to which smaller powers are causal parts of an interdependent world.[7] Since state actors' preferences need not be conflictual, liberal IR affords smaller powers a range of possibilities for acting differently, even if the capabilities of the state by itself remain slight. Neither of these readings of smaller powers' agency, which are explored in more detail in the next section, can be said to be universally adhered to by proponents self-identifying as realists or liberals. It is necessary, though, for all analysts to employ a form of shorthand. I argue that neither of these shorthand positions accounts for the outcomes routinely obtained in world politics, such as the ability of tiny Iceland to prevail over the United Kingdom.

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[6] Matthias Maas argues against a fixed definition. See: Maas (2013), 'The elusive definition of the small state' in *International Politics, 46:1,* pp.65-83

[7] For example, Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye Jnr. (2012, [1989]), *Power and Interdependence* (Boston MA and London) explores the 'vulnerability' and 'sensitivity' of states to each other's actions.

The argument I make is that smaller powers acquire meaningful agency through a social process of coming to understand the possibilities available to them. Although agency is related to the structure of the international system, it does not exist *ex nihilo*, it is neither a trait the actor *always* wields as a consequence of its status in the international system, nor a trait that even the least powerful actor cannot achieve. In other words, there can be both smaller powers without agency, though no state is *de facto* powerless, as well as smaller powers with a wide range of agential possibilities. My thesis strives to provide evidence for these assertions. In doing so it aims to make a dual contribution. The first is to provide a cogent account of smaller power agency in the post-Soviet space, with special reference to the asymmetrical bilateral relationships the smaller powers find themselves party to. It will do so through a primary case study of Belarus in Chapters 4 and 5. Secondly, by analysing the other smaller powers that emerged from the Soviet Union after 1991 in Chapter 6, the thesis aims to contribute to scholarly understanding about how post-communist states realised (or did not realise) their agential capabilities. The question of state agency is particularly important in the Eurasian region during an era in which Russia is forcefully challenging the dominant Western or liberal interpretation of the post-Cold War order, first with its 2008 military intervention in Georgia and then by annexing territory from and its military intervention in Ukraine from 2014 onwards.

1.1. The research problem

In general, scholars have devoted far less attention to the smaller powers than greater ones, despite the prevalence of the former in the international system. The two waves of 'small state studies' that can be identified in IR scholarship coincide with what might be thought of as periods of stable peace.[8] During the precarious peace of the early Cold War the literature

[8] Here I draw on Alexander George's distinction between precarious peace, conditional peace, and stable peace. Alexander George (2006), *On Foreign Policy: Unfinished Business* (Boulder CO), p.51 ff.

remained dormant, despite an interest in smaller powers because of the ongoing process of de-colonisation, through which 'spectators crushed with their inessentiality [were transformed] into privileged actors.'[9] The implied political agency of the anti-colonial struggle did not transfer, though, to the liberated states' international relations. Instead, previously colonial subjects merely came to be viewed as economically dependent ones, and the 1960s proved the heyday of dependency theory, which held that the relationship between the former imperial powers and the newly liberated ones remained exploitative. A first wave of small power studies emerged at a time of détente between the superpowers. Despite notable contributions by David Vital, Robert L. Rothstein, and Marshall Singer, the first wave failed to articulate a coherent research agenda or theoretical framework.[10] The nascent interest in smaller powers petered out as détente faded after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the advent of Reagan's Strategic Defence Initiative (otherwise known as 'Star Wars'). A second wave of interest coincided with the end of the Cold War, and perhaps Panglossian hopes that 'great power politics' were anachronistic.

This observation about the link between times of stable peace and scholarly interest in smaller powers may be interpreted as vindication for the conventional realists' view that smaller powers' agency is insignificant. It could be argued that agency for smaller powers is a luxury only available in the rare moments between conflicts, whereas those conflicts, it might be said, reflect the natural order between powers. This is at least consistent with a core assumption of realism, that says power determines outcomes in an anarchical setting, from which it follows that states with a smaller measure of power do not matter all that much. While realists acknowledge that smaller powers may form alliances with other powers to balance against one or more hostile powers, they ultimately think that the smaller power has minimal agency.

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[9] Frantz Fanon (2001, [1961]), *The Wretched of the Earth* (London), p.28

[10] David Vital (1967), *The Inequality of States: A Study of the Small Power in International Relations* (Oxford); Robert L. Rothstein (1968), *Alliances and Small Powers* (New York NY); David Vital (1971), *The Survival of Small States: Studies in Small Power-Great Power Conflict* (Oxford); Marshall Singer (1972), *Weak States in a World of Powers* (New York NY and London)

The problem with this reading of international relations is that is fails to apprehend the significance of the hierarchical nature of politics. The anarchical portrayal of world politics might work if its units were distinguished only by their size, such that the arrangement of those units was insignificant. If all that mattered were whether the units were smaller or larger powers, then relative power could be predicted to determine the outcome of any conflict. But states are not so arrayed. Anarchy is 'attenuated' and sovereignty less fixed than realist analysis typically treats it (though William Wohlforth claims this is a myth).[11] If a smaller power occupies a hierarchical position, having surrendered a portion of its sovereignty to a regional power, this changes its relationships to *all* states in the international system. Realists may acknowledge that North Korea's assertive foreign policy is sheltered by China from Western reprisals, but realism cannot explain how North Korea is able to act contrary to China's preferences. North Korea has no obvious source of leverage against China, and the asymmetry of the relationship is colossal, yet we can reasonably conclude it acts in defiance of its closest ally.[12] This is a clear expression of North Korea's agency: it could choose to act otherwise. In order to explain North Korea's agency, I submit, one needs to introduce variables usually excluded from realist analysis, such as how hierarchical arrangements normatively condition the responses of other actors in the international system.

A second reading of international relations, which I am calling the liberal approach, thinks that all states' agency holds some significance. The 'smallness' of power is not in itself overcome, though it turns more analytical attention to the observation that preferences between different actors, irrespective of their size, are not necessarily conflictual; preference convergence may allow a smaller power to obtain desired outcomes.[13] At the state-level this may happen by

[11] William C. Wohlforth (2008a), 'Realism' in Christian Reus-Smith and Duncan Snidal (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (Oxford), pp.143-144

[12] Ohn Daewon and Mason Richey (2015), 'China's Evolving Policy Towards the People's Republic of Korea under Xi Jinping' in *Asian Studies Review, 39:3,* pp.483-502

[13] I follow the understanding of liberalism articulated in Andrew Moravcsik (1997), 'Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics' in *International Organization, 51:4,* pp.513-553. The label is deployed vaguely even in scholarly works. I contend that liberalism must begin with the individual.

banding together with other powers, and liberal institutionalists emphasise cooperation through institutions, although it covers too the preferences of sub-state interest groups.[14] Ostensibly the interdependence of the units (states) accounts for outcomes, and liberal analysis explains this by looking to the interactions between domestic and non-domestic interest groups. A smaller power may find allies with interest groups outside its own state structures.

There are two problems with this perspective. On the one hand, it fails to explain cases of smaller powers getting their way independently of other actors. North Korea's nuclear weapons programme advanced without any external states supporting its ambitions; it has proven a thorn in the side of its closest ally, China. On the other hand, it cannot account for differential outcomes on similar issues. How can a smaller power's preference lead to a positive outcome in one instance, but not in another? The liberal understanding of agency fails to explain why different outcomes emerge for smaller powers in what otherwise would appear to be similar contexts. For example, during 2013 both Armenia and Moldova sought to sign Association Agreements with the EU at the Eastern Partnership's Vilnius summit, yet liberals' emphasis of domestic preferences cannot fully explain the different outcomes for states whose material power appears comparable. The two states have similar populations and GDPs.[15] Yet Armenia did not obtain its stated preference, and there is no reason to think there had been any change in preference since Armenia proceeded to negotiate a watered-down version subsequently.[16] Moldova did obtain its stated preference: it initialled the agreement at the same summit, and

[14] Robert Keohane's early review of the small state literature briefly discusses smaller powers and institutions. Robert O. Keohane (1969), 'Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics' in *International Organization, 23:2,* pp.291-310

[15] If anything, Armenia's greater military expenditure ($432 million in 2016 against Moldova's $32 million) means it is the more powerful, although since the relevant relationships here are to a vastly more powerful Russia the stark difference between the two smaller powers pales to insignificance. Figures from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), *Military Expenditure Database.*

[16] Observers expect an Armenia-EU 'comprehensive and enhanced' trade agreement to be signed at the Brussels Eastern Partnership summit in November 2017. The agreement was initialled at a meeting in Yerevan in March 2017. See: European External Action Service (21 March 2017), 'Joint Press Release by the European Union and Republic of Armenia on the initialling of the EU-Armenia Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement.'

signed it some months later during 2014. Admittedly, one could readily explain the outcome in terms of realism and Armenia's military reliance on Russia, but this serves to prove my point about the failings of liberal analysis.

In fact, the asymmetry of relations between smaller and larger powers means that the smaller power is typically better described as dependent rather than interdependent. The vulnerability and sensitivity of a larger power to a smaller power's actions is very limited; Russia could absorb the loss of ties to Armenia far more smoothly than Armenia could come through the breaking-off of relations with Russia. Theories about interdependence therefore seem no less problematic than realist analyses, primarily because they largely overlook the ways in which a unit's position in the system has independent effects. Most obviously, one might hypothesise that Armenia and Moldova's different geographical locations vest both internal and external actors with different perceptions about the range of possible actions.

The intractability of smaller powers thus calls these readings of international relations into question. Smaller powers repeatedly cause headaches for the supposedly great powers in the international system. To reiterate this point, I will give a couple of brief illustrations from the Cold War. First, despite being aligned to the USSR through the Warsaw Pact, Romania under Nicolae Ceausescu irritated its patron by pursuing independent policy lines and hosting US president Richard Nixon in Bucharest in 1969, and managed to strengthen its ties both to China after the Sino-Soviet split and to the Non-Aligned Movement, even if its application for observer status to the latter organisation was ultimately rejected.[17] Yugoslavia under Tito was more powerful than Romania in terms of material capabilities, but it too shows as a case of the smaller power resisting the stronger. According to Roy Allison, 'Tito used Yugoslavia's non-alignment to increase the scope and latitude of the country's foreign relations, to resist Soviet pressures to

[17] Roy Allison (1988), *The Soviet Union and the Strategy of Non-Alignment in the Third World* (Cambridge), pp.66-69

integrate politically into the East European bloc.'[18] This was not a problem unique to the communist world. The United States found itself tested by allies in Asia, tussling with what has been called 'the problem of "rogue allies" – that is, rabidly anticommunist dictators who might start wars for reasons of domestic legitimacy that the US wanted no part of[.]'[19]

The widely-held perception, rightly or not, of International Relations as an 'American' social science aligned to US or Western interests reinforces the idea that smaller powers are to be treated as its objects and not subjects.[20] However, recent post-colonial theory critically challenged the assumptions of economic dependence that has been routinely applied to smaller powers, and sought to break out from the straitjacket of dependency theory. There is in this literature an implication of unrealised agency, and, although I am chary of treating the post-Soviet space in terms of post-colonialism, my thesis's guiding interest in agency indirectly contributes to this literature. In any case, the notion of the Soviet Union as an empire is hardly novel and has been posited by several authors.[21]

1.2. Possible explanations

Analysis might strive to explain smaller powers' agency at each of the three main levels of analysis used in the IR literature: the individual, the domestic, or the system level. The prevalence of authoritarianism in the post-Soviet states that the studies in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 focus on means that individual leaders are usually the key decision-makers. Leaders operate in a

[18] Allison (1988), p.60

[19] Viktor D. Cha (2009), 'Powerplay: Origins of the US Alliance System in Asia' in *International Security, 34:3,* p.159

[20] Stanley Hoffman (1977), 'An American Social Science: International Relations' in *Daedalus, 106:3,* pp.41-60

[21] Karen Dawisha and Bruce Parrott (eds.) (1997), *The End of Empire? The Transformation of the USSR in Comparative Perspective* (Armonk NY); Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (eds.) (2001), *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford); Dominic Lieven (2001), *Empire: The Russian Empire and its Rivals* (New Haven CT); Dmitri Volkogonov (1998), *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire: Political Leaders from Lenin to Gorbachev* (London)

tight elite circle that has a high degree of autonomy from society at large. From this perspective, the different purposefully pursued foreign policies found in structurally similar states as Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia might be attributable to different traits of the individual leader or their advisors. One can readily find crucial differences between leaders across the states concerned. In many cases erstwhile Soviet officials dominated the elite, while in other cases the elite represented either former dissidents or, typically following a regime change, a new post-Soviet generation. Post-communist officials were to various degrees networked into the international community. Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia had served as foreign minister of the USSR, and therefore possessed experience of occupying a certain role on the international stage. Likewise, Heydar Aliyev in Azerbaijan served as deputy prime minister in the USSR, as well as leader of the Azeri SSR Communist Party. However, analysis at the individual level fails to explain consistency in smaller powers' policy across different leaders from different backgrounds. In Georgia, for example, the pro-Western foreign policy following the 2003 Rose Revolution persisted despite changes of president and government. Likewise, in Armenia, the pro-Russian orientation persisted through all three presidents.

Domestic level explanations largely dovetail into the liberal interpretation of agency that I outlined above. The problems with this approach have already been highlighted, although there is an alternative domestic level explanation that requires consideration, and which I have already mentioned as a central strand of the IR scholarship's treatment of smaller powers. This is the focus on the consequences of economic dependence on external powers, which amounts to a variant of dependency theory (with the exception that I would suggest that dependency theory is usually conceived at the system level). Where a smaller power finds itself heavily dependent on a regional power, it is arguably far more constrained and prevented from balancing against that power.[22] This seems true, and in the region covered by this study the legacy of the USSR ensures

[22] Although not quite making this point, the following article is germane: Paul Papayoanou (1997), 'Economic Interdependence and the Balance of Power' in *International Studies Quarterly, 41:1*, pp.113-140

that economic dependence on Russia is widespread. This though only makes the foreign policies of smaller powers in the post-Soviet space even more inexplicable; there have been repeated disputes between Russia and its neighbours because the Kremlin has been dissatisfied with its neighbours' actions. Gvalia et al. make the important observation that Georgia opted for a pro-Western foreign policy despite the fact that reorienting trade from Russia to Western partners could not compensate for economic losses.[23] In this case, the smaller power clearly could have acted otherwise by aligning closely with Russia. It seems, then, that economic dependence provides weaker analytical leverage than might be expected. While economics may explain rational actions, agency in international relations is not reducible to a rational actor model.

System level explanations largely belong to the neorealist literature. Neorealism has been the prevalent form of realism, at least since the 1979 publication of Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics*. Although not widely accepted as a theory of foreign policy, it allows some basic predictions to be made about smaller powers' actions.[24] To quote Waltz himself on this point:

> *'An international-political theory serves primarily to explain international-political outcomes. It also tells us something about the foreign policies of states and about their economic and other interactions. But saying that … a theory about international politics tells us something about economics [and presumably foreign policy – PH], does not mean than one such theory can substitute for the other.'*[25]

In other words, while not a theory of foreign policy, it still gives us some reasons why states act to produce system-level outcomes, such as why they balance or bandwagon. Although Stephen Walt considers that balancing is more prevalent than bandwagoning in the international system,

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[23] Giorgi Gvalia, David Siroky, Bidzina Lebanidze, and Zurab Iashvili (2013), 'Thinking Outside the Bloc: Explaining the Foreign Policies of Small States' in *Security Studies, 22:1,* p.123

[24] A succinct discussion of Waltz's theory applied to foreign policy is given in Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder (1990), 'Chain gangs and passed bucks: predicting alliance patterns in multipolarity' in *International Organization, 44:2,* pp.137-140. For an explication of the cases both for and against see: Colin Elman (1996), 'Horses for Courses: Why *Not* Neorealist Theories of Foreign Policy?' in *Security Studies, 6:1,* pp.7-53

[25] Kenneth N. Waltz (1979), *Theory of International Politics* (New York NY and London), p.39

he hypothesises that for weak states, which for my purposes can be taken as a synonym of smaller power, bandwagoning with a great power threat is the more common outcome.[26] Again, though, the empirical evidence proves problematic, and neorealism fails to explain different outcomes for smaller powers in similar structural positions, or similar outcomes for smaller powers in different structural positions.[27] From this perspective, neoclassical realism offers a potential corrective. Neoclassical realism accepts the basic determinant influence of the international system, but argues that domestic variables must be incorporated into scholarly analysis because they act as a 'filter' or 'transmission belt' across which international variables must pass. Since neoclassical realism forms a major part of the following study, I will hold off discussing its many theoretical contributions to possible explanations until Section 2.2.2. below.

Finally, lying outside of this tripartite levels-of-analysis frame, agency might arise from its social situation. Social constructivist scholars have argued that actors come to define their interests because of their social context, and if that actor is a state, then its understanding of which other actors threaten it and what goals the state needs to pursue emerges from its interaction with other state actors. As Christian Thorun has written: 'Social constructivism offers solutions at a point where Realism fails: it specifies how a state defines its interests and how a state chooses among foreign policy alternatives.'[28] I would go further and argue that the very possibility of agency itself is both enabled and constrained by the social setting.

1.3. Research design

Drawing on the outlined possible explanations, this thesis employs three different readings of international relations to analyse smaller powers in the post-Soviet space. First, it will

[26] Stephen M. Walt (1987), *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca NY and London), pp.32-33

[27] Gideon Rose makes a comparable observation in respect of theories based on domestic politics. Gideon Rose (1988), 'Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy' in *World Politics, 51:1,* p.148

[28] Christian Thorun (2009), *Explaining Change in Russia's Foreign Policy: The Role of Ideas in Post-Soviet Russia's Conduct Towards the West* (Basingstoke), p.24

use some basic predictions about state actions derived from neorealism. As stated, it is widely thought that neorealism does not constitute a theory of foreign policy, it does though make predictions such as the one previously mentioned. Secondly, I will employ a selection of neoclassical realist ideas. Finally, I will attempt to read smaller power agency through the lens of social constructivist ideas. The theoretical framework is fleshed out more fully in Chapter 2. Individual-level and pure domestic-level analyses are not pursued because of the problems already highlighted, however I will return to these in the concluding chapter. The thesis will apply the theoretical framework to a single case, that of Belarus, in Chapters 4 and 5 in respect of two issue areas: official recognition of new sovereignties, such as the declared independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008, and the recognition of new governments following regime changes. An attempt to generalise the findings will be made in Chapter 6, which can be thought of as an 'ancillary check' or 'external validation' for the Belarus case.[29]

Belarus is suitable for several reasons. From the perspective of neorealism Belarus can be considered a least-likely case for wielding agency. If, as neorealists typically claim, smaller powers bandwagon with the greatest threat, then Belarus should be a simple case of bandwagoning with Russia. The very fact that its relations with Russia have proven persistently fractious, as I will describe in Chapter 3, calls into doubt the usefulness of neorealism. Belarus resisted following Russia in the latter's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and has clearly distanced itself from Russia's stance on key aspects of the post-2013 situation in Ukraine. From the perspective of social constructivism, Belarus, but also most of the other states covered in Chapter 6, found themselves nominally sovereign in a largely unexpected fashion after 1991. This is useful because it means their responses to their sovereignty were by no means preordained.

These two issue areas have been chosen because there is clearly some variation in the responses of Belarus and other states to different instances of both sovereignty and government

[29] Gvalia et al. (2013) use this terminology.

recognition; variation both *within* and *across* cases. However, I highlight at the outset that this variation is nuanced and will be brought out during the empirical discussion; a dichotomous coding of recognition would miss much of the variation. As I will show, Belarus has been troubled by some of Russia's actions, and hardened its rhetorical stance on regime change in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, yet softened its rhetorical stance on regime change in Ukraine in 2014. Moreover, they are two issues that Russian official rhetoric has clearly attached great importance too. Accordingly, if Belarus lacked agency, one would reasonably expect Russia to successfully guide the Belarusian policy position. This did not happen. In this way, then, I treat the smaller power's capacity for realising foreign policy preferences as a proxy for its agency in international affairs; in cases where smaller powers act contrary to the regional power's preference, the smaller power almost certainly *could* have acted differently.

The employment of a single case in two of the three empirical chapters requires additional justification. First, focussing on a single case for a large part of the research allows me to fully explore 'the causes-of-effects as opposed to the effects-of-causes.'[30] This is in keeping with an epistemological approach that treats causation as 'a process involving the mechanisms and capacities that lead from cause to effect.'[31] This is distinct from the inductive epistemology that informs many large-*n* studies, which assumes that 'constant conjunction and correlation' is sufficient evidence of causality, or the experimental approach ('the effects of manipulating cause in a controlled setting') that informs many quantitative research models.[32] This epistemological approach is the most appropriate for my purposes because I want to understand *how* agency manifests, and not simply reveal its actions. Moreover, the counter-factual nature of agency, the idea that it exists where an actor could have acted otherwise, renders inductive or experimental

[30] Andrew Bennett and Colin Elman (2006), 'Qualitative Research: Recent Developments in Case Study Methods' in *Annual Review of Political Science 9*, pp.456-458

[31] Bennett and Elman (2006), p.457

[32] Bennett and Elman (2006), p.457. On this point see also: Henry E. Brady (2003), *Models of Causal Inference: Going Beyond the Neyman-Rubin-Holland Theory* [unpublished: available from his personal page on the University of Michigan website]

epistemologies awkward; it is precisely not about constant conjunction or manipulation. Instead, by defining agency as the possibility of acting otherwise, I am saying that it is the capacity of an actor and not something constantly causing effects.

Secondly, researchers undertaking small-*n* studies routinely meet with the criticisms of selection bias and deficiency in terms of generalisability. On the former criticism, the widely-read volume by Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba argues that case selection on the dependent variable is not random and leads to an understatement of the independent variable's effects or biasing inferences that are subsequently made.[33] However, this is at least a partly unfair criticism because I am making no claim of random selection, and the primary case study (Belarus) is deliberately selected because there is variation on the dependent variable. Put simply, there is something to explain. Without variation there would be no means of analysing the necessary and sufficient conditions to the required level of detail.

On the latter criticism, the nomothetic value of case study research has been argued for persuasively by prominent scholars. Stephen van Evera argues that, while single case studies suffer from being unable to identify antecedent conditions for a theory, they none the less compensate for this by revealing *how* an independent variable causes its outcome.[34] In other words, this reiterates the point that 'causes-of-effects' is the appropriate terrain for case study research. Harry Eckstein also argues for the nomothetic value where *n=1*.[35] Furthermore, in the specific context of foreign policy analysis, James Rosenau long ago made the case for 'single country theories' of foreign policy.[36] Rosenau, mind, eschews any claim of nomothetic value. He argues that greater idiographic value should be attributed to single cases than it typically is

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[33] Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba (1994), *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference and Qualitative Research* (Princeton NJ), pp.129-136

[34] Stephen van Evera (1997), *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca NY), pp.50-55

[35] Harry Eckstein (1975), 'Case Study and Theory in Political Science' in F. I. Greenstein and N. W. Polsby (eds.), *Handbook of Political Science, Vol.* 7 (Reading MA)

[36] James N. Rosenau (1987), 'Toward Single-Country Theories of Foreign Policy: The Case of the USSR' in Charles F. Hermann, Charles W. Kegley Jnr., and James N. Rosenau (eds.), *New Directions in the Study of Foreign Policy* (Boston MA), pp. 53-72

because only local knowledge helps the analyst anticipate the case's likely response or probable developments at critical junctures.

1.4. Methods

My thesis combines two kinds of analysis. Chapters 4 and 5 can be thought of as a 'within-case' analysis of Belarus, whereas Chapter 6 is comparative across other cases in the former USSR. On the one hand, King, Keohane and Verba express healthy scepticism about comparative case studies; the social world is very messy after all.[37] On the other hand, Chapters 4 and 5 lay the groundwork that allows me to use other cases as a test for the generalisability of findings. The study employs descriptive and interpretive analysis of a range of source materials. The reliability of interpretivism depends on the claim that other analysts presented with the same data and employing the same methods would draw similar conclusions, although the interpretivist analyst acknowledges that additional evidence might change findings.[38] This is appropriate given the open research question – *in which situations do smaller powers wield agency?* – as opposed to stricter hypothesis-testing approach. While some predictions will be set out in the next chapter, they are not necessarily ones that can be proven or disproven such that a high level of certainty can be attached to all my conclusions.

The first main method was to read through transcripts of speeches, interviews and transcripts given by the presidents and foreign ministers of the states being studied. For the two chapters concentrating on Belarus, these materials were available remotely via the president's website (www.president.gov.by) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs website (www.mfa.gov.by). These materials were mined for declared intentions, desires, or expectations, or for implied

[37] Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett (2005), *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge MA), p.170 ff.

[38] Ted Hopf (2002), *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow 1955 and 1999* (Ithaca NY and London), pp.29-33

understandings about what actions were appropriate. These were compared to what happened on the given issue. This might be considered a form of discourse analysis, embodying an interpretive rather than scientific approach. Determining any actor's beliefs and intentions is notoriously difficult; officials have incentives to disguise their true beliefs, as well as to mislead others' thinking as to what their true beliefs are.[39]

This points to the first methodological obstacle, which is that fewer source materials are typically available for authoritarian, as contrasted to democratic, political regimes. Both Belarus and several of the cases covered in Chapter 6 are authoritarian. In these political systems decision-making processes are especially secretive, usually with far fewer documents in the public domain, and the nature of authority constrains public discussion of sensitive or controversial issues. I briefly discuss Belarus's decision-making process in Chapter 2, but for the moment it suffices to remark that the parliament, the bicameral National Assembly, is not a debating chamber that affords the observer insights into policy-making. The evidence base on which my arguments are based is therefore often necessarily a step removed from the evidence that might be used in respect of democratic states. As a direct consequence of an evidence base that is, at times, rather thin, corroboration for information is hard to come by, but I have triangulated between sources as far as is possible.

For the Belarusian studies in Chapters 4 and 5 this method was complemented with careful reading of both the state-owned and independent media. There is both an upside and a downside here. Many newspapers rarely discuss politics, and certainly not critically. This reflects self-censorship attributable to the amended 1995 Law on the Press and Other Mass Media that makes it illegal for state-owned media both to defame the president's honour (with the effect that a bad word is never said about the president), and also to distribute information on behalf of

[39] Richard K. Hermann (2002), 'Linking Theory to Evidence in International Relations' in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A. Simmons (eds.), *The Handbook of International Relations* (London), p.120

oppositional political organisations (which is vague enough to deter reporting of oppositional activities).[40] By contrast, the few independent media do carry some political analysis, although in a state where politics is a divisive issue there are palpable biases in coverage and opinion. Belarusian state television covers political news more extensively than the print media, and arguably the demands of rolling coverage reduce the extent of stage management from the Presidential Administration (see below). However, without a suitable library of media programmes these could not be consulted systematically. I did, though, make use of the television channels' websites and You Tube channels to watch available current affairs programmes.

On the positive-side, since the state-owned media is so tightly controlled, opinions expressed in these media can be taken as a proxy for official opinion. Most newspaper editors are political appointees, and senior staff at both state TV stations and newspapers have confirmed that the agenda for news reporting is coordinated with the Presidential Administration. As an interviewee from the *Belarus 1* television channel told another doctoral researcher: 'We carry the state position and convey it. So yes, it happens at the level of the Presidential Administration, of course, certain aspects are conveyed to us, which it would be desirable to report.'[41] An interviewee from the *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* newspaper told the same researcher that the editor-in-chief attends regular meetings at the Presidential Administration which *inter alia* dictates the tone to be adopted in reporting about Russia.[42]

Although Russian media dominates the information space in Belarus, I did not systematically consult a comparable range of Russian-owned media because they do not play the same proxy role. The full list of newspapers and media sources consulted is given in the bibliography. These materials were either accessed online or consulted in the National Library of

[40] Joanna Szostek (2015), 'Russian Influence on the News Media in Belarus' in *Communist and Post-Communist Studies, 48:2-3,* p.124

[41] Szostek (2015), p.127

[42] Szostek (2015), p.127

Belarus. For all case studies, I also consulted Western media and analysis such as the Jamestown Foundation's Eurasia Daily Monitor, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's reports, and BBC Monitoring coverage of television media. Important questions can be asked about the bias of some of these sources. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty provides extensive coverage of the post-Soviet region, but it is a US government-funded corporation and its board comprises members of a US government agency, the Broadcasting Board of Governors.[43]

The next method employed for all cases was to dig into US Embassy cables leaked and published online by *Wikileaks*. The authenticity of the Wikileaks cables is assumed; at least, the US government has not publicly refuted them, and they would be staggeringly difficult to forge without noticeable inconsistencies or errors. The cables include weekly reports from US embassies in various states back to Washington DC. For example, coverage includes reports from the US Embassy to Belarus between 2008 and 2011, albeit the embassy was exiled to Vilnius for part of this time, and there are also numerous relevant reports covering discussions between US officials and other diplomats. These were used with appropriate caution. I have used indirect quotations given in cables and attributed to local government sources, although the lack of opportunity for triangulation is a concern. Moreover, these represent opinions consciously expressed to an American diplomatic audience, and there are multiple reasons for local officials to misrepresent their views. No less than with the transcripts of pre-prepared speeches, officials may seek to mislead as a bargaining tactic or strategy. This is further complicated by the incentives or motivations US Embassy staff may have had when recording the information for relay back to Washington DC; there may be 'bureaucratic behaviour' and 'governmental politics' in play and actors' vested interests cannot be easily stripped away.[44] They also represent one

[43] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (no date), 'Management and Governance' [web: accessed 28/9/17]

[44] Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow (1999, [1971]), *The Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York NY)

side of a story and the absence of comparable sources on my cases' other relationships introduces additional bias into the materials.

Finally, my analysis of Belarus in Chapters 4 and 5 draws directly or indirectly on a range of semi-structured interviews and background conversations. These interviews were by and large conducted on an *ad hoc* basis, although several took place in Minsk in the summer of 2016.[45] Interviewees included opposition leaders, a former diplomat, independent in-country analysts, a former campaign manager for president Aliaksandr Lukashenka, a source that formerly worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and an external consultant working in Belarus. Ethical clearance was approved by the University of Oxford, and subjects that consented to a formal interview signed a consent form approving my use of information given. The research is also informed by background discussions with parliamentary deputies, external analysts and campaigners, Belarusian academics, and one source close to the president. For reasons of confidentiality several of these sources would not speak on record, and I have respected their wishes in not naming them. Nonetheless these conversations prove important in shaping my perception of the decisions around key events, and accordingly I am indebted to these people for their commentaries.

1.5. Structure of the thesis

The next chapter expands on the definition of agency by describing what constitutes agency. I borrow from the literature of post-colonialism and its definitions of agency in respect of subjectivity. The chapter then develops the theoretical framework more fully and derives a series of predictions from it; these will guide the subsequent chapters. I then use Chapter 3 to put my cases of smaller powers' agency more properly into their geographical and historical context, in

[45] Due to the difficulty of access to key people, I capitalised on opportunities that presented themselves in the course of other activities Minsk. I was open about my purposes of travel on all occasions.

part by explaining how external actors potentially constrained and/or enabled that subjectivity. Each of the new non-Russian states that existed after 1991 found themselves in contested neighbourhoods, whether between the enlarging European Union and Russia, or between a rising China and depleted Russia, but also not overlooking the role of powers such as Iran and Turkey. Finally, I turn to the three empirical chapters already described, with the work structured by the framework established in Chapter 2. Chapter 4 demonstrates how my primary case, Belarus, began to reflect on its statehood, and I contend that this transformed its agential possibilities. In Chapter 5 I show how Belarus used its agency to attempt some renegotiate with Russia about the latter's role and the regional order. Chapter 6 finds similarities in other cases in the post-Soviet space. Chapter 7 concludes.

Chapter 2: The theoretical framework

I described agency in everyday language as the capacity to act differently. In fact, it is important to recognise that the two readings of international relations I referred to, and which I described as realist and liberal readings, diverge on smaller powers' agency largely because they disagree about the causes of state agency.

To demonstrate this, it is necessary to explore briefly the sources of an agent's capacity for action, and to think about the attributes of an agent. I also need to make a qualification: I will refer in this chapter to what I call 'modern realism.' I think my argument about the sources of agency holds for most realists since (and including) Kenneth Waltz, encompassing those typically referred to as defensive realists, offensive realists, and neoclassical realists. It does not hold for classical realists. On the question of agency, classical realism, which focuses far more on the role of individuals and finds the roots of international politics in human nature, conforms to the liberal understanding.[1]

Although at first blush the theorists referred to in the next section may betray a social constructivist bias, in fact I submit that my succinct theoretical analysis of agency provides a basis for a more careful exposition of the three-pronged theoretical framework to be used in the empirical analysis. Recognising the contribution of constructivism to neorealist and neoclassical realist theories will enhance their operationalisation, as well as suggesting a separate alternative theoretical apparatus. It does not automatically favour the potential explanatory power of social constructivism over the other two strands of theory.

[1] Classical realism simply means any realist before Waltz. As illustrative evidence for my claim, Hans Morgenthau's first principle of political realism asserted that 'politics […] is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature.' Morgenthau, in a manner that was conventional before Waltz's contribution to the discipline, provides a bottom-up reading of politics. Hans Morgenthau (1960, [1948]), *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York NY), p.4

2.1. What is an agent?

According to the Chambers dictionary an agent is 'a person or thing that exerts power,' and agency is 'the action or exertion of an agent.'[2] As Colin Wight remarks, these definitions could be applied to all kinds of inanimate or immaterial objects, such as a motor engine or a chemical compound.[3] It is, I think, uncontroversial to observe that there is equivocation in usage of the terms in political science. On the one hand, agency is a capacity and an agent someone who possesses that capacity. On the other hand, an agent may be understood to mean a proxy of something or someone else.[4] In addition, the definition can be refined by observing that an agent can be distinguished from an actor in so far as an agent, and in turn agency, is purposeful; it is when action is the result of some conscious purpose that it is particularly deemed agency in International Relations literature.[5] This implies that agency refers to the exercise of a capacity, rather than the capacity of itself. This is commensurate with Roy Bhaskar's assertion that *social* agency involves 'intentional transformative praxis.'[6] It also vindicates my choice to use purposeful foreign policy outcomes as a proxy for agency.

The 'first move' taken in much IR analysis is to treat the state as an agent.[7] That it is also a structure does not concern me in this chapter. I would argue that this state-as-agent assumption disguises a disagreement between liberals and modern realists. For liberals, agency always and ultimately lies with a collection of individuals. Referring to a state or smaller power as an agent is merely figurative; the state or smaller power is not literally an agent. As Andrew

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[2] Chambers (2003, [1901]), *The Chambers Dictionary* (Edinburgh)

[3] Colin Wight (2006), *Agents, Structures and International Relations: Politics as Ontology* (Cambridge), pp.206, 212

[4] There is a literature on principal-agent relations. e.g. Daniel L. Nielson and Michael J. Tierney (2003), 'Delegation to International Organizations: Agency Theory and World Bank Environmental Reform' in *International Organization, 57:2,* pp.241-276; Mark A. Pollack (1997), 'Delegation, Agency, and Agenda-Setting in the European Community' in *International Organization, 51:1,* pp.99-134

[5] Simone Bignall (2010), *Postcolonial Agency: Critique and Constructivism* (Edinburgh), p.31

[6] Cited in Wight (2006), p.212. For Bhaskar, an agent is 'anything which is capable of bringing about a change in something (including itself)' (ibid., p.211). I underscore the point that my guiding interest in this text is in agency rather than the agent.

[7] Wight (2006), p.177 ff.

Moravcsik puts it, 'states represent some subset of domestic society, on the basis of whose interests state officials define state preferences and act purposefully in world politics.'[8] From this perspective, the international system has no independent causal effect on the actions of its constituent units, and is merely a convenient description of their arrangement. However, this does not imply that the state itself has no independent effects: although the individuals who pursue their group interests through the state change over time, there is still a constant ('the state') perceived by all other actors.[9] Theseus's ship sailed onwards after all.

In contrast, for modern realists, agency derives from an actor's position in the international system. Without the system the agent would not exist, which is to say that in some vague sense the actor is literally an agent. In other words, the actor becomes an agent because of its relationship to the international system. Whereas for liberals individual and group interests enable and constrain agency, for neorealists an actor's position in the international system *a priori* enables and constrains agency. Neoclassical realism, by accepting the basic precepts of neorealism, concurs with this conception of what agency is, even if it then proceeds to contingencies in terms of how it is used (see Section 2.2.2.). For the purpose of analysis, it is necessary to find the common denominator in these interpretations of agency.

For this I propose a second distinction that can be drawn between rational and reflexive qualities of agents. If an agent is rational its agency can be objectively conceived analytically, whereas to speak of reflexive qualities of an agent means that agency is subjectively conceived. Although Waltz's neorealism ostensibly posits rational agents, really its operationalisation in foreign policy analysis nearly always forsakes this and relies on reflexive components. (As already remarked in Section 1.2, whether neorealism can be used to explain foreign policy is a moot point.) The smaller power acts because of how it perceives the world around it, and rationality is

[8] Andrew Moravcsik (1997), 'Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics' in *International Organization, 51:4,* p.518

[9] Wight (2006), pp.185, 195. As Wight says: 'the practical effect of this theoretical move would be to empty the state as a theoretical construct of any content' (p.191).

thus bounded. Specifically, units perceive themselves in a competition with other units, discern threats accordingly, and are guided by a survival instinct. If perceptions of other actors' intentions and capabilities matter, then the international system is not doing all the explanatory work. Consequently, it becomes apparent that efforts to use neorealism in foreign policy analysis conform more closely to neoclassical realism than might be thought at a first glance; neoclassical realists agree that the system has an independent, perhaps even preponderant, effect, but argue that domestic variables including perceptions must be factored in to any analysis. Furthermore, the distance between neorealism and social constructivism appears far smaller because what neorealist practice reveals is that its reading of international politics reduces to a form of social Darwinism.[10] For this reason, there is common ground in liberal and realist conceptions of agency, even if there is disagreement about the sources of that agency.

Modern realist and liberal readings of agency can be bridged by formulating a theory of agency based on the common ground identified: the reflexive qualities of agents. This reflexivity is inherent in the work of the two most plausible scholarly efforts I am aware of in the International Relations discipline to theorise agency, namely in the work of Alexander Wendt and Colin Wight.[11] Following Wight, I adopt Gayatri Spivak's claim that agency comprises accountability, intentionality, and subjectivity.[12] It is the last of the three that is 'foundational' because subjectivity is the prerequisite of intentionality and accountability. But Wight finds this description of agency wanting, and augments it with Bhaskar's insight that agency is 'embodied'

[10] Jennifer Sterling-Folker (2002), 'Realism and the Constructivist Challenge: Rejecting, Reconstructing, or Rereading' in *International Studies Review, 4:1,* pp.73-97

[11] Other work on the theme includes: David Dessler (1989), 'What's at stake in the agent-structure debate?' in *International Organization, 43:3*, pp.441-473; Walter Carlsnaes (1992), 'The Agency-Structure Problem in Foreign Policy Analysis,' in *International Studies Quarterly, 36:3,* pp.245-270; Roxanne Lynn Doty (1997), 'Aporia: A Critical Exploration of the Agent-Structure Problematique in International Relations Theory,' in *European Journal of International Relations Theory, 3:3,* pp.365-392

[12] Wight (2006), pp.206-7. In the post-colonial literature, this is a more or less standard disaggregation of agency. Simone Bignall identifies three attributes of an agent: desiring (the condition of causality), potency (the condition of capacity), and a reflexive attribute (the condition of directedness). There is sufficient overlap between each tripartite parsing to suggest consensus about some of the components that an agent must comprise. Bignall (2010), p.32

in a social world.[13] Thus: agency manifests as socially-embodied subjectivity. A useful way of thinking about this in a more explicitly International Relations context is in terms of the intrinsic capacities Alexander Wendt says any agent possesses: 1) to have a theoretical understanding (however inaccurate) of its activities, in the sense that it could provide reasons for its actions; 2) to reflexively monitor and potentially adapt its actions; and 3) to make decisions.[14]

Generally, though, I prefer Wight to Wendt for two reasons. First, Wendt stumbles into problematic territory by proceeding to formulate a *structural* theory of international politics in which identities and norms constitute the range of possibilities of the agent. He leans towards social determinism. As Patrick Thaddeus Jackson points out, if agents are acting on the basis of internalised norms they are mere ciphers, 'blind carriers of objectively existing social or cultural forces, unable to exercise any independent causal influence over the course of events.'[15] Great or smaller powers are agents without agency. This can't be right. In fact, it suggests that Wendt's ambitious task is unsuccessful. He purports to solve the agent-structure 'problem' – that is, the claim that we have no means of effectively theorising the relationship between agents and structures. He argues persuasively that IR theories give ontological priority (prior-ness) to either agent or structure, and proposes structuration theory as a 'solution.'[16] Structuration theory sees agents and structures in 'dialectical synthesis' such that neither is subordinated the other. However, it is not clear to me that this does anything other than make both elements 'ontologically primitive' and untheorized.

My second reason for preferring Wight's model of agency is convenience. Wendt's ambition sets his ideas about agency and structure in competition with neorealism's ontological

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[13] Wight (2006), p.211 ff. Wight also draws on the work of Margaret Archer in making his argument.

[14] Alexander Wendt (1987), 'The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations' in *International Organization, 41:3,* p.359. Wendt refers to 'behaviour' rather than 'actions.' I do not distinguish between the two terms in this thesis.

[15] Patrick Thaddeus Jackson (2004), 'Hegel's House, or "People are states too,' in *Review of International Studies, 30:2*, p.285

[16] Wendt (1987), pp.355-361

commitments. He argues that neorealism makes agents 'ontologically primitive,' by which he means that agents are crudely assumed (untheorised) before theorising structure, and sees this as something in need of correction. However, since I see neorealism as a possible explanation to my research problem, I would risk 'throwing the baby out with the bathwater' were I to adopt much of Wendt's perspective. I do, mind, accept Wendt's claim, shared by most social constructivists, that agent and structure are 'co-determined.' I do not think that this proposition is incompatible with neorealism or neoclassical realism, and this point will be picked up in Section 2.2.3. below. As one part of this co-determination, or 'mutual constitution,' state agency derives from the international system, and states are in some sense literally agents (because they are *self*-interested, 'states are people too'[17]). But how this happens remains vague. My interest in agency means that I only need concern myself with how structures determine agents, and I suggest they do so by inflecting human individuals. In this regard, Wight is helpful.

In Wight's formulation, derived from Bhaskar, human individuals perform roles in enduring structures ('positioned-practice places') simultaneously at different levels of analysis.[18] Let us consider the president of Belarus, Aliaksandr Lukashenka. At one level of analysis, Lukashenka is a father, and this role structures (or enables and constrains) certain kinds of agential actions in respect of his three sons, but grants no special agency in respect of typical fellow Belarusian citizens. At the domestic level of analysis, Lukashenka is a political leader, which structures certain and different kinds of action both from and towards him by Belarusian citizens, including his three sons who are now undifferentiated from Belarusian citizens. At the international level of analysis, he is both a head of state and a head of government, which structures a further set of actions that would not otherwise be possible. The same actor in each

[17] Alexander Wendt (1999), *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge), p.215

[18] Wight (2006), pp.212-215. Also: Colin Wight (1999), 'They Shoot Dead Horses Don't They: Locating Agency in the Agent-Structure Problematique' in *European Journal of International Relations, 5:1,* pp.109-142

of these positions is inflected such that he becomes an agent. For my overall theoretical framework, the means in which agents constitute, and arguably inflect, structure is untheorised.

It is by occupying positioned-practice places that individuals are socially-embodied internationally. This conception sidesteps liberal analysts' tendency to treat international actors as mere collections of individuals. It does so by recognising that these individuals' positioned-practice place transforms them. This formulation also avoids the modern realist tendency to either personify or reify the state. Although I will persistently resort to statements of the kind 'State A intended such-and-such an outcome,' it must be kept in mind that this is merely for convenience's sake, and that behind such statements are various actors occupying positioned-practice places. In other words, the smaller power is a subject 'capable of reflecting upon, and constantly renegotiating, the forces of [its] construction.'[19]

2.2. Agency and International Relations theory

I have now established a basis for analysing a smaller power's agency. I have argued that for liberals agency derives bottom-up from groups of human individuals, whereas for modern realists agency derives top-down from a smaller power's position in the international system. In both cases, agency finds its social embodiment in inflected, reflexive individuals that hold various posts as representatives of their states in international politics. What matters for agency is the subjectivity of these positioned actors; an issue that neorealism, neoclassical realism, and social constructivism might potentially address by drawing on different theoretical precepts. Keeping this in mind, I turn more fully to the theoretical framework that will be used in the three empirical chapters (Chapters 4, 5 and 6).

[19] Wight (2006), p.210. cf. Alexander Wendt (1992), 'Anarchy is what states make of it: The social constriction of power politics' in *International Organization, 46:2*, pp.391-425

2.2.1. Waltzian neorealism and alliance politics

The realist tradition comprises diverse and contradictory theories. In the previous section, I marked off what I termed modern realism from classical realism. Both Waltzian neorealism, the concern of this section, and neoclassical realism, the concern of the next section, are forms of modern realism. This distinction is helpful for a discussion of agency, but generally it should be borne in mind that the realist tradition coalesces around a number of shared beliefs about the world.[20] First, the scope condition for realist theories is anarchy. In this setting, actors cannot be sure how others will act, and this uncertainty under conditions of anarchy takes on the character of a causal force for realist theories. However, as I pointed out in Section 1.1 above, this scope condition seldom obtains in the real world, and this presents a fundamental challenge for realists' ideas. Secondly, realists assume that politics is the domain of self-interested units, and in contemporary politics these units are states. Thirdly, where these self-interested units' preferences diverge, then it is assumed that power determines outcomes. In Thucydides' hackneyed articulation, 'the powerful exact what they can, while the weak yield what they must.' Finally, realism asserts that politics happens between groups.

*Neo*realism is first and foremost a structural theory. It seeks to explain outcomes at the level of the international system, contending that the system's structure 'shapes and shoves' the actions of its constituent units.[21] The crucial detail here, and the first relevant observation for my analysis of agency through the lens of neorealism, is that the system does not determine its units' actions. This is in keeping with Waltz's ideas about what a theory is and what a theory does. For Waltz, a theory does not define the relations between variables, rather it refers to a set of

[20] The remainder of this paragraph is based on William C. Wohlforth (2008b), 'Realism and foreign policy' in Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield, and Timothy Dunne (eds.), *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases* (Oxford), pp.31-48. See also: William C. Wohlforth (2008a), 'Realism' in Christian Reus-Smith, and Duncan Snidal (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (Oxford), pp.131-149

[21] Kenneth N. Waltz (2000), 'Structural Realism After the Cold War' in *International Security, 25:1,* p.24

statements that explain the relations between those variables.[22] If the international system is not determinant, then space is potentially left for agency of the units. Moreover, Waltz claims that all structures that are parts of the whole 'work to keep [systemic] outcomes within narrow ranges,' which establishes that he thinks the constituent units are agents (agents *of* the system).[23] This yields a mechanistic conception of the balance of power; international relations kept in equilibrium by unseen forces.

This implies the second relevant observation about Waltz's theory: the system is described in terms of its agents' properties, such as their power and interests.[24] The independent variables of systemic theorising might be polarity, or relative power distribution, but these cannot exist without measuring properties of the constituent units. For the units to have interests, such as maintaining a balance of power, implies subjectivity. In fact, the system must be a social system since it is described in terms of the relationship between the units; their absolute properties *in isolation* are insignificant. As Bhaskar observes, 'social structures … do not exist independently of the agents' conceptions of what they are doing in their activity.'[25] I said that agents were purposeful, and the groupism assumption of realism, combined with the fact that the international system as it is today comprises state units, tells us that the goal of the agents in world politics is state survival.[26] Generally, as neorealism's classical realist ancestors recognised, certain factors facilitate a smaller power's survival: 1) an ongoing balance of power in the

[22] Waltz (1979). He illustrates this with the example of pushing a cart. One can establish a formal law concerning the push and the consequent movement, but the theory that explains it might be Aristotelian or Newtonian. It's important to recognise, mind, that Waltz fails repeatedly to live up to his own criteria. As Adam Humphreys says, 'There is … a disjunction between what he says and what he does.' See: Adam R. C. Humphreys (2012), 'Another Waltz? Methodological Rhetoric and Practice in "Theory of International Politics"' in *International Relations, 26:4,* pp.389-408

[23] Waltz (1979), p.73

[24] Wendt (1987), p.343

[25] Cited in Wendt (1987), p.359

[26] According to David A. Lake: 'In realist theories the national interest is assumed to be state power, and in neorealist theories it is assumed to be state survival, at a minimum, or power, at a maximum. Survival is understood as a primordial goal that is necessary for the pursuit of all other political ends.' David A. Lake (2008), 'The State and International Relations' in Christian Reus-Smith, and Duncan Snidal (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (Oxford), p.43

international system; 2) the protection of a patron; 3) the smaller powers' lack of attraction to other powers' ambitions.[27]

I have established not only that there is space for agency, but also that the system must be a social structure in which the agents have subjective awareness. Nonetheless the causal factors in any neorealist theory must be ones that can be attributed to the system level. To put it another way, the organisation of the units in relation to each other in the system bears independent effects. Domestic-level variables cannot have significant independent or causal effect, or else the precepts of neorealism will have been violated. This means that while agents' perceptions matter, the agent must be treated in a unitary fashion. Though a given state may have multiple positioned-practice actors, in this case there is an analytical assumption of cohesion. I will return to this with illustrative examples in Section 2.2.2.

For Waltz, in the first instance this potential for agency related to great powers. As he wrote, 'a state that is stronger than any other can decide for itself whether to conform its policies to structural pressures and whether to avail itself of the opportunities that structural change offers.'[28] Yet he did concede that smaller powers are not without certain choices either. Describing the bipolar Cold War system, he claimed that great power leaders were 'free to set policy without acceding to the wishes of lesser alliance members' and that '[b]y the same logic, the latter are free not to follow the policy that has been set. … [T]hey enjoy the freedom of the irresponsible since their security is mainly provided by the efforts that others make.'[29] The conflation between 'states,' which decide, and 'leaders,' who set policy, is justifiable in light of my exposition of agency. The claim is that both great powers and lesser alliance members are 'free to set policy,' though, seems an unforgivable violation of the power politics assumption.

[27] Morgenthau (1960, [1948]), p.170
[28] Waltz (2000), p.24
[29] Waltz (1979), pp.184-185

This is too quick. Waltz has skipped over the basic agential choice facing all systemic units. Waltz and his followers assume that the major action units take to maintain equilibrium and to survive is form alliances. This cannot be described as an argument since it derives from an assumed groupism, but arguments and hypothesis can be made in respect of how and when the units choose their allies. While the predictions the theory makes are indeterminant, from the perspective of smaller powers there is a choice between balancing and bandwagoning. Although Waltz did not give any attention to smaller powers, they must be granted this agential choice. Waltz argued that his theory is falsifiable because one can look for cases of states allying or not allying in accordance with the theory despite prevailing other theoretical reasons not to do so.[30] Stephen Walt's work on the formation of alliances provides guidance about what these theoretical reasons might be. He establishes some hypotheses that determine the likelihood of a smaller power balancing or bandwagoning in response to shifts in relative power within the system. Although there is a general tendency for the units in the system to balance against a threat, Walt qualifies this by saying that 'the stronger the state the more likely it is to balance.' As a corollary of this, he argues that weaker states 'are more vulnerable to pressure and can do little to determine their own fates.'[31] Thus, *smaller powers typically bandwagon*.[32]

Waltz's reference to the 'freedom of the irresponsible' soon breaks down. Most realists concur that smaller powers are especially 'vulnerable' and 'sensitive' to the actions of the larger powers, and therefore usually argue that a whole range of non-military problems will be dominated by their security implications. In their critique of neorealism, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye write: 'The overall structure [of power] explanation assumes that power, like water, will find a common level: discrepancies between which states are dominant on one issue and

[30] Waltz (1979), p.125

[31] Walt (1987), p.173

[32] Walt (1987), pp.32-33. It is important to recognise that Walt and Waltz differ in their understanding of what the units are either balancing against or bandwagoning with. For Waltz what matters is power, whereas for Walt what matters the most is threat (although he did concede that the Cold War superpowers balanced against power). In so far as threat is partly a perception of others' power, this reiterates my claim that the operationalisation of neorealism as foreign policy means turning to subjective aspects.

which [states] predominate on others will be eliminated in important cases by linkages drawn by powerful states through the use or threat of force.'[33] As I will demonstrate in Chapter 3, the issue areas selected for analysis in chapters 4 and 5 are exactly these kinds of issues and, in the absence of consent, and assuming the precepts of neorealist analysis are valid, then a regional hierarchy will be created by coercion. In fact, the constraints imposed through the larger powers expectation of policy coordination are not the sole risk to the smaller power of allying. At the same time, the smaller power forecloses its options of dealings with other states, while as well it increases the likelihood of counter-alliances forming or expanding.[34] Taken together, these observations mean that once the smaller power has elected its alliance partners, it cannot be expected to have any extensive agency. Hence, once Belarus has decided to 'bandwagon' with Russia (or: 'balance' with Russia against the NATO alliance), then this has effects in a range of different spheres.

Moreover, the literature on alliance politics provides additional, germane ideas. There are threat situations in which the smaller power might strive to wield agency in an asymmetrical alliance with a regional power. In particular, Michael Mandelbaum coined the phrase 'alliance security dilemma' to describe the constant pay-off between security and autonomy that an alliance partner faces; this is especially acute for a smaller power in an asymmetrical alliance.[35] The dilemma is encapsulated by the contradiction arising from the risk of abandonment (loss of security), on the one hand, and the risk of entrapment (loss of autonomy), on the other. By abandonment I mean the risk that the regional power will abandon the smaller power in the latter's time of need, and this will become acute when the smaller power perceives threats against itself.[36] To guard against this the smaller power can be expected to assert its loyalty and

[33] Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye Jr. (2012, [1977]), *Power and Interdependence* (Boston MA), p.42. As mentioned in Chapter 1, vulnerability and sensitivity are variables used in Keohane and Nye's analysis (see Chapter 1, footnote 6).

[34] Glenn H. Snyder (2007, [1997]), *Alliance Politics* (Ithaca NY), p.44

[35] Cited in Snyder (2007, [1997]), p.180 ff.

[36] Snyder (2007, [1997]), pp.183-184

increase its commitments. However, as Walt observes, when an ally is confident about support from its allies it perceives opportunities to 'free ride.'[37] By entrapment I mean the risk of being dragged into a war by one's alliance commitments; for example, the United States' commitments to Taiwan could entrap it into a war with China. This will become acute when the smaller power perceives either threats against its ally or aggressive actions by its ally. To guard against this a state decreases its commitments, and may even threaten to defect from the alliance. This gives a within-alliance echo to Walt's guiding notion that aggression encourages units to balance against the aggressor.[38]

Although alliance politics is not identical with neorealism, it is a helpful literature to draw on in order to advance the basic insight neorealism gives us without betraying the latter's core assumptions. It reveals the reasons that the small power may distrust its great power ally, although the smaller power's agency is constrained to such an extent that it cannot pursue a foreign policy that changes anything at the system-level. If a smaller power's intractability in its relations with its great power ally can be comprehensively explained by considering fears of abandonment and entrapment, then I would accept that neorealism is a sufficient explanation of the smaller power's agency. Fear, naturally, must be subjectively perceived by certain individuals in positioned-practice places if it is to affect foreign policy. Yet the smaller power's response is treated as a unitary one.[39] In this case prising open the black box of decision-making would not disclose anything significant not already inferable, and it is doubtful that neoclassical realist or social constructivist theories could provide any added value.

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[37] Walt (1987), p.33

[38] Walt (1987), p.33

[39] Victor Cha equates abandonment and entrapment with neoclassical realism. He claims that the 'privileging of unit-level perceptions of objective external conditions … as causal determinants' makes for neoclassical realism. This is insufficient to pass my test, since I argue that all neorealists smuggle perceptions into their theories. Victor D. Cha (2000), 'Abandonment, Entrapment, and Neoclassical Realism in Asia: the United States, Japan, and Korea' in *International Studies Quarterly, 44:2,* p.263

This basic policy-making on the basis of fears of abandonment and entrapment reflects the highly circumscribed subjectivity of the smaller power. In respect of my primary case, there is preliminary evidence that suggests fears of entrapment do feature in the elite's thinking. A minor controversy flared up in 2015 when Russia announced its intentions to establish a new military airbase on Belarusian soil, plans that Belarus appears to have thwarted. During a time of heightened tensions between Russia and NATO this Belarusian position is fully explicable as an effort to avoid entrapment. President Lukashenka's public assertion that Belarusian military forces will not be deployed outside of Belarusian territory also speaks to the same fear, despite its blatant contradiction of Article 4 of the Collective Security Treaty which establishes collective defence commitments (and refers explicitly to military assistance).[40] Likewise, Belarus's reluctance to unequivocally support Russia in its dispute with Turkey following the shooting down of a Russian fighter jet in 2015 may well have reflected a caution against emboldening Russia to aggressive acts against Turkey. The smaller power wields its agency in these situations as a matter of alliance management.

Finally, a small number of alternative foreign policies can be pursued without violating the basic neorealist worldview. Paul Schroeder challenged the notion that the units in the system either balance or bandwagon, finding that unit actors often protected their perceived national interests via alternative policies.[41] One policy option was to 'hide' from a threat, which might mean declaring neutrality.[42] Another policy option was to 'transcend,' which meant striving to

[40] Collective Security Treaty Organisation (2010, [1992]), Dogovor o kollektivnoi bezopasnosti [Treaty about collective security]

[41] Paul Schroeder (1994), 'Historical Reality vs. Neo-realist Theory' in *International Security, 19:1,* pp.108-148

[42] This requires qualification. It is widely accepted that neutrality depends on the agreement of the major powers in the system. As Geoffrey Blainey writes in the conclusion of this 1973 volume on war: 'Sweden and Switzerland, for instance, have remained neutral for more than a century and a half not only because they chose neutrality but because warring nations permitted them to be neutral.' After the Napoleonic Wars it served outside powers' interests to have Switzerland as a mountainous buffer separating them. However, it has been argued that during the Cold War bipolarity facilitated neutrality because the two superpowers alone maintained stability; as Hedley Bull explains, the defection of a smaller power hardly affected the overall balance of power. Geoffrey Blainey (1973), *The Causes of War*

surmount the problem either through resolving the problem or taking extensive actions to prevent its repetition. Similarly, a policy of 'specialisation' may serve to protect a power by convincing other powers that it is in their interest not to violate sovereignty. A further policy option was to 'exploit' the threat for one's own ends.[43] This last possibility was not lost on Walt, who recognised that 'weaker powers have profited by encouraging competition between the superpowers.'[44]

To summarise:

1. Smaller powers will typically bandwagon with the greatest threat
2. Non-military problems will be dominated by their security implications, such that the smaller power will be coerced to act in line with a great power ally's expectations (i.e. there are few situations in which the former wields agency)
3. The smaller power will purposefully seek to avoid risks of abandonment and entrapment by an ally

2.2.2. Neoclassical realism

Neorealism's structural emphasis limits its prescriptions about agents and agency. In contrast with neorealism, neoclassical realism strives to explain probable foreign policy outcomes, and eschews claims about the systemic consequences of powers' agency. Its proponents think that domestic-level variables act as a 'transmission belt' across, or 'filter' through, which system-level pressures are moderated.[45] Although the international system is privileged as the factor that establishes the boundaries of what agency is possible, domestic-level

(Basingstoke), p.245; Hedley Bull (2002, [1977]), *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York NY), p.196

[43] Schroeder (1994), p.118 (footnote 27). There is some overlap between these policies.

[44] Walt (1987), p.156

[45] On this point generally see: Norrin M. Ripsman (2009), 'Neoclassical realism and domestic interest groups' in Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (eds.), *Neoclassical Realism, the State and Foreign Policy* (Cambridge), pp.170-193

variables shape how that agency is exercised. Thus, the international system's 'shaping and shoving' explains a smaller extent of its units' behaviour. Instead of emphasising uncertainty under conditions of anarchy as 'a causal force,' it is portrayed as 'a permissive condition.'[46] This suggests agential possibilities for the units. This section elucidates the distinction between the neorealist and neoclassical realist readings of international relations, and then teases out the implications for where a smaller power might be expected to wield agency. In short, I argue that neoclassical realism advances two propositions: differentiation *between* systemic units provokes a subjective (agential) response, and differentiation *within* a given unit prospectively contributes to that unit's agency.

The crux of the distinction is reducible to whether powers are treated as unitary actors. There are two senses in which units are unitary: either in the sense that they are single entities, or in the sense that they are internally cohesive. Neorealists conventionally treat powers as unitary actors in both meanings of the term, even in cases where they introduce intervening variables to explain foreign policy, whereas neoclassical realists do otherwise. For neorealists, this unitary actor assumption combines with the tendency to treat the system as one comprising *like units*, units that respond in similar ways to similar pressures. The demarcation from neoclassical realism is best brought out by providing some illustrations.

Stephen Walt's *The Origins of Alliances*, and a seminal article by Thomas Christensen and Jack Snyder reveal the neorealist position. For Walt, the intervening variable was the perception of threat, and he theorised that states' alliance behaviour, with the partial exception of the superpowers, was best understood as a response to threat (and not to power directly as Waltz argues). Threat is subjectively perceived as a function of aggregate power, geographic proximity,

[46] Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (2009), 'Introduction: Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy' in Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro (eds.), op. cit, p.7. According to the cited text, it is this treatment of anarchy as 'a permissive condition' that links neoclassical realism to classical realism.

offensive power, and offensive intentions.[47] When Walt tests his hypothesis that balancing is more common than bandwagoning, he looks at 'the relative importance' of these four factors, which he calls 'the sources of threat.'[48] Despite bringing subjective aspects of statehood squarely into his theory, Walt does not flout the unitary actor assumption. None of his four sources of threat requires any deep investigation of the domestic politics of the state perceiving the threat. Although he says that he will consider elite perceptions 'where available,' this does not reflect any analytical interest on his part in differentiation among the elite's perceptions. The actor is unitary both in the sense that it is a single entity and that it is internally cohesive.

Thomas Christensen and Jack Snyder argue that perception of whether offence or defence holds the advantage determines state actions.[49] In both cases, powers may or may not perceive the balance of power/threat correctly, which may result in 'under-balancing' or 'hyper-balancing.' In the former case, states 'buck-pass' and fail to form an alliance when the balance of power demands it. In the latter case, states are ostensibly tilting at windmills: they form a chain-gang, which essentially amounts to an unnecessary entrapment problem. In effect, both 'under-balancing' and 'hyper-balancing' mean that any power, whether great or small, might not conform to the expectations of Waltz's theory because they make policy errors.[50] Again, the explanation does not require opening the black box of the state, which remains unitary and internally undifferentiated. In both of these widely-read neorealist expositions of alliance formation, the focus on perception tacitly recognises the post-colonial claim that agency is characterised by subjectivity: perceptions do not exist outside of the subject. For the individual,

[47] Walt (1987), pp.21-24

[48] Walt (1987), p.148

[49] Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder (1990), 'Chain gangs and passed bucks: predicting alliance patterns in multipolarity' in *International Organization, 44:2,* pp.137-168

[50] cf. John Mearsheimer's characterisation of defensive realists' explanations: '[S]tates ultimately would have been more secure if they had concentrated on maintaining the balance of power, not attempted to alter it by force. This self-defeating behaviour … cannot be explained by strategic logic but must instead be the result of misguided policies pushed by selfish interest groups on the home front.' (2014, [2003]), *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York NY and London), p.171, p.210

perceptions are a cognitive process fraught with all kinds of problems.[51] In both works discussed, perceptions are introduced because their authors recognise that while systemic pressures inflect subjects, they do not entirely determine the actions of the units.

Neoclassical realists do not usually share neorealists' interpretation of the unitary actor assumption. Recognising that foreign policies in the short-term are seldom 'objectively efficient or predictable based upon a purely systemic analysis,' neoclassical realists devote greater attention to the unit-level.[52] The first proposition that comes to light is that differentiation *between* the units matters, with the consequence that units respond in different ways to similar pressures. For instance, unlike neorealists' analysis of alliances, where interests were not differentiated between units, neoclassical realists might think that the units enter alliances for different reasons, and that they pursue different solutions to systemic problems.[53] Indeed, alliance formation may have little to do with responding to power/threats, and a smaller power may ally because it sees an opportunity to share in the spoils of another's actions.[54]

Following Randall Schweller, I suggest that regime/government vulnerability is a significant intervening variable.[55] This taps into the more broadly recognised issue of 'regime security,' which is especially salient for weak or fragile states.[56] The incumbent political regime's

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[51] Robert Jervis (1976), *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton NJ), discusses the impact of evoked sets and how actors deal with cognitive dissonance; Yuen Foong Khong (1992), *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton NJ), analyses the pitfalls of analogical reasoning.

[52] Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman (2009), p.4

[53] Randall L. Schweller (1998), *Deadly Imbalances: Tripolarity and Hitler's Strategy of World Conquest* (New York NY), pp.60-61

[54] Randall L. Schweller (1994), 'Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In,' in *International Security, 19:1,* p.88 ff.

[55] Randall L. Schweller (2006), *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton NJ and Oxford)

[56] Note that 'weak' here refers to the resilience of domestic institutions, and does not refer directly to capabilities in the international arena. There is no necessary correlation between weak or fragile states and smaller powers in world politics, but generally great powers require strong domestic institutions. This is the subject of Fareed Zakaria's study of the United States, where he seeks to demonstrate how weaker domestic institutions hampered the rising power (in terms of aggregate capabilities) from developing an internationalist foreign policy despite its tremendous wealth. Fareed Zakaria (1998), *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton NJ)

confidence that it will retain power remodels its (agential) perception of itself, and affects how it acts, as a single entity, in international relations. This is the case irrespective of whether the challenge to its power comes from external threats or internal ones, such as from the military, other political parties, or social movements.[57] Those occupying the relevant positioned-practice places perceive their situation and formulate their intentions in ways that cannot be attributed to the system alone. Thus, if regime vulnerability is an explanatory variable, then it is one that cannot be explained through neorealist precepts. Instead it depends on domestic perceptions of the regime's legitimacy (accountability), as well as the coercive grip the regime might hold over society.[58]

Leaders of institutionally weaker states often seek to compensate with strong government. The two-level game these agents are playing has been captured in Steven David's theory of 'omnibalancing.' He developed this in respect of 'third world' states, although for my purposes I can replace 'third world' with 'smaller power' without losing anything theoretically critical. This idea once again recognises that state leaders face threats at both the domestic and international levels, and argues that 'the most powerful determinant of Third World alignment behaviour is the rational calculation of Third World leaders as to which outside power is most likely to do what is necessary to keep them in power.'[59] Foreign policy actors in positioned-practice places are balancing against threats at both levels, but it is the domestic threat that David thinks paramount in weaker states, and this arguably inflects the actions of the units in the system.

Another proposition that comes to light is that differentiation *within* the units matters. The units may act as a single entity in world politics, but the agency wielded is partly a

[57] Schweller (2006), p.49 ff.

[58] Schweller (2006), pp.49-50

[59] Steven R. David (1991), 'Explaining Third World Alignment' in *World Politics, 43:2,* p.235; cf. Mohammed Ayoob (1989), 'The Third World in the System of States: Acute Schizophrenia or Growing Pains?' in *International Studies Quarterly, 33:1,* pp.67-79

consequence of the degree of internal consensus and cohesion.[60] Consensus refers to an issue-specific situation, whereas elite and social cohesion refers to the degree of persistent fragmentation and division.[61] The fact that any unit in the system comprises multiple individuals in positioned-practice places appears highly significant. Steven Lobell describes the foreign policy elite as 'Janus-faced' because it lies at the intersection between the domestic and international, and acts with an eye on both realms.[62] Each of a smaller power's individual actors possesses the capacity to reflect on the state's position in international relations, and to understand the state's accountability and formulate its intentions less predictably than neorealism's unitary actor assumption implies.[63]

Neoclassical realism allows for significant divisions within the unit about prospective foreign policy. Threat perceptions will be 'complex.'[64] The efficiency of counter-balancing a threat reveals itself as a function of the degree of consensus among domestic actors, but also the cohesion of the elite. There are two distinct forces at work here. Elite cohesion enables the state to act as a single entity, but elite consensus, which 'concerns the degree of shared perception about some facts in the world as being problems,' also affects the agency of the actor.[65] Lobell argues that the greater the degree of cohesion, the more efficient the unit will comply with the balancing prediction spurred by systemic changes in the balance of power. However, I propose that for smaller powers (especially authoritarian ones) the degree of consensus affords the power

[60] I once again borrow intervening variables from Schweller (2006), p.54 ff.

[61] Schweller (2006), pp.54-56

[62] Steven E. Lobell (2009), 'Threat assessment, the state, and foreign policy: a neoclassical realist model,' in Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro (eds.), op.cit., p.43;

[63] There are possibilities here for neoclassical realism to salvage work done at the individual level of analysis. First, decision-makers possess different personalities, something recognised in typologies found in the foreign policy analysis literature. Secondly, each individual actor will possess different priorities and experiences, which, often unconsciously, informs their interpretation of a given problem and evaluation of prospective solutions. Andrey Tsygankov suggests that foreign policy can be evaluated through decision-makers' positions on four criteria: security, wealth, autonomy, and identity. See: Richard C. Snyder, H.W. Bruck, and Burton M. Sapin (2002, [1962]), *Foreign Policy Decision-Making (Revisited)* (Basingstoke), pp.138-139; Andrei P. Tsygankov (2010, [2006]), *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (Oxford), p.24

[64] Lobell (2009), pp.42-70

[65] Schweller (2006), p.47

agency. Counter-intuitively, I posit that lower consensus among the elite allows the smaller power to wield wider agency; the more likely the state is to obtain its foreign policy preference. In making this argument, I point out that internally cohesive units can deploy lack of consensus strategically to engage external actors. For great powers this is not especially significant, since I reasonably expect aggregate power to be determinant, whereas for smaller powers differentiated domestic positions allow leverage with external states by keeping diplomatic channels open. The external actor engages with dissenting voices, rather than resorting to hard power options. Although the level of analysis is different, Kalypso Nicolaidis and Gjovalin Macaj argue similarly that the EU's 'strategic disunity' on the question of Kosovo's independence afforded it 'diplomatic clout' with Serbia and Russia that it would not otherwise have had.[66]

One possible consequence is that the smaller power may try to both balance and bandwagon at the same time according, say, to issue area, because its complex perception of threats is more discriminating. This can be termed 'hedging,' which 'refers to taking action to ensure against undesirable outcomes, usually by betting on multiple alternative positions.'[67] Describing hedging in Southeast Asia, Evelyn Goh writes: 'hedging is a set of strategies aimed at avoiding … a situation in which states cannot decide upon more straightforward alternatives such as balancing, bandwagoning, or neutrality. Instead they cultivate a middle position that forestalls or avoids having to choose one side at the obvious expense of another.'[68] Although Goh refers to 'a middle position,' I think the vital element of hedging is that it is an insurance policy; depending on the degree of risk perceived by the small power, the closer or farther it will position itself from key external powers. Although described as an alternative to balancing or bandwagoning, 'hedging' in fact involves elements of both, such that Goh writes of both 'deep engagement' with

[66] Gjovalin Macaj and Kalypso Nicolaidis (2014), 'Beyond "one voice"? Global Europe's engagement with its own diversity,' in *Journal of European Public Policy, 21:7,* pp.1078-1080

[67] Evelyn Goh (2007), 'Southeast Asian Perspectives on the China Challenge' in *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 30: 4-5*, pp.809-832

[68] Goh (2007), p.825

and 'soft balancing' against China.[69] Moreover, the states she has in mind – the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia – are militarily allied to the United States.[70] In this situation, the regional power ally will be less certain about the smaller power's commitments, and this will increase the smaller power's agency *vis-à-vis* the regional power. Hedging clearly represents a subjective (agential) response to the structural world in which the power finds itself, even if the scholars writing about the topic have not made a connection to a lack of elite consensus.

Neoclassical realism allows for a far wider range of intervening variables than I can possibly indicate here. Nor can I consider the full range of possible variables during my analysis. There are a couple of additional variables that might be worth considering in the case of new powers in the international system: the level of political culture, and the strength of domestic institutions.[71] Since two of the empirical chapters analyse Belarus's foreign policy, I very succinctly address these two variables with regard to the Belarusian political system. First, the political culture in Belarus is underdeveloped in the sense that public opinion surveys show disengagement between the population and the leadership, and society seldom participates in political processes.[72] Indeed, the political system and its policy-making processes are highly centralised and non-transparent, and works against the development of a political culture. It is better to view the political system as a mechanism for rent extraction in the elite's relations with Russia.[73]

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[69] Goh (2007), p.825

[70] Goh (2007), p.813. On these states' alignment see: Yuen Foong Khong (2014), 'Foreign Policy Analysis and the International Relations of Asia' in Saadia Pekkanen, John Ravenhill, and Rosemary Foot (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the International Relations of Asia* (Oxford), p.89

[71] Samuel Finer provides definitions and distinguishes between mature, developed, low, and minimal political cultures in S. E. Finer (1976, [1962]), *The Man on Horseback: The Role of the Military in Politics* (Harmondsworth), pp.78-80. On Belarus, see also: Steven M. Eke and Taras Kuzio (2000), 'Sultanism in Eastern Europe: The Socio-Political Roots of Authoritarian Populism in Belarus' in *Europe-Asia Studies, 52:3,* pp.523-547

[72] Interviews, Minsk, 2016

[73] The best source on how Belarus's politics works is: Margarita M. Balmaceda (2014), *Living the High Life in Minsk: Russian Energy Rents, Domestic Populism, and Belarus's Impending Crisis* (Prague). Other studies on Belarus-Russia relations include: Alex Danilovich (2006), *Russian-Belarusian Integration: Playing Games Behind the Kremlin's Walls* (Aldershot); Katja Yafimava (2007), *Post-Soviet Russian-Belarusian Relationships: The Role of Gas Transit Pipelines* (Stuttgart). In Belarusian: Valer Bulhakaw (ed.) (2001),

In this respect, and secondly, the Belarusian political system is geared towards a specific and limited kind of agency. The most powerful 'institution' is not the presidency, but the office-holder: Lukashenka. Although the constitution provides for the separation of powers, this is highly misleading. The president is granted unspecified decree powers, and *de facto* operates with few safeguards or constraints. Neither the judiciary nor advocacy are independent since the President possesses the power to appoint and dismiss judges, and lawyers are required to belong to the state-controlled bar association. Although the bicameral parliament, the National Assembly, is constitutionally appointed as the legislature, the Presidential Administration wields its own duplicate legislative capabilities and functions outside of the parliament. Policy proposals and analysis come from the Presidential Administration's secretive Information and Analytical Centre, and not from parliamentary working groups. Alongside of the Presidential Administration, the most powerful institution is the Security Council, which operates as an adjunct of the Administration. This coordinates policy and relays it to the various ministries responsible for policy implementation, with the Council of Ministers playing a mediating role.

Across the political system it is the office-holders and not the institutions that largely carry the policy burden. It is noteworthy that a small number of individuals have rotated among the key posts for the whole period of Lukashenka's rule.[74] This suggests that informal rather than formal decision-making processes prevail at the top; lower down, the bureaucracy operates according to rules and habits. The security agencies, including the KGB, uphold this system, and Lukashenka uses the various agencies, as well as frequent personnel movements, to prevent any

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Belaruskaya palitychnaya sistema i prezydentskiya vybary 2001 hodu: analytychniye artikuly [The Belarusian Political System and the Presidential Elections 2001: Analytical Articles] (Minsk)

[74] On differentiation and change among the Belarusian elites see: Vitali Silitski (2004), 'Belarus: The Tsar and his Boyars' in *Transitions Online* (6 August 2004); Susanna Eskola (2009) 'Signs of Change in Belarus: Has the Countdown for Lukashenka begun?' *Defence Academy of the United Kingdom: Working Paper 2009/07* (Shrivenham); Grzegorz Gromadzki (2009) 'Belarusian Foreign Policy – Change or Continuity?' in Sabine Fischer (ed.) (2009), *Back From the Cold: Belarus and the EU in 2008,* European Union Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Paper No. 119 (Paris); Siarhai Bohdan (2013), *Who Rules Belarus?* Belarus Digest, Working Paper (London and Minsk)

faction forming against him.[75] The president's paranoia in this regard in part explains his emasculating institutions such as the parliament.[76] In Chapter 4, I will devote some attention to the parliamentary chambers' foreign affairs committees, but for now I reiterate the insignificant role of the parliament in decision-making. The parliament does not even have a meaningful role in budgetary approval, since the Presidential Administration almost certainly operates its own shadow budget, and the formal budget is published with few income and expense figures.[77] The various ministries are geared towards implementation, and do not contribute in an appreciable way to policy-making. One reasonable conclusion would be that the political system superficially imitates liberal democratic regimes as a claim for legitimacy.

In the aforesaid, I have used neoclassical realism to demonstrate the implications of differentiation of the systemic units for small power agency. The relevant weighting of domestic and international variables in explaining foreign policy remains a limitation of the neoclassical realist endeavour, as does the sense that the range of intervening variable make for something of a grab-bag at times. Notwithstanding this, and summing up:

1. Smaller powers will typically display elements of both balancing and bandwagoning (i.e. hedging) across different issue areas
2. Absence of elite consensus will facilitate this differentiated foreign policy (i.e. contribute to agency)
3. Domestic concerns (e.g. regime vulnerability) will significantly modify neorealism's predictions, such that the smaller power will purposefully seek to stem perceived future challenges

[75] Although a dated text, see: Kimitaka Matsuzato (2004), 'The Lukashenka Regime as an Exception Among CIS Countries' in *Europe-Asia Studies, 56:2,* pp.213-239

[76] For a summary of how Lukashenka consolidated power, see: Andrew Wilson (2011), *Belarus: The Last European Dictatorship* (New Haven CT), Chapters 9 and 10. A faction prospectively began to form against Lukashenka in 2002, see: Wilson (2011), p.201

[77] Wilson (2011), p.185; Ryhor Astapenia (2014), 'How the Belarusian Political System Works,' *Belarus Digest*. The 'unofficial' budget is sufficiently widely discussed that I assume it exists.

2.2.3. Social constructivism

Uncertainty in conditions of anarchy, according to neorealism, is a causal force. Anarchy, according to neoclassical realism, is a permissive condition. And for social constructivism? Anarchy, according to social constructivism, is 'what states make of it.'[78] Contrary to the first two readings of world politics, many social constructivists argue that there is no inescapable logic of anarchy: rather, agents generate an international structure and its contingent logic (and vice versa). The implications of this for agential possibilities are profound, and potentially unlimited – suddenly 'nothing is true and everything is permitted.'[79] Before exploring these agential implications, I will first dispel the notion of social constructivism's incommensurability with other readings of international relations that is met with occasionally.

In a widely-read book from the 1990s, Martin Hollis and Steve Smith argued that explaining and understanding were distinct exercises.[80] From this perspective, neorealism answers 'why' questions, whereas constructivism answers 'how' questions.[81] There were 'two stories' to tell about the problems encountered in international relations, and these stories could complement each other, but they should not be employed to answer a single question. Either the analyst is interested in an 'interpretive' account about the realm of the possible, or the analyst is interested in a description of causality. This portrayal of the literature unhelpfully divided scholars into two more or less hidebound camps. I am persuaded by Jennifer Sterling-Folker's argument that, on the contrary, these two readings of the world promise much 'ontological common ground.'[82] Enough, in fact, that one can use them to answer the same question, particularly in the light of the interpretivist methods I described in Section 1.4.

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[78] Wendt (1992), Wendt (1999), pp.246-312

[79] Attributed to the assassin Hassan-i Sabbah (e.g. in the works of William S. Burroughs)

[80] Martin Hollis and Steve Smith (1990), *Explaining and Understanding in International Relations* (Oxford). Note that the authors themselves cannot agree on major points! (See Chapter 9 of the book.)

[81] Martin Hollis and Steve Smith (1994), 'Two Stories About Structure and Agency' in *Review of International Studies, 20:3*, pp.241-251

[82] As well as Jennifer Sterling-Folker's argument for ontological convergence, James Fearon and Alexander Wendt give a solid rebuke of the Hollis-Smith argument. See: Sterling-Folker (2002); James

There are clear ontological and epistemological foundations for both the neorealist and neoclassical realist readings of international relations already elaborated. They adhere to what Patrick Jackson calls a 'neopositivist' research agenda in so far as their advocates: 1) accept a 'mind-world dualism' (the separation between the researcher and the world), and 2) maintain that the researcher can only know the world as it is observed ('phenomenalism').[83] As he explains:

> *'Mind-world dualism tells researchers to test hypotheses; phenomenalism tells researchers to seek indicators of causal relations in constant conjunctions of objects or factors or qualities, and not to go beyond the evidence of experience in seeking those indicators.'*[84]

In contrast, social constructivism comprises a far less coherent group of scholars, and it cannot be reduced to a single research agenda based on shared commitments about the world. Many social constructivists recognise that the ontological and epistemological commitments of neopositivism are far from unassailable. However, the 'light' form of social constructivism used in this thesis does not challenge the neopositivist foundational claims about ontology, and proceeds with interpretivist methods in the analysis.[85]

Social constructivists recognise that individual state actors, which in line with my depiction of agency means the diplomats and politicians occupying positioned-practice places, selectively process data to interpret the world in which they find themselves. Agents' responses to the world and consequent actions occur within the context of competition between groups,

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Fearon and Alexander Wendt (2002), 'Rationalism vs Constructivism: A Skeptical View' in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A. Simmons (eds.), *The Handbook of International Relations* (London), pp.52-72

[83] Patrick Thaddeus Jackson (2011), *The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations* (Abingdon), pp.32-40

[84] Jackson (2011), p.68

[85] There have been various typologies of constructivist scholarship. My use of the term in this thesis covers what Emanuel Adler calls 'modernist constructivism,' as well as 'modernist linguist constructivism,' but excludes what he describes as 'radical' and 'critical' constructivism. Emanuel Adler (2002), 'Constructivism and International Relations' in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A. Simmons (eds.), *Handbook of International Relations* (London), p.115-117. See also: Sterling-Folker (2002), p.73 fn.1, which places her article in John Gerard Ruggie's alternative typology.

whether that means groups of citizens (states) or groups of states (alliances). In this way, then, social constructivism shares much in common with realism, which adopts groupism as one of its core assumptions.[86] While my description of agency in Section 2.1. relied on social constructivist works, it does not necessarily follow that social constructivism has explanatory power in respect of smaller powers' foreign policies. What I argue in making it a strand of a three-pronged theoretical framework is that it prospectively makes a couple of contributions to the ensuing analysis that would not otherwise be possible.

The first contribution of social constructivism is that it expands the range of factors that potentially motivate actions. It is probably fair to say that *most* neorealists and neoclassical realists think that actors are by and large rational.[87] Few would dispute, though, that a range of non-rational factors may motivate people's actions. Nigel Gould-Davies, who served as British Ambassador to Belarus from September 2007 until autumn 2009, comments of that state's president, Aliaksandr Lukashenka: 'He has an almost animal instinct for the way power works.'[88] Then, referring to the elite more generally, Gould-Davies's suggests that 'the reflexes and the ruling mind in Belarus are more strongly influenced by Soviet patterns and habits and modes of thinking about power and how you use it to achieve [ends] than most of the [other] parts of the Soviet Union.' If this view is correct, it clearly points to the kind of motivating factors that neorealism or neoclassical realism typically overlook.

Max Weber identified four kinds of social action that allow the analyst to move beyond the rational actor assumption: rational (technical), normative (value-oriented), affective (emotional), and traditional (habitual). Together these kinds of social action allow for a range of different theoretical approaches, and social constructivist scholarship leads the way in considering the role of norms, practice, and emotion in international relations. In this thesis, I

[86] This is a paraphrasing of Sterling-Folker's (2002) argument.

[87] William Wohlforth states that rationality is not an assumption of realism. Much realist writing though proceeds on a presumption of rational actors. Wohlforth (2008b), p.133 fn.6

[88] Interview, Oxford, 9 January 2017

focus especially on the explanatory power of norms, and I hope that my formulation of agency in respect of positioned-practice actors circumvents the Wendtian trap of generating 'agents without agency.'[89] I discount the effect of habits because a habitual action is relatively unintended, which defies the notion of agency I developed above.[90] Likewise, role and practice are largely subsumed into my definition of agency-as-subjectivity, and so are not afforded any explicit causal attention, rather I acknowledge them as assumptions.[91]

A norm is an internalised belief about appropriate action. Thus, a smaller power's foreign policy actions may be motivated by a 'logic of appropriateness' rather than a mere means-end calculation ('logic of consequences').[92] Admittedly norms may be used instrumentally by powers, and the analyst can only apply judgment as to whether a norm is deeply held.[93] Nevertheless, the conscious quality of a norm means that they are indirectly part of decision-making discussions; they leave a paper trail.[94] Since it would be implausible to think power does not matter at all in world politics, smaller powers may especially be deemed 'norm-takers' rather than 'norm-makers.'[95] In saying this, I do not mean to suggest smaller powers are never responsible for new norms: one example is the development of territorial limits for fishing, which were established by Latin American smaller powers against the wishes of the United States and, as I demonstrated at

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[89] See Section 2.1.

[90] Ted Hopf (2002), *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow 1955 and 1999* (Ithaca NY and London), p.10

[91] Role theory yields a large body of International Relations scholarship. In foreign policy analysis the earliest example I am aware of is: K. J. Holsti (1970), 'National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy' in *International Studies Quarterly, 14:3,* pp.233-309. Holsti described how states adopt roles such as 'faithful ally,' which would be germane to my analysis (pp.267-277). Likewise the so-called 'practice turn' continues to produce articles and books, such as Vincent Pouliot's recent analysis of how practices establish and maintain a global hierarchy. Vincent Pouliot (2016), *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy* (Cambridge).

[92] James G. March and Johan P. Olsen (1998), 'The Institutional Dynamics of International Political Orders' in *International Organization, 52:4,* pp.943-969

[93] For a discussion see: Jeffrey T. Checkel (2005), 'International Institutions and Socialization in Europe: Introduction and Framework' in *International Organization, 59:4,* pp.801-826

[94] Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink (1998), 'International Norm Dynamics and Political Change' in *International Organization, 52:4*, p.892

[95] Jeffrey T. Checkel (1999), 'Norms, Institutions and National Identity in Contemporary Europe' in *International Studies Quarterly, 43:1,* pp.84

the beginning of this text, were something Iceland fought hard to consolidate.[96] Norm-takers may be particularly resistant to compliance with global or local norms in cases they deem the norm-makers display behaviour in violation of those norms.[97] In this situation, the norm-taker is predicted to challenge the legitimacy of related norms more forcefully.[98] It is analytically helpful for this purpose to recognise the characteristics of a given norm, which might include a description of its domestic salience to the agent, its specificity and longevity, and whether or not it is applied and enforced equally among all units in the system.[99]

A second contribution of social constructivism is that it potentially explains a dynamic world. This differs from realism which, its critics argue, derives explanations by implausibly positing a static world. The theoretical prescriptions of both neorealism and neoclassical realism are statements about the permanent *being* of the world; the basic structures are immutable even if their parts move. In contrast, for constructivists the world is always *becoming* and *changing;* hence the constructivist reading of international relations purports to be a dynamic one.[100] It claims that how we reflect on the world collectively brings about change, and my analysis looks for how smaller powers' ideas about themselves and their place in the global order develops or otherwise mutates across time. However, social constructivism faces a different challenge: in presenting a world in constant flux, it fails to account for continuity as well as change. This adds a note of caution, and vindicates the use of neorealism and neoclassical realism as well as analytical insights from social constructivism.

As a rule of thumb, social constructivism intimates that social aspects of the world are preponderant over material ones. Whereas for neorealists the emphasis on brute power means that agency remains coupled with material resources, social constructivists emphasise how

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[96] Keohane and Nye (2012, [1977]), Chapter 5

[97] Rosemary Foot and Andrew Walter (2011), *China, The United States, and Global Order* (Cambridge), p.11

[98] Foot and Walter (2011), p.11

[99] Foot and Walter (2011), pp.12-15

[100] Adler (2002), p.95

norms, practices, and discourse constitute agential possibilities. Likewise, national interests are never assumed, rather they are constituted – again through norms, practices, and discourse. (Identity is also routinely invoked as a constituting variable, although I do not pursue identity as a line of inquiry in my analysis.[101]) What does this mean in practice? It means that a state defines its interests because of its subjective understanding: to adapt a highly gender-stereotyped example from Ted Hopf, a mother's decision to take her son to football practice and her daughter to ballet class is based on an understanding of interests derived from ideational or identity variables (and self-evidently socially constructed ones about gender roles), and not from material ones such as the actor's resource base and needs.[102]

For my purposes, though, my use of constructivism is relatively superficial. I treat norms and ideas as if they were independent variables. To summarise:

1. Smaller powers' foreign policy will be partly motivated by internalised norms and other non-rational factors
2. Smaller powers will challenge the legitimacy of certain norms, such as where the norm-makers do not comply with the norm, or where the domestic salience of the norm makes it highly inconvenient
3. This may embolden the smaller power to promote alternative norms

2.3. The argument

To reiterate, my argument, which I succinctly summarised in Chapter 1, is that smaller powers acquire meaningful agency through a social process of coming to understand the possibilities available to them. Let me anticipate two points of criticism. First, this is not merely a matter of definition: a tautology would take the form *x is x*, and not *x acquires y*. I have been

[101] e.g Hopf (2002), Tsygankov (2010, [2006])
[102] Hopf (2002), p.17

careful to distinguish between actors and agents, remarking that the latter's actions represent agency if they are intended and purposeful. It is actors that potentially become agents in the first instance, but my focus is on agency and not agents of themselves. Secondly, this is not a circular argument: I am not claiming that a smaller power has agency because it thinks it is an agent. That would be axiomatic. Thus, the distinction between subjectivity and agency needs to be teased out. As Vivienne Jabri explains, subjectivity 'is produced and constituted in and through … discourse and power, while [agency] emerges from this constitution, so that the enactment of agency … is indeed variously enabled and constrained by it.'[103] Following on from this distinction, I am arguing that agency ranges on a spectrum, and that agency increases *within limits* because of the flourishing reflexivity of the subject. What the analysis in the three empirical chapters will show is how differentiated opinions among the elites of smaller powers facilitated reflection and hence agency. The limits of agency may well be structurally or socially determined, and it is to that question that I now turn my attention.

[103] Vivienne Jabri (2014), 'Disarming norms: postcolonial agency and the constitution of the international' in *International Theory, 6:2,* p.375

Chapter 3: New states in the post-Soviet landscape

In the previous chapter, I defined agency as the capacity to act otherwise, and elaborated this in respect of subjectivity. I also outlined the three-pronged theoretical framework that will be used to evaluate smaller powers' agency in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. The purpose of this chapter is to specify the context for my case studies of smaller power agency. Whereas the previous chapter concerned itself with agency, this chapter concerns itself with structure. Since I am not aspiring to contribute anything new about structure, there is no need for me to dwell on what constitutes structure. However, I note briefly that, as with agency, scholars use the term equivocally. In the International Relations literature, 'structure' may refer to: 1) patterns of aggregate action by the units (states) that are stable over time; 2) law-like regularities governing those actions (*vid.* some variants of Waltzian neorealism); 3) collective rules and resources that govern states' actions; or, 4) relations of difference between units that constitute the properties of those units.[1] Whereas the previous chapter began to think about the new powers as *subjects* in international relations, this chapter primarily considers them as *objects* of international relations. The exception is the next section, which sketches the new smaller powers' historical experience of statehood.

The chapter proceeds as follows. I begin with a *tour d'horizon* of the new powers. Since history is usually deemed a formative experience, and one that is routinely appealed to by leaders during periods of state- and nation-building, even a cursory examination of the new sovereignties' pasts reveals potentially significant differences. Next, I concisely review the changes in the structural setting of world politics since the Cold War; the structural context in which the new republics emerged as prospective agents. I consider how the international system evolved through the period under study, and how the relevant external powers responded to the

[1] Colin Wight (2006), *Agents, Structures and International Relations: Politics as Ontology* (Cambridge), pp.127-177

appearance of new subjects within the previous Soviet borders. The growing power and capabilities of the West's favoured institutions that became standard-bearers of the post-1991 liberal global order impinged increasingly on the subjectivity of the new republics, and on Russia's threat agenda.[2] At the same time, I argue that, as its aggregate power increased, Russia strived ever more to revise elements of the international system that *de facto* obtained with the dissolution of the USSR. China also plays a significant role, especially in Central Asia. An understanding of this structural context is vital if one is to evaluate the scope of smaller powers' agency.

3.1. Excursus: The Soviet republics as historical subjects

The Belavezha Accords, signed on 8 December 1991 at a state dacha in the Belarusian forest near to the border with Poland, sealed the Soviet Union's fate. The leaders of the Byelorussian, Russian, and Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republics rejected the agreement that had created the USSR, the 1922 Union Treaty, and supplanted it with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).[3] One superpower dissolved into fifteen new powers spread across a wide stretch of Eurasia, and which varied in their resource bases and capabilities. One might argue that the moment of independence represented a *tabula rasa*, but in fact these states histories were diverse and this informed elite perceptions of their states as subjects. They therefore provide a mixed population of cases to be examined in Chapter 6. Notwithstanding the long national histories, all were partly or fully in the Russian Empire at the time of the Russian Revolution, and the dissolution of the empire in 1917 brought forth independence declarations

[2] I use 'the West' as a metonym for the proponents of a liberal democratic world order. It encompasses the United States, Canada, European Union member states (whether acting alone or in unison), and many other states where European culture predominates.

[3] I adopt standard English practice in referring to the independent state as Belarus, and using the historical Byelorussia to describe the Soviet federal republic. The independent state is formally known in English as the Republic of Belarus, and its official Russian name *as registered with all international bodies* is Respublika Belarus'. Only in Russia itself is the contemporary state routinely called Byelorussia; though in all Belarus-Russia bilateral official agreements the term Respublika Belarus' is used.

from many national groups. There is therefore an obvious if slapdash analogy between 1917 and 1991, although demarcation lines at the two dates did not in all cases correspond.

3.1.1. Belarus

There were only cosmetic reasons for Belarus to consider itself a subject in international relations in the pre-Soviet era, even if a rudimentary national consciousness had emerged at the end of the nineteenth century.[4] Unlike certain other Soviet republics, Belarus did not have a significant experience of statehood, although it had briefly existed as an independent polity in 1918. Since already in that era international relations were theorised as relations between states, it would be difficult to argue that people who did not comprise a state had a theoretical understanding of their actions. Moreover, the nationalist idea of a people and state being coextensive had scarcely been realised by Belarusians. Perhaps related to this absence of political autonomy, Belarusians did not have the richly-developed identity that, say, Armenians or Georgians did.

The Belarusian identity in so far as it existed can be seen as the consequence of Poland and Russia striving to prise the lands from each other. For example, it was Russian historians that promoted 'West-Russism' to persuade the people on the lands to the west of Russia that they were not Poles.[5] Perhaps it is ironic, therefore, that the main thrust of national consciousness came under 1920s' Soviet nationalities policy, which encouraged local languages and cultures. As is well known, this brief period was followed by repression and purge. Likewise, in the Republic of Poland, there was a campaign of Polonisation that affected the region bordering the Soviet Union that had, if only briefly, been a part of the independent Belarusian state. Vadim Gigin, a regime 'insider' and contemporary supporter of the West-Russism interpretation of Belarusian

[4] Timothy Snyder (2003), *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus 1569-1999* (New Haven CT), Chapter 2

[5] Andrew Wilson (2011), *Belarus: The Last Dictatorship in Europe* (New Haven CT), Chapter 5

history, argues that Poland continues to view Belarus as a legitimate part of its sphere of influence, and thinks many Poles are 'no less imperialistic than the Russians.'[6]

The Soviet period hardly granted Belarus agency though. While the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic (BSSR), and likewise the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, had seats on the United Nations General Assembly, which meant other states recognised that it had a right to vote on matters brought to the organisation, this did not represent any autonomy. While Byelorussia ostensibly possessed a capacity to monitor and adapt its behaviour, and was permitted under the Soviet constitution of 1944 to establish representation abroad,[7] really it lacked the capacity to make decisions. Instead the BSSR simply gave the USSR additional votes in the General Assembly. This was demonstrated early on, when the BSSR voted against the Uniting for Peace initiative (Resolution 377), which sought to empower the General Assembly on which it sat. It would seem reasonably to be in line with Byelorussia's interests, if it were autonomous, to have voted in favour of a resolution that would have purported to make its voice equal to all other members, including Russia's. In voting the way it did, the BSSR was simply backing the USSR's position, which was explicable in that the USSR preferred to wield its veto on the Security Council rather than defer to the General Assembly, which was the substance of Resolution 377's proposals. Indeed, I cannot find any instance of the BSSR voting differently from Russia.

3.1.2. The Baltic states

Although there were historical Estonian and Latvian socio-ethnic identities, Estonia and Latvia only existed as independent states for the short period between the two world wars.[8] Prior to this they fell entirely within the Russian Empire, having been annexed from Sweden after the

[6] Private discussion, Minsk, December 2016. Quoted with permission.
[7] James P. Nichol (1995), *Diplomacy in the Former Soviet Republics* (Westport CT), p.5
[8] For a comprehensive account of these states histories see: Anatol Lieven (1994, [1993]), *The Baltic Revolution: Estonia, Lativa, Lithuania and the Path to Independence* (New Haven CT)

Great Northern War of the early eighteenth century. They were then annexed to the Soviet Union at the end of the Second World War. Despite this short-lived statehood, it was sufficient for them to meet all three of the criteria for agency identified by Alexander Wendt: those acting in the name of the state had a theoretical understanding of their actions, and possessed the capacity to monitor and adapt actions, and to take decisions.[9] They were, though, very weak powers in the international system. Estonia was formally recognised by European states in the early 1920s, joined the League of Nations, and initially established trade relations with European powers. However, it suffered acutely during the Great Depression. Latvia's territory had lost a quarter of its population during the First World War, Russian war policy withdrew the bulk of industrial and agricultural equipment, and Latvia consciously opted against developing ties to lucrative German and Russian markets.[10] Independent Latvia's decision to prioritise business ties with the United Kingdom instead signalled its agency, but as with Estonia its economic situation left it hamstrung.

The third Baltic state, Lithuania, was the only one to have something akin to statehood in an earlier era. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania overshadows histories of the region from late mediaeval to early modern periods. However, in modern history, Lithuania's experience was similar to that of Estonia and Latvia. Being the largest of the three, and possessing a strategic asset in an ice-free port at Klaipėda, Lithuania naturally received great attention from external powers. According to one account, the Soviet Union felt threatened by a prospective alliance between Poland, Finland and the Baltic trio, and therefore sought to subvert domestic politics by supporting anti-Polish forces.[11] No doubt this was assisted by growing Lithuanian suspicions about Poland, which annexed Vilnius and its locale from Lithuania following the Zeligowski

[9] Alexander Wendt (1987), 'The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations' in *International Organization, 41:3,* p.359

[10] Gundar J. King and David E. McNabb (2014), 'Crossroads Dynamics in Foreign Policy: The Case of Latvia' in *Problems of Post-Communism, 56:3,* p.31

[11] Zenonas Butkas (2007), 'The Impact of the USSR on Lithuania's Domestic Policy and its International Orientation in the Third Decade of the Twentieth Century' in *Journal of Baltic Studies, 38:2*, pp.215-233

mutiny. Following a coup in 1926 that brought pro-Soviet nationalists to power, Lithuania largely accepted that it was a Soviet quisling regime, although post-war occupation probably came as a shock. It seems that Lithuania wielded minimal agency during the inter-war years. Since I do not include the Baltic states in my empirical analysis due to the very different institutional milieu in which they operate, I merely mention them here for the sake of comprehensiveness.

3.1.3. Moldova and Ukraine

Ukraine's history is intertwined with Russia's, although a national movement grew stronger in the second half of the 19th century.[12] Most of the territory of contemporary Ukraine fell within the limits of the Russian Empire, although there was a brief existence for a Ukrainian People's Republic and Hetmanate successively in 1918, which were granted international recognition.[13] Major regional powers recognised the former's declaration of independence in early 1918, primarily through the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (not to be confused with the subsequent treaty of the same name signed between Bolshevik Russia and the Central Powers). The People's Republic attended the Paris Peace Conference, and began to act as a fully-functioning power in international relations. Its existence was short-lived: it was soon reincorporated into the area controlled from Moscow as the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic: it did nonetheless provide a template for Ukraine as an international subject with agency. Like Byelorussia, the Ukrainian SSR had a seat on the UN General Assembly and ostensibly possessed its own apparatus for monitoring and adapting its behaviour. In reality, it voted according to instructions from Moscow, although there were exceptions which are not significant enough to warrant attention.

The territory today called Moldova had no genuine independence, existing as a vassal of the Ottoman Empire (and called Moldavia) until 1812 when it transferred to the Russian Empire

[12] Snyder (2003), Chapter 6

[13] On Ukraine's history see: Andrew Wilson (2000), *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation* (New Haven CT), esp. pp.121-124.

as a condition of the Treaty of Bucharest. It was now known as the Governate of Bessarabia, and it did exercise a degree of autonomy within the Russian Empire. Most of the territory passed to Romania after 1917, and the unification was internationally recognised by the Treaty of Paris (1920), although neither Bolshevik Russia nor the United States signed the agreement. Transnistria, a slither of territory along the Dniestr River, remained under Russia's control throughout the period when it was known as the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. The Bolsheviks established a government-in-waiting, but the failed Tatarbunary uprising in 1924 largely killed off its ambitions to form a Soviet republic out of what was by now Romanian territory. Thus, its one effort to exercise agency was foiled. Bessarabia passed back again to Soviet Russia at the end of the Second World War. The autonomy Bessarabia held within the Russian Empire did not extend to its international relations, and there is little sense in talking of Moldova (or Bessarabia, with which contemporary Moldova is largely co-extensive) as a subject of international relations before 1992.

3.1.4. The Caucasus

The three Caucasus states likewise passed from one empire to another throughout recent centuries; in very crude terms from Persian to Ottoman to Russian. Unlike the Central Asian 'nations' discussed in the next sub-section, the Caucasian peoples possess rich, historical identities linked to statehood, even if those states were not coextensive with contemporary borders. The Kingdom of Armenia (3rd century BC – 4th century AD) covered a large swathe of the Near East, with much of the same territory part of the Kingdom of Georgia in the Middle Ages. The Azerbaijani Turks had a slighter precedent. A relatively cohesive ethnic group, they were divided between Persian and Russian Empires in 1828, such that part of northern Iran today is sometimes referred to as southern Azerbaijan. It was primarily circumstances that stymied the three groups' ambitions of becoming international subjects in the early 20th century.

Initially, on the collapse of Tsarist rule, Armenians, Azeris and Georgians formed a single republic, although this survived only six weeks. Richard Pipes describes the Transcaucasian Federation an 'act of desperation' that endeavoured to prevent the region being overwhelmed by German and Ottoman troops.[14] The troops came regardless. This first, and frankly pitiful, episode ended when Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia each declared independence in 1918. Georgia was first to declare independence and found support from Germany. Armenia sought continued Russian protection while appealing to Britain and France for aid. The Azeris were helped to power by the Turkish military, although curiously the Treaty of Sevres (1918), signed by the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, recognised Armenia but not Azerbaijan. In fact, the lack of separation between Armenians and Azeris meant expectations of broad international recognition of both states would have been ambitious. Although all three nascent republics sent representatives to the Paris Peace Conference, European powers were uninterested in acknowledging what they continued to think of as parts of Russia.

The problem these nascent states had in wielding any agency would seem to be that they struggled to consolidate into units recognisable to others. The Azeris appealed to outside actors to recognise all the eastern Transcaucasus, plus Daghestan, Kars, and Batum as Azeri. These demands were scarcely acceptable to either the Armenians or the Georgians, both of whom were also appealing to European powers for recognition, and who had their own skirmishes in late 1918 over the Borchalo region. Armenia also sought recognition for its claims on territories seized by the Ottomans who continued massacring local populations after 1915. Georgia was conveniently sheltered from the Russian Civil War, and used a growing nationalism to forcefully close an Abkhaz Council vying for autonomy. In some regards, Georgia appeared as the most promising case for establishing itself as an independent actor, but it could not easily disentangle

[14] The remainder of this section is based on Svante E. Cornell (2011), *Azerbaijan Since Independence* (Armonk NY), pp.19-30, and Richard Pipes (1964, [1954]), *The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism, 1917-1923* (Cambridge MA and London), pp.193-214.

its administration and economy from Armenia and Azerbaijan, since the trio had developed as an integrated whole over the preceding century.

Four years later, this second pitiful episode ended when the three Caucasian states were incorporated into the USSR as the Transcaucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. Thus, the three states' experience of statehood in the modern era was slighter than for the Baltics, though greater than that of Belarus. Although they went some way to fulfilling the criteria for subjectivity described above, the lack of international support for them as subjects impeded the flourishing of their self-understanding. Moreover, their capacity to make decisions was thwarted by febrile internal division and uncertainty. Although the Műsavat party controlled much of Azerbaijan, Baku continued to be controlled by factions loyal to Moscow's rule, and surviving thanks to oil exports to Russia. Azerbaijan was not so much prospectively an internally differentiated unit, rather it was a divided one.

3.1.5. Central Asia

In some sense, the nominal nation groups of the five Central Asian states suffered similar experience to that of the Caucasus states, although the peoples mainly comprised nomadic tribes. They lived under Turk, Persian, Mongol, Mughal or Timurid empires for large tracts of their history. However, these states had weaker templates for their present form of statehood prior to the USSR's collapse, and those templates were far less integrated into, and less obviously subjects in, the system of international relations. The proto-states that did exist, such as the khanates of Bukhara or Kokand, today cover multiple sovereign states.

Throughout history, loyalties were to clan or tribe. Although there existed literary languages that can be claimed by the five titular nations of contemporary world politics, the levels of literacy in the pre-Soviet era were very low. In any case, since Tajiks and Uzbeks often lived together, the spoken *lingua franca* was another language: the now extinct Chagatai

(sometimes called Old Uzbek). Despite this vague historical sense of identity, all the states embraced 'national heroes' after 1991, such as the Uzbeks' veneration of Timur. The late Edward Allworth described this process as the search for 'retrospective proof' for nationalist claims.[15] The beginnings of this quest may have been slightly earlier. There were significant flashes of inter-ethnic violence during the perestroika period; riots shook Almaty in 1986, violence between Turks and Uzbeks in 1989 caused 112 deaths, and clashes in 1990 between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh, Kyrgyzstan left 320 dead.[16]

Having been conquered by the Russian Empire, scholars have argued that pre-revolutionary identities and politics persevered. There was an uprising against Bolshevik rule when the Tsarist Empire collapsed, the so-called Basmachi revolt, although this was suppressed by the Red Army. According to John Glenn a 'two level politics' operated throughout the Soviet era, whereby a Soviet upper tier maintained control, but traditional loyalties and customs were institutionalised at a secondary level.[17] This prospectively created agency for the ethno-national group within the Soviet Union, though the high degree of centralisation probably circumscribed it. Moreover, although all five states had some level of national awakening before 1917, the main loyalties prior to the USSR were religious and not political. This had not really changed during the Soviet period, even if Soviet border-drawing arguably aspired to disrupt pan-Islamism. Writing after the USSR's collapse, Glenn avers that '[t]he influence of Islam in the region has not diminished despite ruthless Soviet attempts to eradicate it.'[18]

The varying historical experiences of the fourteen non-Russian republics translated into independence differently. The Baltic states' drive for the return of independence was

[15] Cited in Lena Jonson (2006), *Tajikistan in the New Central Asia: Geopolitics, Great Power Rivalry and Radical Islam* (London and New York NY), p.18

[16] John Glenn (1999), *The Soviet Legacy in Central Asia* (Basingstoke), Chapter 5

[17] Glenn (1999), p.98

[18] Glenn (1999), p.130

instrumental in the USSR's collapse. All three issued declarations of independence in 1991. Ukraine found a basis for independence, even if the Rukh, its independence movement in the last days of the Soviet Union, was primarily a weaker imitation of comparable movements in the Baltics. The three Caucasian states' national revivals were weaker still, although Georgia held a referendum and issued a declaration of independence earlier even than the Baltic states, and national sentiment in all three states proved more developed than it had been after Russian power withdrew in 1918. In the case of by Armenia and Azerbaijan, the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute motivated independence movements.[19]

Back in the Belarusian forest, at the end of 1991 the leaders of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine – Stanislav Shushkevich, Boris Yeltsin, and Leonid Kravchuk respectively – asserted that they headed sovereign republics, ones which had established the USSR, and which now declared that the USSR ceased to exist 'as a subject of international law and a geopolitical reality.'[20] Two weeks later the remaining Soviet republics acceded to the CIS through the Almaty Declaration. In this document, the eleven republics (the Baltic trio and Georgia having already seceded) stated that they were independent, and recognised each other's territorial integrity and the inviolability of sovereign borders.[21] For the Central Asian republics this declaration was a reactive measure; they had no strong independence movements or grievances against Soviet power. As Sally Cummings writes of Kazakhstan: '[it] was born by default. The republic's independence […] in 1991 was neither the result of secessionist demands by its leadership, nor a national liberation movement; it resulted from the decision by Moscow to withdraw its maintenance of the Soviet edifice.'[22] In any case, by the close of 1991 each of the fifteen Soviet republics had declared themselves subjects in international relations, and did so by invoking core norms of international

[19] Svante E. Cornell (2011), *Azerbaijan Since Independence* (Armonk NY), p.60 ff.; Thomas de Waal (2013, [2003]), *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan Through Peace and War* (New York NY), esp. pp.151-157

[20] Commonwealth of Independent States (1991), 'Soglasheniye o sozdanii Sodruzhestva Nezavisimikh Gosudarstv' [Agreement on the foundation of the Commonwealth of Independent States]

[21] Commonwealth of Independent States (1991), 'Alma-Atinskaya deklaratsiya' [Almaty declaration]

[22] Sally N. Cummings (2005), *Kazakhstan: Power and the Elite* (London and New York NY), p.1

relations that putatively comprised the structure of the international system. It was a structure that would be rigorously tested over the subsequent three decades.

A potentially important distinction must be made between those new powers where nationalist movements in the dying days of the USSR had brought new elites to power, and those where the communist party elite retained power. The former group comprised Armenia, Estonia, Georgia (despite the former Soviet foreign minister, Eduard Shevardnadze, being returned to power *de facto* in 1992 following a coup), Latvia, and Lithuania. The latter group comprised: Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan (soon rocked by civil war on the issue), Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. There were more nuanced continuities in Ukraine under Kravchuk, who was a senior Communist Party figure but acceptable to reformers.

3.2. Dissolution and structural change

The international system underwent a transformation around the time of the Soviet Union's collapse. The structural transformation began earlier, though, with the coming to power of Mikhail Gorbachev in the USSR. His 'new thinking' in foreign policy rejected the Brezhnev doctrine, which endorsed the use of force to maintain Soviet dominance within the socialist bloc, and increased cooperation with states in the capitalist bloc. The 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe, based around the 1975 Helsinki Final Act, boldly declared that the 'era of confrontation and division in Europe has ended.'[23] Gorbachev publicly expressed views, and took actions, that suggested a preference for international 'solidarism' over a world governed by spheres of influence and the balance of power. There was, at the very least, an indication of the USSR's acceptance of 'normative evolution towards a thicker international society.'[24] However, one ought not be too zealous in reading into convergence between the two sides, and, anyway, the

[23] Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (1990), 'The Charter of Paris for a New Europe' (21 November)

[24] Roy Allison (2013), *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention* (Oxford), p.34

system soon endured a different kind of rupture. On the domestic scene, Gorbachev's policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost'* spurred nationalist movements in the constituent republics. Torn apart from inside, the Soviet Union ended its existence.

3.2.1. Russia weakened

At the systemic-level, the consequence of the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union was the loss of bipolarity. Most scholars agree that bipolarity best described the international system for the best part of the half-century following the Second World War, and under these conditions a sense of stability obtained. Indeed, many writers at the time keenly supplied arguments in favour of bipolarity over multipolarity as a source of structural stability.[25] The argument is not unassailable. It may be relevant to record that this period can be marked off from any preceding era by the advent of nuclear weapons, which also arguably contributed to Cold War stability.[26] Notwithstanding this qualification, almost all smaller powers in Asia and Europe became objects in one or other superpower's spheres of influence, which can be defined as 'a determinate region within which a single external power exerts predominant influence, [and] which limits the independence or freedom of action of political entities within it.'[27] Gorbachev's foreign policy hinted at the end of such an international system.

At the regional level, the post-Soviet geopolitical landscape was full of new powers, which had several decades of shared history and hefty infrastructural ties with the authorities in Moscow. Officials in Moscow suddenly controlled a state massively depleted in territory,

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[25] For a summary of the debate see: John Mearsheimer (2014, [2003]), *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York NY and London), pp.338-347. Kenneth Waltz and his adherents tended to argue for bipolarity. In contrast, classical realists including Hans Morgenthau and Arnold Toynbee conventionally argued that multipolarity was conducive to stability. Toynbee contested that a chair could not balance on two legs alone. Cited in Geoffrey Blainey (1973), *The Causes of War* (Basingstoke), p.110

[26] John Mueller (1991), 'The Essential Irrelevance of Nuclear Weapons' in Sean M. Lynn-Jones (ed.), *The Cold War and After* (Cambridge MA)

[27] Paul Keal (1983), *Unspoken Rules and Superpower Dominance* (New York NY), p.15

population, raw materials, and industry. The disruption of economic relations meant that in many of the new states pensions and wages were unpaid, and in some cases liberalisation and privatisation soon followed, which allowed a select few to plunder state enterprises of resources. Arguably, Russia sought to disentangle itself from the economic fallout of the smaller powers' crises.[28] In any case, several sets of relationships remained undefined: the relationships between Russia and the other successor states, where more than twenty million ethnic Russians found themselves unexpectedly a diaspora community; the relationships of all units to other units in the international system; and the relationships among the new smaller powers.

Russia itself retained many of the trappings of its superpower status. It continued to possess a nuclear arsenal rivalled only by the United States, and it retained its seat on the UN Security Council. However, the coup of August 1991 signalled the loss of the centre's legitimacy. Moreover, the new authorities in an independent Russia were focused on dealing with domestic economic crisis, and Russia's ailing economy could not support Soviet-era power projection. The institutions of post-Soviet Russia were fragile, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs lost policy-making influence (briefly revived during the period that Yevgeny Primakov was foreign minister, 1996-1998) to a diffuse constellation of elites.[29] The foreign-policy making elite was highly fragmented about the direction of Russia's policy.

The question of Russia's (lost) status became an *idée fixe* among domestic actors.[30] This occasionally manifested as expansionism. To give one example, the firebrand leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, declared that Russia should regain some

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[28] S. Neil Macfarlane (forthcoming), 'Contested regional leadership: Russia and Eurasia' in Hannes Ebert (ed.), *Title TBC*; Andrei P. Tsygankov (2010, [2006]), *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (Oxford), pp.76-77

[29] Jeffrey Mankoff (2012, [c.2009]), *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* (Lanham MD), Chapter 2 [unpaginated e-book]

[30] More recently, Russia's longing for status generated a burgeoning literature. A typical example is Iver B. Neumann (2016), 'Russia's Europe, 1991-2016: inferiority to superiority' in *International Affairs, 92:6,* pp.1381-1399. A more general survey of status in international relations is found in: T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth (eds.), *Status in World Politics* (Cambridge)

of its lost territories through the use of force.[31] While similar views have influenced foreign policy, they ought not be exaggerated. Nevertheless, imperialist claims especially concern the Slavic states of Belarus and Ukraine.[32] Concerns for status more frequently manifested in the assumption that the smaller powers on Russia's borders, and which were formerly parts of the Soviet whole, were legitimate parts of a Russian sphere of influence; a point that will recur as a leitmotif throughout this section. President Boris Yeltsin asserted that Russia was 'first among equals,' while Andrey Kozyrev, his foreign minister from 1991-1996, claimed Russia possessed 'a zone of interest and special responsibility.'[33] In so far as there was a 'Kozyrev doctrine' in foreign policy, it considered that the 'countries of the CIS and Baltics… [constitute] a region where the vital interests of Russia are concentrated… We should not withdraw from those regions which have been the sphere of Russia's interests for centuries.'[34] Despite these faintly-concealed ambitions, in terms of the overall structure of the international system, the 1990s were, as Charles Krauthammer described them, a 'unipolar moment' for American power.[35] In referring to the system in this way, he recognised that the situation was transitory.

Despite Russia's emasculation, power asymmetries ensured that it remained a prospective threat to other powers in the region. If Stephen Walt's criteria for evaluating threats are valid, then Russia presents the greatest threat to any post-Soviet power continuously throughout the three decades after the USSR's collapse. Its geographical proximity to the smaller powers, its aggregate power, and its offensive capabilities all exceed any rival. For the smaller powers in Central Asia, China may soon represent a greater prospective threat than Russia. That

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[31] Martha Brill Olcott, Anders Aslund, and Sherman W. Garnett (1999), *Getting It Wrong: Regional Cooperation and the Commonwealth of Independent States* (Washington DC), p.7

[32] Note, for example, the volume by Yu. F. Godin (2008), *Belorussiya – Eto "Brestskaya krepost'" sovremennoi Rossii* (Moscow) [Byelorussia – Contemporary Russia's "Brest fortress"]. The title refers to Brest's role in defending the Soviet Union from Nazi invaders in 1941.

[33] Allison (2013), p.124

[34] Mark Webber (1996), *The International Politics of Russia and the Successor States* (Manchester), p.100

[35] Charles Krauthammer (1990/1991), 'The Unipolar Moment' in *Foreign Affairs – America and the World (special issue), 70:1,* pp.25-33. See also: Christopher Layne (2009), 'The Waning of US Hegemony – Myth or Reality: A Review Essay' in *International Security, 34:1,* pp.147-172

time is yet to come. Moreover, geography militates against it. Most of China's capabilities are centred on its eastern seaboard, and deserts and mountains partly shield the five central Asian powers from a Chinese threat. Whereas the Kazakhstan-Russia border lacks demarcation with physical geography, the Kazakhstan-China border comprises the Tian Shan mountain range. China could not invade Kazakhstan with land forces across much of the border, although the Dzungarian Gate mountain pass is a vulnerability. The same mountains provide a sturdier defence still for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Map 1: Smaller powers in post-Soviet Central Asia (Source: FreeWorldMaps.net, adapted by author)

The deployment of Russia's armed forces in the smaller powers compounded any perceived threat. In the early 1990s, rather than using the dissolution of the USSR as a prompt to withdraw its troops, Russia consolidated its military presence in several of the new powers. Its intervention in various unresolved regional conflicts facilitated this. In Armenia, Russia exploited anxieties about Azerbaijan to increase its basing rights. Abkhazian separatism was used to justify the deployment of additional troops to Georgia. The civil war in Tajikistan between 1992 and 1997 kept Russian battalions in that state. Taking into account Russia's troops based in Kaliningrad, Transnistria (Moldova), and Crimea (Ukraine), Russia's military continued to delineate the western and southern borders of the dissolved polity.[36] Yeltsin announced proposals for further new Russian bases in CIS states, although these remained on the drawing board.[37] Russia signalled its ambitions to exercise control over the territories in other ways too; in 1993 its Security Council considered proposals to maintain a common CIS border and eliminate border controls between CIS member states. Smaller powers suspected Russia saw the CIS as a mechanism for reasserting its control, whereas a few of the former, especially Ukraine, viewed it as a forum for 'a civilised divorce.'[38]

Similar uncertainties surrounded the Collective Security Treaty, the status of which remained unclear for several years. It was originally signed by six states in Tashkent in May 1992 (it is also known as the Tashkent Treaty), although its extension to Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Georgia in 1993 made its membership coextensive with the CIS security bodies; Turkmenistan and Ukraine did not participate in these bodies at any time. Although it formally entered into force in 1994, its institutionalisation through the 1990s was 'slow and incomplete.'[39] It is with the formation of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation in 2002 that the CST became a

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[36] Zbigniew Brzezinski (1997), *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York NY), p.108

[37] Allison (2013), p.124

[38] Olcott *at al.* (1999)

[39] Andrei Zagorski (1998), 'CIS regional security policy structures' in Roy Allison and Christoph Bluth (eds.), *Security Dilemmas in Russia and Eurasia* (London), pp.282-284

mechanism of substance. It is plain, despite its name, that the foundational treaty is an agreement about dealing with external aggression and therefore concerns collective defence and not collective security. Subsequent documents somewhat blur the boundaries between collective defence and collective security; the latter being an arrangement concerned with threats among members of the agreement.[40] This distinction would be divisive as the later debate surrounding the CSTO Rapid Reaction Force would show (see Chapters 4, 5, and 6).

3.2.2. European Union and NATO enlargement

With the collapse of the Cold War order, a coalition of Western states in effect determined the structure of the new international system. Under American leadership, these Western states sought to empower the new powers and socialise them into the 'liberal democratic' structure of norms, rules, and regulations. The principal reason for this was not so much grand design as it was absence of a systemic counter-weight or challenger capable of checking the coalition. Indeed, there was ambivalence in the West about what came next, which brought about a debate between those who saw the end of bipolarity as an opportunity to promote cosmopolitan norms, and those who argued the world order should continue to be based on norms of sovereign equality, non-interference, and non-intervention.[41] The debate did not properly resolve itself, with the two sides in 'unhappy coexistence.'[42] Both Americans and Europeans debated these issues. Let me consider the Europeans in the first instance.

European leaders' ambivalence regarding the new world was apparent when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. State officials were unsure about the future direction of the states that had shaken off communism. When France's president, Francois Mitterrand, proposed a confederate

[40] Zagorski (1998), pp.284-288

[41] Foot and Walter (2011), *China, the United States, and Global Order* (Cambridge), pp.4-5. The authors characterise the debate in English School terminology as one between solidarism and pluralism. The distinction also influences Allison (2013).

[42] Andrew Hurrell, cited in Foot and Walter (2011), p.5

Europe, including Russia, he raised the ire of Central and Eastern European powers that dreamed of 'a return to Europe' after decades of Soviet domination; the proposal was soon abandoned.[43] The pressing matter was the German question, which would intimate the future direction of the European project, and the Soviets agreed hesitantly to reunification with Germany retaining the membership of NATO held by the Federal Republic of Germany (i.e. West Germany).[44] In many respects, Germany's reunification was the first enlargement of the European project, and its success implied all states had a choice. The debate among Europeans therefore became one of whether integration should be deepened between existing members, or widened to new states. These positions were mutually exclusive because enlargement meant incorporating states lagging far behind European Community standards.[45]

East Germany's incorporation into the European Community emboldened the decision to privilege widening over deepening. The policy of the European Union (as the arrangement became known following the adoption of the 1993 Maastricht Treaty) gradually emerged around the solidarist position of cooperation through common values. The 1993 Copenhagen Criteria, which applied to all states that aspired to EU membership, spoke of: 'stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights, respect for and protection of minorities, the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressures and market forces within the Union.'[46] Over the next two decades the EU underwent a series of enlargement rounds, most notably the 'big bang' enlargement of 2004 (of which the 2007 enlargement can be considered an adjunct), and through this expansion it sought to lock in other powers to the 'liberal democratic' structure of the international system. Several erstwhile Warsaw Pact members, as well as the three Baltic states, acceded to the EU.

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[43] Jolyon Howorth (2017), '"Stability on the borders": The Ukraine Crisis and the EU's Constrained Policy Towards the Eastern Neighbourhood' in *Journal of Common Market Studies, 55:1*, pp.121-136

[44] Mary E. Sarotte (2014), *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-War Europe* (Princeton NJ), Chapter 5

[45] Howorth (2017), p.123

[46] European Council (1993), 'Presidency conclusions – Copenhagen European Council, 21-22 June 1993'

It was against this backdrop that an EU 'common foreign and security policy' potentially emerged. It involved the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), announced following the 2004 enlargement, and its Eastern Partnership initiative inaugurated in 2009. With the Baltic trio now integrated into the European economic architecture, the next six Western-most post-Soviet smaller powers cooperated with the EU through the new policies. Russia tolerated the situation, although Russian officials were increasingly critical, with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov accusing the EU of attempting to carve out a sphere of influence in Russia's backyard.[47] Those powers spearheading the EU enlargement may well have sought collective primacy in the former Soviet Union, but this should not be mistaken for a sphere of influence. Acting individually or collectively, EU members lack both the political will and the capabilities to maintain a sphere of influence; the EU is merely a coalition of secondary powers. It is also relevant that at no time did the EU's policy exclude Russia, even if the relationship got off to a false start with the signing of an EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in 1994. Six months after signing the agreement, Russia dismayed EU leaders by launching the First Chechen War, and ratification was suspended pending the end of fighting. The EU initially hoped Russia would participate in the ENP, but this contradicted Russia's assumption that it deserved a higher status than its neighbours, and various other EU-Russia bilateral initiatives (most recently the Partnership for Modernisation launched in 2010) have resulted in no meaningful structural changes in the relationship.

In so far as the EU's enlargement represents a structural change, it is part of the ideological superstructure, rather than a pole of material power in itself. Beneath the rhetoric, there is little to show for an EU foreign and security policy. Although French or German officials may present initiatives as 'European,' few are fooled. When France's president, Nicolas Sarkozy, negotiated a ceasefire during the Russo-Georgia War in 2008, no one really believed that he was

[47] Valentina Pop (21 March 2009), 'EU expanding its "sphere of influence," Russia says' in EU Observer (online)

acting as anything other than the French president. The fact that France happened to hold the rotating presidency of the EU was largely irrelevant, and that he was accompanied to Tbilisi by senior EU officials was merely symbolic.[48] Moreover, the little the EU does arguably have to show for its common foreign and security policy has been widely slated as counter-productive. One scholar claims that the Arab Spring demonstrated that the EU was 'out of sync' with global trends.[49] Other scholars write of the post-2013 Ukraine crisis, which has its roots in a planned Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine, that 'a potent cocktail of conflicting European interests, naivety and arrogance helped precipitate the crisis, and continues to undermine attempts to create an effective response.'[50]

The parallel enlargement of NATO embodied a more obvious structural change. The decisive moment was the US decision, under President Clinton's Administration, to support the policy of NATO enlargement.[51] Retired diplomat George Kennan described it as 'the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-war era,' while other prominent American thinkers, including Zbigniew Brzezinski, argued in favour of the policy.[52] Three former Warsaw Pact members (Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary; known as the Visegrad group) joined NATO in 1999, and NATO had its own 'big bang' enlargement when all except one member of the Vilnius group (comprising the three Baltic states, Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia) acceded in 2004 and 2009.[53] Western European leaders went along with it, although later showed awareness it did not meet Russian approval; German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy insisted Georgia and Ukraine must not be granted NATO Membership Action Plans at NATO's 2008 summit in Bucharest. Again, though, this only

[48] Howorth (2017), p.125

[49] Patrick Holden (2016), 'Eternal Potential? Temporality, complexity and the incoherent power of the European Union' in *Cooperation and Conflict, 51:4,* pp.407-427

[50] Neil Macfarlane and Anand Menon (2014), 'The EU and Ukraine' in *Survival, 56:3,* p.95

[51] Ronald D. Asmus (2002), *Opening NATO's Door: How the Alliance Remade Itself for a New Era* (New York NY)

[52] Brzezinski (1997). Especially the concluding chapter.

[53] The last member, Macedonia, acceded to NATO in 2017.

shows how limited the EU's agency was. It was too slow to monitor and adapt its own policies, let alone shape others' actions.

From one angle, NATO enlargement empowered smaller powers as international subjects. Part of the goal of its 'open door policy' was to demonstrate that the alliance was open to all, and did not seek to exclude states because they were formerly part of the communist bloc.[54] The policy was a deliberate effort to show that dividing lines and spheres of influence belonged to a past era. This always risked being labelled expansionism by states unprepared to adopt the values espoused by the main NATO members, and institutionalised in the Atlantic Charter.[55] More significantly, it is questionable that NATO was truly open to all, since it is doubtful that NATO could have admitted Russia in the medium term. Even if Russia met the putative criteria, the hostility of several NATO member states, who were Russia's erstwhile Warsaw Pact allies, presented an obstacle. After all, NATO decision-making is based on consensus. It is difficult to imagine that the three Baltic states would consent to a former occupying power joining the alliance.

From a different angle, as with Russia individually, so the NATO alliance collectively could be perceived as a threat by smaller powers. Its 1999 and 2004 enlargement rounds brought it to the former Western border of the USSR, as well as incorporating the three Baltic states. By absorbing new member states, the alliance's aggregate capabilities such as economic strength and manpower increased. At the same time, NATO is not an autonomous entity, and aggressive intentions must be attributable to its members. In this connexion, it is relevant to observe that military spending of most members through to 2014 was declining (this, naturally, depends somewhat on how expenditure is measured, calculated, and is subject to important qualifications). It is likewise relevant that existing members deployed no troops or equipment

[54] John Borawski (2000), 'NATO Beyond 2000: A New Flashpoint for European Security' In *European Security, 9:2,* p.9

[55] North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (4 April 1949), 'The North Atlantic Treaty'

permanently to the new members, although the planned missile defence shield is a long-standing exception. These points need to be factored into evaluations of both aggressive intentions and aggregate capabilities.

NATO's enlargement occurred alongside efforts to carve out a new role for the alliance.[56] The terrorist attacks in New York in September 2001 gave a certain impetus to this. Russia consented to the US military presence in Central Asia, largely because it saw no viable alternative. According to Gleb Pavolovsky, a Russian political analyst, it was 'better to have the Americans in Uzbekistan than the Taliban in Tatarstan.'[57] Moreover, allowing US or NATO forces a free hand meant that Russia could keep its own forces away from a war in Afghanistan; a salient issue given the experience of the decade-long Soviet-Afghan War. At the same time, Russia signalled its unwillingness to let the US consolidate any military primacy across Central Asia by opening the Kant air base in Kyrgyzstan, close to the Manas air base that US troops were stationed at. Since the US has vacated the base, while Russia's current lease runs to 2027 and has an option for extension, the outcome of NATO involvement for the balance of power in Central Asia appears to be in Russia's favour.

3.2.3. Russia resurgent?

The 2002 agreement between Russia and five other states (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan) to institutionalise the CST as the CSTO disclosed Russia's ambitions to create a new security organisation that would be on a par with NATO.[58] In the 2000s, under President Vladimir Putin, Russia underwent a domestic process of centralisation of power. At a

[56] Rebecca R. Moore (2007), *NATO's New Mission: Projecting Stability After the Cold War* (Westport CT); Seth A. Johnston (2017), *How NATO Adapts: Strategy and Organization in the Atlantic Alliance Since 1950* (Baltimore MD), Chapters 6 and 7; Stanley R. Sloan (2016), *Defense of the West: NATO, the European Union, and the Transatlantic Bargain* (Manchester)

[57] Mankoff (2012), Chapter 6

[58] Roy Allison (2004), 'Regionalism, regional structures and security management in Central Asia' in *International Affairs, 80:3,* p.471

systemic level, these did not reflect any immediately significant structural change. First, although the Russian economy grew rapidly thanks to rising oil prices up to the global economic crisis (2008 onwards), it remained relatively slight (see Table 1). In addition, relevant long-term indicators such as demographics and the failure to modernise and diversify the economy tend to support the view that Russia is a declining power, albeit that its regional power had been to some extent revived.

	1990	*1995*	*2000*	*2005*	*2010*	*2015*
China	0.40	0.74	1.21	2.31	6.07	11.12
France	1.28	1.61	1.37	2.20	2.65	2.42
Germany	1.76	2.59	1.95	2.86	3.42	3.36
Russia	0.78 **[USSR]**	0.40	0.26	0.77	1.52	1.33
United Kingdom	1.09	1.32	1.64	2.51	2.43	2.89
United States	5.98	7.66	10.28	13.10	14.96	18.04

Table 1: Nominal GDP across time in trillions of US dollars of P5 + Germany (source: United Nations)

It also marked a qualitative change related, in the first instance, to Russia's agency. The Kremlin tightened its control over its natural resource enterprises, the banking sector, and media, much of which had fallen into private hands during the early Yeltsin years. The Kremlin managed to install figures loyal to the President onto the boards of all the main natural resource companies or banks: Dmitry Medvedev at Gazprom, where the director was also replaced for Aleksey Miller;

Viktor Khristenko at Transneft; Igor Sechin at Rosneft; and German Gref at Sberbank.[59] Jeffrey Mankoff suggests that the changes aimed at extracting 'rent' from private industry, and he makes the persuasive point that Russia's interest in the *status quo* liberal democratic order declined in so far as globalisation prospectively dilutes the Russian elite's capacity to extract that rent.[60] Moreover, Russia began a process of military modernisation. Having captured the state, the Russian elite directed attention to its foreign policy: but to talk of Russian 'resurgence' given its continued structural weakness misleads.

Russia began to push back against the influence of EU and NATO in what it perceived to be its sphere of influence. Russia's ambitions for status combined with distaste for what it perceived as the West's gloating about 'winning' the Cold War. In 2007, President Putin gave a speech at the Munich Security Conference that startled many observers with its criticism of unipolarity, NATO, and the West's use of military force.[61] It is worth noting, mind, that Russian officials' persistent calls for a multipolar world order tacitly acknowledges that Russia cannot realistically expect to recover its superpower status.[62] At the end of 2007 Russia suspended its participation in the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty, formally in protest at NATO's proposed missile defence shield, but the decision relieved it of the Istanbul commitments related to the withdrawal of its military presence in Georgia and Moldova (though Russia's previous manoeuvring on the Istanbul commitments meant that NATO members had not ratified the revised Treaty, and so it was not in force).[63] It formally withdrew from the Treaty in 2015.

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[59] Mankoff (2012, [2009]), Chapter 2. For a more detailed account of the relationship between Putin and his associates, and a fuller list of board memberships, see the table in Karen Dawisha (2014), *Putin's Kleptocracy: Who Owns Russia?* (New York NY), pp.338-339

[60] Mankoff (2012, [2009]), Chapter 2

[61] President of the Russian Federation (10 February 2007), 'Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy'

[62] On Russia and multipolarity see: Thomas Ambrosio (2005), *Challenging America's Global Preeminence: Russia's Quest for Multipolarity* (Aldershot); Andrey S. Makarychev (2014), *Russia and the EU in a Multipolar World: Discourses, Identities, Norms* (Stuttgart)

[63] Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (19 November 1999), 'Agreement on Adaptation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe.' Russia ratified the Adapted Treaty, despite not fulfilling its obligations (instead pushing for its military in Georgia and Moldova to be re-

Russia turned especial attention to Georgia. It began distributing passports to residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, increased military exercises along its border with Georgia, and made repeated 'accidental' incursions into Georgian airspace.[64] In late July and early August 2008, a large-scale military exercise, Kavkaz-2008, was used as a stalking horse for deploying military equipment into the Caucasus. A few days later Russia invaded South Ossetia. The Russian-side argued that it responded to a provocation by the Georgian government, and this argument won broad public acceptance: the Georgian shelling of Tskhinvali was indiscriminate and disproportionate. However, a leading analyst cites evidence from telephone intercepts to claim Russian troops crossed the border into Georgia before the attack on Tskhinvali.[65] Interestingly, Russia did not deny that the intercepts were genuine, but insisted that the troops concerned were legitimate peacekeeping units already in South Ossetia.[66] In light of the intervention in Georgia, and subsequent events in Ukraine that will be covered in detail in a subsequent chapter, it is easy to see where the idea of a resurgent Russia finds impetus, but such an interpretation is wide of the mark. Russia only became a more effectual foreign policy actor regionally. Once again, this was largely motivated by an internalised belief of Russian entitlement to a sphere of influence; in Dmitry Medvedev's formulation after the war, Georgia was part of its zone of 'privileged interests.'[67]

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designated as peacekeepers), and insisted that the original treaty's coverage should be expanded to cover the Baltic States, which would have impeded their subsequent NATO accession. For a summary see: Vladimir Socor (17 May 2006), 'Moscow Pressing for CFE Treaty Ratification Despite Its Own Non-Compliance' in *Eurasian Daily Monitor, 3:96*

[64] Macfarlane (forthcoming), [unpaginated proof]

[65] Roy Allison (2008), 'Russia resurgent? Moscow's campaign to "coerce Georgia to peace"' in *International Affairs, 84:6,* p.1148. The claim is credible. In 2009, the deputy commander of Russia's Airborne Troops admitted that regular Russian troops (not 'peacekeepers') exercised inside South Ossetia before the invasion. See: Roy Allison (2009), 'The Russian case for military intervention in Georgia: international law, norms and political calculation' in *European Security, 18:2,* p.176

[66] Matt Robinson and Margarita Antidze (16 September 2008), 'Georgia says phonetaps show Russia launched war,' *Reuters* (online)

[67] President of the Russian Federation (31 August 2008), 'Interv'yu Dimitriya Medvedeva rossiislkim telekanalam' [Dmitry Medvedev interview with Russian television stations]

A tactic employed by Russia was exploitation of smaller powers' economic dependency. Russia persisted with this tactic despite limited success. The day after Moldova ratified a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the EU, Russia imposed a wide-ranging ban on Moldovan processed meats, one of Moldova's most profitable exports to Russia, allegedly due to health risks though few observers were persuaded.[68] Similar bans have been imposed on Georgian wine, a range of Ukrainian export goods, and Belarusian dairy products (see Chapter 4) with the timing of such bans undermining the official explanations. In addition, Russia in the Putin era has not banned imports from Abkhazia or Transnistria, despite reports of counterfeiting practices.[69] Instead, Russia unilaterally lifted CIS sanctions on Abkhazia imposed in the 1990s.[70] Only unstinting loyalty has kept other smaller powers safe from Russian trade sanctions, although it is not hard to second guess what was on the agenda when Putin visited Yerevan in September 2013: as mentioned in the previous chapter, Armenia effected a *volte face* on its intention to sign an EU Associate Agreement and declared its future accession to the Eurasian Customs Union. It is reasonable to assume this was the result of Russia's pressure.

A complementary tactic has been to exploit smaller powers' energy dependence. Belarus is one of the most energy-dependent states in the international system, and the failure to agree supply prices in 2004 led to Gazprom (technically an independent company, but note my previous comment on board membership) cutting supplies.[71] The issue was resolved only once Russia had acquired an ownership stake in the transit pipeline operator. Oil and gas supplies were again reduced during conflicts between Belarus and Russia in 2006-2007, 2010-2011, and 2016-2017,

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[68] Sibren de Jong (2016), 'The Eurasian Economic Union and the European Union: Geopolitics, Geo-economics and Opportunities for Europe,' European Policy Analysis, *Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies,* p.8

[69] Vitali Silitski (2010), '"Survival of the fittest": Domestic and international dimensions of the authoritarian reaction in the former Soviet Union following the colored revolutions' in *Journal of Communist and Post-Communist Studies, 43:4,* p.346

[70] Vladimir Socor (7 March 2008), 'Moscow "Lifts" the Economic Sanctions on Abkhazia' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 5:44*

[71] For a good summary of each of the first three 'energy wars,' and various other trade disputes between Belarus and Russia, see: Elena Korosteleva (2011), 'Belarusian Foreign Policy in a Time of Crisis' in *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics, 27:3-4,* pp.566-586

and there was always an adjunct political dimension. In respect of Moldova, alongside the ban on processed meats, Russia's deputy prime minister, Dmitry Rogozin, visited Chisinau and pointedly remarked that he hoped residents would not freeze over the coming winter.[72]

A broader strategy employed by Russia has been to lock in smaller powers to a rival, non-Western set of international organisations. As I have already touched upon, the earliest of these institutional arrangements was the CIS itself. There were several largely unsuccessful attempts to create new forms of integration, including the Customs Union formed in the mid-1990s, the Eurasian Economic Community formed in 2000, and the previously-mentioned bilateral Belarus-Russia Union State also operational since 2000. There were tensions over the Union State in the early 2000s (see Chapter 5), which, coupled with the energy and trade disputes mentioned, lays bare the persistently fractious relationship between the two states. The latest and most successful incarnation of Eurasian integration is the Eurasian Union (EAU), originally envisaged by Putin in a 2011 newspaper article, and heralding his return to the presidency after the Medvedev 'inter-regnum' of 2008-2011.[73] The EAU explicitly purported to imitate the EU, although the asymmetry of power between Russia and its other members (Belarus and Kazakhstan since its launch; Armenia and Kyrgyzstan joined subsequently) has never really been overcome. Unlike the EU there is no parliament, and Russian officials dominate the institution in a manner no EU member dominates that institution. In part, this reflects the fact that Russian citizens constitute 84% of the population within the trading bloc, but as well there are no measures akin to the EU's use of qualified majority voting to compensate smaller powers. The smaller powers' attitudes

[72] Hiski Haukkala (2015), 'From Cooperative to Contested Europe? The Conflict in Ukraine as a Culmination of a Long-Term Crisis in EU-Russia Relations' in *Journal of Contemporary European Studies, 23:1*, p.33

[73] Vladimir Putin (3 October 2011), 'Noviy integratsionniy proekt dlya Evrazii – buduschee, kotoroe rozhdaetsa segodnya' [New integration project for Eurasia – the future that is born today] in *Izvestiya*

towards the EAU have shifted over time, and it is increasingly interpreted as a tool of Russian domination rather than a vehicle for free trade.[74]

3.2.4. China and other powers

Far more significantly, China's rising power recalibrated the structure of the international system. Table 3 shows economic growth in the post-Cold War period that has outflanked all other major powers. Its attainment of superpower status seems likely at some point in the future, but there is nothing inevitable about how soon that will transpire. Specifically, China's demographics appear problematic; its population is projected to peak in the coming two decades, and decline thereafter, which will make sustaining economic growth challenging.[75] There are both security and economic dimensions to China's involvement in the former Soviet Union, which grant the smaller powers, especially those in Central Asia, both opportunities and threats.

One of China's guiding goals in the security sphere is stability in its restive western province, Xinjiang.[76] Indeed, China takes an interest in shaping the trajectory of neighbouring Central Asian powers in part because of their populations' ethnic kinship with Chinese populations in Xinjiang. The Chinese province comprises Turkic, Uighur, and Muslim peoples, which could lead to irredentist claims were Turkic populations in, say, Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan motivated to pursue such claims.[77] Since 2001, one of China's main techniques of influence in the

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[74] Interviews, Minsk, 2016. Also: Alena Vysotskaya Guedes Viera (2016), 'Eurasian integration: elite perspectives before and after the Ukraine crisis' in *Post-Soviet Affairs, 32:6,* pp.566-580. More generally on the EAU: Piotr Dutkiewicz and Richard Sakwa (eds.) (2015), *Eurasian Integration – The View From Within* (London and New York NY); Rilka Dragneva and Kataryna Wolczuk (eds.) (2013), *Eurasian Economic Integration – Law, Policy and Politics* (Cheltenham)

[75] United Nations (2017), *World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision, Key Findings and Advance Tables,* Department of Economics and Social Affairs, Working Paper ESA/P/WP/248 (New York NY), p.24. This source gives China's current (2017) population as 1.4 billion, with it declining after 2030. Data are at large intervals and so the figures are indicative only.

[76] This paragraph, and the next one, are largely based on Alexander Cooley (2012), *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia* (Oxford), Chapter 7. See also: Thomas Ambrosio (2008), 'Catching the "Shanghai Spirit": How the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Promotes Authoritarian Norms in Central Asia' in *Europe-Asia Studies, 60:8,* pp.1321-1344

[77] Mankoff (2012, [2009]), Chapter 6

region has been the development of a new multilateral organisation that ensures its regional leadership; namely the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). This emphasises norms of non-interference, sovereignty, pluralism, and resisting the 'three evils' of separatism, terrorism, and extremism. By creating an institutional organisation that rivals Western ones, China can potentially lock in other powers into structural conditions determined by its way of thinking. It is based on the earlier, looser 'Shanghai Five,' and four of the Central Asian post-Soviet powers (the exception being Turkmenistan) are members. So, too, is Russia. While China is the largest member, it makes efforts not to appear dominant. The Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure is based in Tashkent, and the General-Secretary at the time of writing (2017) is Tajik. The SCO's importance to China is evident in the routine attribution of bilateral agreements to SCO initiatives. There have been successes in resolving border disputes, though the failure to find a common position on the regional problem of Afghanistan is telling.

In the economic sphere, China strives to meet its growing needs for energy and raw materials. China has used the acquisition of local industries as a tool of control; to cite one example, in 2005 Chinese state-owned China National Petroleum Company bought one of the largest oil companies operating in the region, PetroKazakhstan. By 2007, China controlled more than a quarter of Kazakhstan's oil reserves. Turkmenistan has filled a similar role in respect of gas: Chinese investments and building of pipelines granting Beijing influence. Importantly, China built both oil and gas pipelines that bypassed Russia, securing its needs independently from Russia. Moreover, China displaced Russia as the main trade partner to Central Asia during the global financial crisis of 2008. Table 2 compares the total value of imports and exports between China and Russia with Central Asia. The significance of Central Asia to Chinese strategy was reiterated in 2013 when Chinese President Xi Jinping used a visit to Kazakhstan to propose the One Belt One Road initiative. In his speech, he pointed to two millennia of trade between China

and Central Asia, and the region is crucial to the success of this Eurasia-wide economic development strategy.[78]

	2000	*2002*	*2004*	*2006*	*2008*	*2010*	*2012*	*2014*	*2016*
China	1 819	2 385	5 838	12 059	30 820	29 958	45 264	44 966	30 170
Russia	6 467	5 636	10 443	16 735	26 824	13 945	33 255	29 012	14 850

Table 2: Chinese and Russian trade volume with the five Central Asian smaller powers by year in millions of dollars (source: IMF Direction of Trade Statistics)

At the same time, the United States' much vaunted decline cannot be assumed. By most measures it remains well ahead of its rival powers, and its military capabilities remain unsurpassed. The decline of the West thesis, of which arguments about US decline are a variant, persisted throughout the Cold War and earlier. Oswald Spengler argued that the West was in terminal decline in a popular book from 1918. Thus, three broad brushstroke assertions about the global order – concerning Russia's resurgence, China rise, and the US decline respectively – each bandied around as common wisdom are questionable. None should be resorted to uncritically. As well, on the Eurasian landmass both Turkey and Iran have some structural influence. Significant Turkic populations reside across the post-Soviet landscape, and Turkey possesses both hard and soft power. Meanwhile, though economic sanctions constrained Iranian power during the 2000s, it boasts a formidable military, significant manpower, and extensive oil reserves, which together give it a hand in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

[78] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (7 September 2013), 'President Xi Jinping Delivers Important Speech and Proposes to Build a Silk Road Economic Belt with Central Asian Countries'

3.3. Two structural challenges

I have considered three main structural influences on smaller powers in the post-Soviet landscape. Member states of NATO and the EU *de facto* determined the principles undergirding the world order after the end of the Cold War. China's remarkable and rapid rise ensure its increasingly significant structural role. Finally, given Russia's patent potential to threaten other powers across the former Soviet Union, it remained a crucial structural component. Yet the configuration of these structural factors meant that Russia's overall influence over the successor states has been in steady decline (subject to some qualifications for the most recent period). The European Union and NATO have been the key to that in Europe, but Russian hegemony has not been displaced. In Central Asia, the picture is more complicated. EU powers have limited and specific interests: there was a significant German diaspora in Kazakhstan, a legacy of forced wartime deportations, although that population has declined, and EU actors sought to secure access to energy resources while bypassing Russia.[79] The aftermath of 9/11 and the war in Afghanistan brought a US presence into the region, but it is China that wields growing influence in Central Asia, although again Russian hegemony has not been displaced.

Russia has responded to China and the EU/NATO very differently. This can be explained with reference to Russia's concerns for recovering its lost 'great power' status.[80] Since it was the West that determined the structure of rules and norms of the international system, with Moscow having lost systemic influence, then Russia's longing for status demanded that recognition from Western actors.[81] As it felt its sphere of influence was being encroached, Russia directed multiple challenges towards the West. It appears to view China as an ally in its resistance of Western power. In part, this informal alliance between China and Russia is based on a shared privileging of

[79] S. Neil Macfarlane (2003a), 'European Strategy Toward Kazakhstan' in Robert Legvold (ed.), *Thinking Strategically: The Major Powers, Kazakhstan, and the Central Asian Nexus* (Cambridge MA), pp.141-163

[80] An alternative way to look at this would be to argue that China and Russia are pushing back less against Western influence *per se*, and rather against liberal democracy. See: Thomas Ambrosio (2009), *Authoritarian Backlash: Russian Resistance to Democratization in the Former Soviet Union* (Farnham)

[81] On this point see: Neumann (2016), p.1399

order over justice, which Neil Macfarlane described in Russia's case soon after the dissolution of the Soviet Union; it is largely an alliance of convenience.[82] Despite this, both sides are aware of tensions that historically characterised their relationship; at the time of the Sino-Soviet split in 1969 the two sides clashed with loss of life during the Zhenbao Island incident.

There are two core normative issues that Russia has picked up and perhaps represent the most fundamental challenge to the systemic structural context for smaller power agency: the question of externally-supported regime change within a state, and the recognition of new sovereignties. Together these cover questions of sovereignty, non-interference, territorial integrity, and self-determination, such that, in one way or the other, much of the ideational fabric of international system and its prospective change after the Cold War is reducible to these two issues. Moreover, given that on these issues there was a significant overlap between China and Russia's objections to the West's positions, they represent a genuine challenge to the international system. Note, however, that China has *arguably* been socialised into the international system to a sufficient degree, such that it chose to avoid any direct challenge to the West.[83] While China may concur with Russia's views, its strategy in many issue areas has arguably been one of patience and working with international rules and norms. China may therefore find the latter's policy inconvenient; one strand of Chinese foreign policy thinking emphasises Deng Xiaoping's strategy of *taoguang yanghui*, which translates as keeping a low profile.[84]

It is true that Russia subsequently undermined the 'Shanghai spirit' with its actions in Georgia and Ukraine. This must be borne in mind throughout the analysis because the prospective cleavage between China and Russia suggests possibilities of manoeuvre for smaller powers. For instance, I will show in Chapter 6 that the SCO failed to find consensus at its 2008

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[82] S. Neil MacFarlane (2003b) 'Russian Perspectives on Order and Justice' in Rosemary Foot, John Gaddis, and Andrew Hurrell (eds.) *Order and Justice in International Relations* (Oxford), p.205

[83] Alastair Iain Johnston (2007), *Social States: China in International Institutions, 1980-2000* (Princeton NJ)

[84] Zhu Liqun (2010), *China's Foreign Policy Debates*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Paper No. 121 (Paris), p.51

Dushanbe summit on Abkhazia and South Ossetia's independence. Alexander Cooley contrasts this to the way China successfully rallied the Central Asian powers and Russia to its side in 2009 following ethnic violence in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang.[85] This suggests two things. First, there is issue salience for the smaller powers in the norms promoted by the SCO; the smaller powers' territories host diaspora communities and hence prospective separatist claims. China offered political cover for the powers to adopt a policy position undesirable to Russia. It further suggests that Russia uses core structural norms such as self-determination (via separatism) instrumentally in certain cases. As I will demonstrate in a later chapter, Russia would invoke 'historical injustice' in respect of Crimea, apparently without a second thought to the far longer history of Kaliningrad's existence under Prussian/Germanic rule as Königsberg.

I make two related arguments. First, Russia rejected an emergent notion of 'sovereignty as responsibility' that lay behind the first sovereignty recognition case I study in Chapter 5: Kosovo. Secondly, Russia came to see changes in international practice cynically as a drive for either American or Western hegemony through the installation of friendly political regimes around the world. The importance of these challenges should not be understated. As Roy Allison writes of military interventions during the Cold War era: justifications offered by different powers 'were not mere shadowboxing or cynical efforts to play to the gallery of global opinion among states. […] Such claims could shape or even recast basic interpretations and norms on the legitimate use of force […] which in turn could be used to sustain or enlarge spheres of influence.'[86] A similar argument could be made about the arguments advanced by different powers in respect of these core normative issues in contemporary world politics.

[85] Cooley (2012), p.83
[86] Allison (2013), p.32

3.4.1. Sovereignty recognition

I have already indicated that European leaders were ambiguous about the end of the Cold War. The inherent dangers of recognising new sovereignties were widely understood; it risked opening a Pandora's box of territorial claims. To give just one potent example, Hungary never fully reconciled itself with territories lost through the Treaty of Trianon at the end of the First World War. The ambiguity could also be seen among Americans. In the dying days of the USSR, the US president, George H. W. Bush addressed the Ukrainian parliament. His speech, subsequently dubbed the 'Chicken Kiev speech,' discouraged the Soviet republics' push for independence. Bush told the Ukrainians that, while he supported freedom, 'freedom is not the same as independence. Americans will not support those who seek independence in order to replace far-off tyranny with a local despotism. They will not aid those who promote a suicidal nationalism based on ethnic hatred.'[87]

It is significant that the new sovereignties proclaimed in 1991 were not contested by the centre. By signing of the Belavezha accords, the CIS Treaty, and various other documents, Russia formally recognised the sovereignty of the Soviet republics. Russia's policy ensured that recognition by other actors did not represent a break from international practice, which more or less conformed to the 1933 Montevideo Convention for recognising statehood: permanent population, delineated territory, government, and capacity to enter relations with other states. If Russia recognises the republics as sovereign states, then it would be illogical for others not to do so. The parallel process of deciding whether to recognise sovereignty claims in Yugoslavia was far more fraught. The pressures of political agendas being such, the European Community (EC) ultimately adopted a single position with its 'Declaration "On the Guidelines on the Recognition of New States in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union" and "Declaration on Yugoslavia."'[88] The EC

[87] President of the United States (1 August 1991), 'Remarks to the Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Ukraine in Kiev, Soviet Union' via *The American Presidency Project* [documents archive]

[88] Richard Caplan (2005), *Europe and the Recognition of New States in Yugoslavia* (Cambridge), Chapter 1

broke tradition by linking recognition to a commitment from the new sovereignties to agree to a range of norms of international relations, including human rights.[89] This was novel.

The document adumbrated a shift: sovereignty was no longer merely about order, but also concerned justice. This paved the way for some degree of intervention in other states' affairs. In particular, after NATO's 1999 bombing campaign in support of Kosovo, humanitarian intervention found itself linked to a lengthy process of self-determination. Whereas the Montevideo Convention preserved a Westphalian (pluralist) interpretation of sovereignty, the tendency to view sovereignty in terms of human security, to see it as something qualified by solidarist normative principles, became far more prevalent; this put self-determination squarely on the agenda.[90] This was explicable in the light of international actors' failure to act to circumscribe the genocide in Rwanda, and the massacre at Srebrenica, which led to diplomats coalescing around new ideas. The NATO-led intervention in support of the Kosovan side appealed to humanitarian grounds for violating the sovereign rights of Serbia. Initially the principle drew wide support, even if NATO had not convinced the Security Council to authorise its Kosovo intervention. The doctrine of responsibility to protect (R2P) was adopted unanimously at the UN's 2005 World Summit, explicitly authorising intervention should an incumbent government be shown to be 'manifestly failing' to protect its citizens.[91] Its subsequent implementation proved divisive, with Resolution 1973 concerning Libya marking the first time the UN Security Council authorised an intervention without the consent of the sovereign state concerned.

Until Kosovo's independence, self-determination in a non-colonial context was conventionally interpreted as a matter of internal self-determination. A clear statement of the legal situation was given by the Supreme Court of Canada in a 1998 ruling on the Quebec

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[89] Caplan (2005), p.24

[90] On different interpretations of sovereignty, see: Stephen D. Krasner (1999), *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy* (Princeton NJ)

[91] United Nations General Assembly (2005), 'Resolution Adopted by the UN General Assembly - 60/1 2005 World Summit outcome,' p.30

question.[92] This concluded that, not only was unilateral secession impermissible under the national constitution, but also that under international law the peoples in the state had a right to *internal* self-determination without violating the territorial integrity of the state concerned. It was asserted that the right to secede was exclusively applied to colonial contexts, although it emphasised that peoples within the state must be treated fairly and without discrimination. The proclamations of independence from Kosovo, and subsequently Abkhazia and South Ossetia, were interpreted by some as relying on a claim of the right to *external* self-determination, though Western powers were at pains to insist the case was *sui generis* (see Chapter 4). Russia would seek to justify its annexation of Crimea in 2014 by a similar principle, and thereby use the Kosovo case to strive to revise the conventional interpretation.

The issue of secession and sovereignty recognition is one of high salience for Russia due to the multinational nature of the state. Both Presidents Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin went to war to prevent Chechnya from seceding, and there are marginal separatist movements in Circassia, Siberia, Tatarstan (where 62% voted in favour of sovereignty in a referendum on the matter in 1992), and elsewhere. As part of its narrow self-interest in preserving for itself a sphere of influence, Russia has adopted a dual approach to sovereignty. As Ruth Deyermond describes, Russia insists on a Westphalian model of sovereignty generally in the international system, while applying a 'post-Soviet model' inside the former Soviet Union.[93] A key component of the former has been Russia's resistance to a norm of 'sovereignty as responsibility' or 'responsibility to protect' (R2P), which has been ratcheted up through its use of (or threat of using) its veto in the UN Security Council in respect of Iraq, Libya, and Syria. At the same time, Russia's actions persistently insist that these Westphalian principles do not apply in the post-Soviet space.

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[92] Supreme Court of Canada (1998), 'Reference re Secession of Quebec, [1998] 2 SCR 217'

[93] Ruth Deyermond (2016), 'The Uses of Sovereignty in Twenty-First Century Russian Foreign Policy' in *Europe-Asia Studies, 68:6,* pp.957-984; cf. Carmen A. Gayoso (2009), 'Russian hegemonies: historical snapshots, regional security and changing forms of Russia's role in the post-Soviet region' in *Communist and Post-Communist Studies, 42:2,* pp.233-252

Deyermond argues that Russia's application of a differentiated approach is strictly instrumental; it links the concept of R2P to an assertion of, and a method for the expansion of, Western hegemony. The consequence is that Russia is challenging the fabric of the evolving solidarist post-Cold War order.

I should underscore two points. There is no compelling evidence, at least until very recently, to suggest that the relevant Russian officials' goal has been to annul the sovereignty of post-Soviet smaller powers. Secondly, Russia's policy long prioritised negotiation over conflict. During President Putin's first two terms he made genuine efforts to find compromises with the West, and consented to neighbouring states' participation in EU projects via the ENP. As late as 2013, Russia's Foreign Policy Concept spoke of Russia as a member of European civilisation, which, even if only superficially, evokes a spirit of commonality rather than difference.[94] The 2016 iteration of that document is the first to describe the EU as a geopolitical threat to Russia.[95] Russia did though seek to preserve its hegemony over the territorial expanse of the dissolved USSR, and qualifying the sovereignty of smaller powers is part of that process, but Russia rejects a solidarist system-level qualification of sovereignty. Russia disapproved of the shift from order to justice in interpretations of sovereignty. The responses of smaller powers to new sovereignties will be analysed in Chapters 4 and 6.

3.4.2. Regime change

I remarked above that one ought not be too zealous in seeing convergence during the Gorbachev-era between the USSR and the West. The situation surrounding the First Gulf War revealed disagreements as well as agreements about the norms and rules of international relations. On the one hand, the USSR's 'new thinking' allowed it to align alongside the United

[94] Russian Federation (2013), 'The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation'
[95] Russian Federation (2016), 'The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation'

States in support of military intervention, despite pitting the USSR against an erstwhile pupil in Saddam Hussein. It was an easy test for détente between the two Cold War superpowers. Iraq's attempt to annex Kuwait was one of the most blatant violations of international law since the Second World War. The Soviet foreign minister, Aleksander Bessmertnykh, said it was 'very important to avoid a precedent in which a large country swallows up another one while bearing no responsibility to the world community.'[96] On the other hand, there were differences of opinion between American and Soviet officials about what would constitute a permissible outcome. The UN authorisation, Security Council Resolution 678, used the standard expression 'all necessary means,' but Soviets questioned whether US forces were not exceeding the bounds of necessity. In particular, the Soviet Ambassador to Turkey asserted that 'the Soviet Union will not allow any of the powers involved in the conflict to attempt to put a placeman in Saddam Hussein's place.'[97]

The spectre of regime change haunted this otherwise promising moment. There is no suggestion that a regime change was planned, but an extensive history of superpower-imposed interference in other states' affairs rankled. In any case, by the end of the 1990s regime change in Iraq clearly was on the US agenda. Following Hussain's boast of holding a stockpile of biological weapons, Congress passed the Iraq Liberation Act of 1998 which declared: 'It should be the policy of the United States to support efforts to remove the regime headed by Saddam Hussein from power in Iraq and to promote the emergence of a democratic government to replace that regime.'[98] The UN did not authorise the subsequent 2003 invasion, and one might assume Russia, as a permanent member of the Security Council, would not want to see the authority of the UN undermined. At the same time, Russia was not opposed in principle to lowering the threshold for military interventions, which could be useful to it in its perceived sphere of influence. However,

[96] Allison (2013), p.38
[97] Allison (2013), p.39
[98] United States Congress (1998), 'The Iraq Liberation Act of 1998, Stat. 3178: 105th Congress'

as Allison describes, the debate in Russia focused on the justified use of force against non-state groups, and resisted the notion that pre-emptive or preventive interventions could be used against states.[99]

The core Westphalian norm of non-interference was being stress-tested. In October 2000, the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic brought a muddled response from Moscow; it disapproved of the West's support for Vojislav Kostunica but was unsure what it could do (see Chapter 5). The colour revolutions that occurred in the years that followed jolted Russia into a firmer policy position. The three key instances being the Rose Revolution in Georgia (2003), the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004), and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan (2005). There was a consensus among Russian officials that these were US-led interference in other states' domestic politics. The extent to which this was really the case is debatable.[100] There are a couple of reasons for this. First, at the time of the colour revolutions, US policy-makers' attention was focused on Islamic terrorism, and if there was a formal policy for the post-Soviet space then it was little more than a continuation of the Clinton-era policy.[101] Secondly, a crucial role was attributed to NGOs: Russian officials saw a CIA-steered conspiracy, with democracy-promoting NGOs interpreted through the prism of enmity with Russia. (NATO enlargement also encouraged such views.) However, the causality is unclear, and blaming either the CIA or the US government neglects crucial details.

It is easy to see where the conspiracy theory gains traction with public opinion. Several American NGOs were certainly active, and although the former Soviet Union may have been low

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[99] Allison (2013), pp.102-106

[100] The more general question is whether international factors were in any way determinant. An argument for the proposition they were is given in: Michael McFaul (2010), 'The Missing Variable: The "International System" as the Link between Third and Fourth Wave Models of Democratization' in Valerie Bunce, Michael McFaul, Kathryn Stoner-Weiss (eds.), *Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Postcommunist World* (Cambridge). See also the literature on democratic diffusion, such as Mark R. Beissinger (2007), 'Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomenon: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions' in *Perspectives on Politics 5:2*, pp.259-276.

[101] Lincoln A. Mitchell (2012), *The Color Revolutions* (Philadelphia PA), p.74

on US foreign policy agenda, it remained the *raison d'être* of many NGOs buoyed by the wave of democratisation that occurred in the 1990s. Organisations including the National Democratic Institute and the International Republican Institute (both working under the umbrella of the National Endowment for Democracy) were participants in events. As well, much of their funding comes from the US government. A number of other organisations, notably the Soros Foundation, were also operating in the states concerned.

To present these groups activities as centrally directed US policy looks like a distortion of reality. In the case of the Tulip revolution it seems particularly tenuous; the main US interest in Kyrgyzstan was related to the Manas base, which was operated under an agreement with the incumbent government. Moreover, with the exception of Ukraine, the US groups did not back a single candidate in the elections that sparked each colour revolution.[102] (And it is quite possible that a sizable segment of funding before the Orange Revolution inadvertently supported Viktor Yanukovych's campaign in any case.[103]) These groups did *claim* to have played a causal role, but they had vested interest in doing so in the competition for funds, and so this hardly counts as proof.[104] Such claims fuelled Russian officials' protestations, but serious analysis must not overlook the intensity of the battle for USAID grants in 2004.[105] In fact, US funds for democracy promotion and other aid to Ukraine declined tremendously through the early 2000s; $280 million in 2002 was down to $143 million in 2004, the election year, and most of that money was not earmarked for democracy but rather directed at institutions and procedures. Of course, Russia never blushed about the fact it probably pumped vastly larger sums of money into Ukraine's 2004 presidential elections. In its view, it held the right to interfere in Ukraine.

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[102] Mitchell (2012), pp.84-85

[103] Andrew Wilson (2005), *Ukraine's Orange Revolution* (New Haven CT and London), p.188

[104] Mitchell (2012), p.77

[105] Wilson (2005), pp.184-188. I take the figures in the rest of this paragraph from this source. There is, inevitably, a lot of uncertainty about exact figures, but Wilson does a commendable job of tracking down the relevant data.

A second wave of regime changes were central to the Arab Spring. These revolutions, which symbolically began in Tunisia with the self-immolation of a street vender as an act of protest on 17 December 2010, are usually treated by Western analysts as a separate series of events. For many Russian observers, they represent a continuation of the colour revolutions in the post-Soviet space.[106] Protests spread to Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Bahrain, and elsewhere, with Tunisia's president, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali, the first leader to fall. Rulers in Egypt (Hosni Mubarak), Libya (Muammar Qaddafi), and Yemen (Ali Abdullah Saleh) were also toppled, while Syria descended into civil war.

Finally, the ousting of Viktor Yanukovych during the 'Maidan' protests in Ukraine in 2014 has also roused resentment in Russia. Many Russian officials and commentators internalised a narrative whereby 'the West' sponsored the toppling of the incumbent president. They construe an intercepted and leaked telephone conversation between Victoria Nuland, then US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, and Geoffrey Pyatt, who was serving as the US Ambassador to Ukraine, as 'evidence' (or even more tenuously 'proof') of US machinations.[107] As well, the visit of Nuland to Kyiv is interpreted as an aspect of US efforts to marshal a new government into place. The responses of smaller powers to each of these events will be covered in Chapters 5 and 6.

[106] For example: Valery Gerasimov (2013), 'Novye vyzovy treboyut pereosmyslit' formy i sposoby vedeniya boeviykh deistvii' in *Voenno-Promishlennii Kur'er* [New challenges demand rethinking the ways and means of combat operations]

[107] *BBC* (7 February 2014), 'Ukraine crisis: Transcript of leaked Nuland-Pyatt call'

Chapter 4: Belarus and sovereignty recognition

This chapter is divided into three parts. In the first part, I analyse Belarusian officials' response to the sovereignty declaration of Kosovo in early 2008. I then consider their response to the question of the sovereignty of Abkhazia and South Ossetia later in the same year. Finally, I examine Russia's annexation of Crimea and how Belarusian officials responded to Russia's claim that it possesses sovereignty over the peninsula. Although Crimea constitutes a different category of sovereignty claim, one of recognition of an outside power's claim to have sovereignty rather than a declaration of independence, I include it alongside Kosovo, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia because it embodies the same cluster of norms: self-determination, territorial integrity of a *de facto* rump state, and non-interference in another state's sovereign affairs. Belarus's foreign policy positioning in two of these cases varied *from Russia's*: Belarus held a consistent policy line that rejected any re-designation of sovereignty.

The fact that Belarus has no separatist movements of its own to contend with means that its policy positioning on secession in third states is not obviously a vital national interest in the way it is for Russia. In line with the outline of neorealism given in Section 2.2.1., one would expect the issue of prospective new sovereignties to be one where Russia draws linkages to other issues through the threat or use of force. However, if intervening domestic variables are in any way determinant for a smaller power's foreign-policy making, then neoclassical realism could explain some variation between Belarus and Russia. If Belarus substantively challenges Russia on an issue, then social constructivism encourages deeper analysis of the motivations of its policy positioning and an interpretation of the legitimacy of claims invoked by Russia.

My argument across this chapter is as follows: Belarusian officials instinctively resisted the recognition of Kosovo's sovereignty, and there was only the shallowest reflection on the

causes and consequences of the latter's independence. I suggest that this foreclosed the agential opportunities that might otherwise have been available to Belarus. The situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia provoked deeper reflection, and differentiation within the elite meant that Belarus contemplated its position as a subject in international relations and its foreign policy options in a far more nuanced manner than during the earlier situation. Neoclassical realism gives the necessary and sufficient analytical leverage; Belarus introduced an element of hedging into its foreign policy. An even more explicit process of reflection surrounding the Crimea annexation, coupled with experience in respect of the Georgian regions, enabled Belarus to adopt a reasonably effective foreign policy. Neorealists might describe that foreign policy as 'specialisation' or 'transcendence,' but neorealism fails to provide a reliable means of distinguishing between these. Belarus found agency by reconstructing its own role. This can be most fruitfully explained by recourse to both neoclassical realist and social constructivist readings of IR.

4.1. Kosovo and the fight over precedence

The first point to be substantiated is that Belarus little reflected on its position following Kosovo's declaration of independence. The speed at which Belarus's position was publicly declared and became fixed demonstrates this. Kosovo declared its independence unilaterally on 17 February 2008. The following day Belarus's president expressed his opinion to representatives of the Russian media: *Russia Today* (later rebranded RT) and *RIA Novosti*. A brief statement issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 19 February reiterated the president's position, as did a joint statement from the two parliamentary chambers. I will look at each of these statements in turn, as well as their relationship to Russia's position on the question of independence. The president's original remarks would seem to have been the definitive statement of Belarus's position since it was not contradicted by any official sources.

In his comments, Aliaksandr Lukashenka immediately invoked the pronouncements from Russian diplomats. He added: 'One can speak today, as can all who regretted and were against the bombing of Yugoslavia, and ask: is it not too late that we have taken this up? Back then [at the time of the Yugoslav wars] we ought not to have allowed the carving up of the Balkans, back then we should have defended Yugoslavia. … We lost our influence there long ago. We should never have let this happen – and today there would be no question of independence. And today we have no influence: let's speak frankly about this.'[1] It is fairly clear that, by referring to 'we,' Lukashenka expected Russia to take the leading role in resisting the breakup of Yugoslavia. It is equally apparent that Lukashenka implicitly rejected new sovereignties, although he felt powerless to prevent them. His comments were widely promulgated in the state-controlled press. The leading story in the next day's issue of *Zvyazda* explained the policy directly: 'the President announced that Belarus supports the views expressed by Russian diplomats.'[2]

Russia's firm position against Kosovo's independence had been established during the weeks leading up to the declaration. Russian officials had cautioned that they would take actions, and Russia's Foreign Ministry issued a statement condemning the action and calling on the UN and NATO-led peacekeeping force to adopt severe measures against it.[3] *Kommersant* noted that the statement was 'clearly prepared in advance' since it was issued within an hour of the declaration from Pristina.[4] Moreover, in what appeared to be a final effort to persuade other states that the consequences of Kosovo's independence would be undesirable, two days earlier the Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, pointedly met the leaders of Abkhazia and South

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[1] President of Belarus (18 February 2008), 'Aleksandr Lukashenko dal interv'yu telekanalu Russia Today i informatsionnomu agenstvu "RIA Novosti"' [Aleksandr Lukashenko gave an interview to the TV station Russia Today and the news agency RIA Novosti]

[2] *Zvyazda* (19 February 2008), 'Alyaksandr Lukashenka: "na situatsiyu vakol Kosava pawplyvats' ne wdastsa"' [Aliaksandr Lukashenka: We will not be able to influence the situation around Kosovo] (no author)

[3] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (17 February 2008), 'Statement by Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Kosovo'

[4] Gennady Sysoev (18 February 2008), 'Kosovo pershlo granitsu gosudarstvennosti' [Kosovo crossed the boundary of statehood] in *Kommersant*

Ossetia. The MFA issued a statement after the meeting saying that independence for Kosovo would need to be considered in relation to the two separatist republics.[5] While that statement is open to different interpretations, it looks like a rear-guard action that anticipated Russia's preferences being ignored, and sought to keep Russia's interests on the agenda. Russia's President, Vladimir Putin, subsequently said that Kosovo's recognition 'breaks the entire system of international relations.'[6]

In Belarus, Lukashenka's remarks were followed by a brief statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on 19 February. In 2008, the MFA commanded little responsibility for policy formulation. As I mentioned in Section 2.2.2., the ministries' role was to implement policy decisions passed down to them from the President's Administration, via the Security Council and the Council of Ministers. The MFA's tendency to echo the President's statements supports this view. According to the MFA: 'The Republic of Belarus is convinced that political regulation remains the only path to overcome tensions and achieve stability in the region, envisaging a return to negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina with the possible presence of international mediators.'[7] Next, on 20 February, a joint statement was issued by the Council of the Republic's Standing Committee for International Affairs and National Security and the House of Representative's Standing Committee for International Affairs and CIS Relations. The two committees 'receive[d] news of Kosovo's exit from Serbia with great concern.' According to their statement:

[5] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (15 February 2008), 'Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov Meets Presidents Sergey Bagapsh of Abkhazia and Eduard Kokoity of South Ossetia'

[6] Cited in Roy Allison (2013), *Russia, the West and Military Intervention* (Oxford), p.160

[7] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (19 February 2008), 'Zayavleniye Ministerstva inostrannikh del Respubliki Belarus' v svyazi s provozglasheniem v odnostoronnem poryadke vremennymi organami camoupravleniya Kosovo nezavisimosti kraya' [Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus in connection with the unilateral declaration by the temporary organs of self-government of Kosovo of the province's independence]. See also: *Respublika* (20 February), 'Chem stanet Kosovo?' [What will become of Kosovo?] (no author)

> *'The Kosovo problem bears a general European character. The Balkans have always been the litmus test from the perspective of evaluating the international situation in Europe, and now this indicator is sending out a warning signal, which is evidence of increasing global tensions. […]*
>
> *'Kosovo will unavoidably become a precedent for similar crisis situations in other countries. This step violates the unshakability of the territorial integrity of the state and creates the pre-requisites for the drawing up of a new format for relations with unrecognised states throughout the whole world.'*[8]

The quoted segment was thinly-disguised plagiarism of a Russian official's rhetoric from the previous day.[9] The statement continued in a similar vein to the MFA statement. Specifically, Belarus mimicked Russia's repetitive attention on recognition of Kosovo as a negative precedent.[10] The insistence that Kosovo would set a precedent contradicted the West's own emphasis, which was to insist it must not be a precedent.[11] For the West, this rhetoric served to paper over the divisions among EU and NATO members. Most prominently among EU member states, Spain would not formally recognise Kosovo because it feared separatists in Catalonia and Basque regions would take it as an exemplar for their own activities.

Further evidence for Belarusian officials' lack of reflection is their unwillingness even to discuss the matter with other actors. In the days leading up to Kosovo's independence

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[8] House of Representatives (20 February 2008), 'Zayavleniye postoyannoi komissii Soveta Respubliki po mezhdunarodnym delam i natsional'noi bezopasnosti i postoyannoi komissii Palaty predstavitel'ei po mezhdunarodnym delam i svyazyam s CNG v svyazi s provozglasheniyem v odnostoronnem poryadke vremennymi organami samoupravleiya Kosovo nezavisimisi kraya' [Statement by the Permanent Standing Committee of the Council of the Republic for International Affairs and National Security and the Permanent Standing Committee of the House of Representatives for International Affairs and CIS Relations in connection with the unilateral declaration by the temporary organs of self-government of Kosovo of the province's independence]

[9] cf. *Argumenty i Fakti* (19 February 2008), '"V sluchae s Kosovo zapuschena v oborot otrabotannaya schema bezzakonikh destvii"' [In the case of Kosovo a well-developed scheme of illegal actions has been set in motion]

[10] For example: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (23 January 2008), 'Stenogramma vystuplieniya i otvetov na voprosy Ministra inostrannikh del Rossii S. V. Lavrova na press-konferentsii, posvyaschennoi vneshnepoliticheskim itogam 2007 g. [Transcript of the speech and answers to questions of the Minister of Foreign Affairs S. V. Lavrov at a press-conference devoted to foreign policy results for 2007]

[11] United Nations Security Council (18 February 2008), 5839th meeting. The United Kingdom, the United States, and several temporary members of the Council all stressed that Kosovo could not set a precedent.

declaration, the US diplomatic corps endeavoured to rally support for government in Pristina, though the US Embassy in Minsk expected Belarus to support Russia's opposition to it.[12] According to US sources, Russia along with Serbia had been 'actively lobbying OSCE members' to support a Serbian invocation of the OSCE's Berlin Mechanism, which would have convened an emergency meeting of OSCE senior officials.[13] In line with a request to all US diplomatic missions, the US Belarus office made enquiries to the leading foreign policy advisor in the Presidential Administration, Valyantsin Rybakow.[14] The 'demarche' was repeated to officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but none of these enquiries brought any substantive response.[15] On 20 February, following the independence declaration, the US Embassy again 'delivered points' to the MFA, only to be told that the ministry had issued its statement.[16] Belarus's intentions and foreign policy position were firmly established. If only statements made *after* the 17 February declaration are considered then it looks like policy-makers took the decision without further consultations.

Belarus's president does not appear to have reflected on the possibilities his privileged positioned-practice place inflected him with; the subsequent situation around Abkhazia and South Ossetia demonstrates that more nuanced policy positions were possible, which could have yielded benefits for Belarus. For example, as a self-aware subject Belarus might have bargained its support to Russia for something in return, but this does not appear to have happened. It might too have bargained with the EU to reshape the relationship in a manner favourable to it, but according to the British ambassador serving in Belarus in 2008 the question was never raised by Belarusian officials in discussions.[17] Instead, the official position was simply cascaded downwards. The various domestic institutions were kept on a tight leash. Answering questions

[12] US Embassy, Minsk (13 February 2008), *Wikileaks cable 08MINSK103_a*
[13] US Department of State (12 February 2008), *Wikileaks cable 08STATE14248_a*
[14] US Embassy, Minsk (13 February 2008), *Wikileaks cable 08MINSK103_a*
[15] US Embassy, Minsk (15 February 2008), *Wikileaks cable 08MINSK116_a*
[16] US Embassy, Minsk (20 February 2008), *Wikileaks cable 08MINSK123_a*
[17] Interview with Nigel Gould-Davies, Oxford, January 2017. Dr. Gould-Davies states that he 'can't remember' the matter being raised. It would later be raised when Belarus negotiated its policy position on Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

during a media briefing on 21 February, the MFA's Press Secretary only reiterated the position. 'Naturally, the Belarusian side fully subscribes … to all formulations in that [previous] statement.'[18]

4.1.1. The spectre of NATO bombing

One glaring reason that Belarusian officials did not discuss policy options among themselves is that a dominant narrative dictated their policy. Their basic position was framed in terms of the break-up of Yugoslavia. In Lukashenka's remarks on 18 February, he said that 'the process started long ago. […] Montenegro left, other republics left. Kosovo was remaining. It's just a continuation of that collapse.'[19] Understanding Belarusian, but also Russian, officials' views on NATO military intervention in Serbia is important because it informs not only Kosovo's sovereignty recognition, but also the regime change that ousted Slobodan Milosevic (discussed in Chapter 5). I explore Belarus's narrative about Serbia prior to Kosovo's sovereignty declaration, before evaluating the position in respect of my theoretical framework in the two sections that follow.

Policy-makers had internalised the notion that anything connected to the earlier event should be resisted; policy was a matter of reflex rather than reflection. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that this was a continuation of Cold War thinking on the part of the Belarusians. Lukashenka understood that Belarus, Russia, and Serbia were allies, and that NATO's actions were part of a wider imperialist politics on the part of 'the West.' When NATO began its 1999 bombing campaign in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Operation Allied Force, on the side of Kosovar Albanians, Lukashenka visited Belgrade to signal his support for the Serbian President,

[18] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (21 February 2008), 'Otvety press-sekretarya MID Andreya Popova na voprosy predstavitelyei sredstv massovoi informatsii v khode brifinga v MID Belarusi 21 fevralya 2008 goda' [Answers of the Press Secretary of the MFA Andrey Popov to questions from representatives of the mass media in the course of briefings at the MFA, 21 February 2008]

[19] President of Belarus (18 February 2008)

Milosevic.[20] The Belarusian-side took a firmer stance than Russia, with the Russian press reporting that officials in Moscow were trying to soften Lukashenka's position, and persuade him not to encourage Serbian accession to the Belarus-Russia Union State. During his visit, Lukashenka ignored Russia's advice and announced that he personally received the Serbian request to accede to the Union State.[21] An observer at the time argued that the events in Serbia engendered security anxieties common to both Belarus and Russia about NATO's expanding membership and mission.[22] In other words, this was a situation in which allies might be expected band together and support each another.

To be sure, the 1999 intervention had been controversial. Although the United Nations (UN) Security Council had adopted a number of resolutions about the situation in Yugoslavia prior to NATO's bombing, and criticised the Serbian authorities for their indiscriminate use of force, including against Kosovan citizens, there was no UN authorisation for military intervention.[23] Both China and Russia pledged to veto any tabled resolution and, in the end, none was sought. Acting without UN sanction, NATO member states justified the bombing campaign against Serbia as a humanitarian intervention. Belarus co-sponsored a Russian-drafted UN Security Council resolution calling for a halt to the NATO bombing; a symbolic gesture, since the resolution could never have been expected to be adopted.[24] After the war the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1244, which Russia protested but allowed its adoption.[25] Resolution 1244 laid the framework for a long process of striving to reconcile the Serbs and Kosovars.

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[20] On this episode see: Grigory Ioffe (2011), *Reassessing Lukashenka: Belarus in Cultural and Geopolitical Context* (Basingstoke), pp.140-141

[21] Gennady Sysoev (15 April 1999), 'Miloshevich i Lukashenko opredelili rubezh' [Milosevic and Lukashenka set their red line] in *Kommersant*

[22] Anatoly Rozanov (1999), 'Belarus; Foreign Policy Priorities' in Sherman W. Garnett and Robert Legvold (eds.), *Belarus at the Crossroads* (Washington DC)

[23] United Nations Security Council (31 March 1998), Resolution 1160; United Nations Security Council (23 September 1998), Resolution 1199

[24] United Nations Security Council (26 March 1999), Press Release SC/6659: 'Security Council Rejects Demand for Cessation of Use of Force Against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia'

[25] United Nations Security Council (10 June 1999), Resolution 1244

During the period between the bombing campaign and Kosovo's independence declaration, Belarus persevered with its criticisms. In 2003, Belarus's foreign minister, Siarhei Martynow, told the UN General Assembly that military intervention in Iraq was a continuation of the same policy, whereby the UN is only brought in to help address pressing issues when it is presented with a *fait accompli*.[26] Similarly, in a landmark speech in 2004, Lukashenka railed: 'In recent years especially, the USA has allowed itself to blatantly abuse its world leadership. Especially odious are Kosovo and Iraq.'[27] The two interventions were routinely mentioned in one breath. Even the death of Milosevic in 2006 was an opportunity for the parliament to condemn the 'double standards and bias' of his trial at the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia at The Hague.[28] By stating that the trial acted in the interests of NATO and that its purpose was to retrospectively justify its military intervention in 1999, one can infer that the parliament saw international law as the superstructure of Western primacy or hegemony.

Resolution 1244 culminated with UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari putting forward a plan eight years later and proposing the supervised independence of Kosovo. The plan had the support of many states, although Russia stood firmly against. Speaking in the Security Council, Russia's representative, Vitaly Churkin, cautioned that the plan provided 'a negative precedent […]. Separatism would be encouraged throughout the world.'[29] The Belarusian press would subsequently criticise the Ahtisaari Plan (see next section). These positions translated into those adopted when Kosovo declared its independence. The United States and many European powers

[26] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (1 October 2003), 'Vystupleniye Ministra inostrannikh del Respubliki Belarus' Sergeya Martynova na 58-i sessii General'noi Assamblei OON (obschepoliticheskaya diskussiya), N'yu-Iork' [Speech of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus Sergey Martynov at the 58th session of the UN General Assembly]

[27] President of Belarus (22 July 2004), 'Vystupleniye Prezidenta Belarus' A. G. Lukashenko "Vneshnyaya politika Respubliki Belarus' v novom mire" na soveschanii s rukovoditelyami zagranuchrezhdenij Respubliki Belarus'' [Speech of the President of Belarus A. G. Lukashenko "Foreign policy of the Republic of Belarus in the new world" at the meeting of leaders of the foreign missions of the Republic of Belarus]

[28] House of Representatives (3 April 2006), 'Zayavleniye Natsional'nogo sobraniya Respubliki Belarus' v svyazi so smert'yu bivshego presidenta Soyuznoy Respubliki Yugoslaviya Slobodana Miloshevicha' [Statement of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus in connection with the death of former president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia Slobodan Milosevic]

[29] United Nations Security Council (10 May 2007), 5673rd meeting

recognised the claim, whereas Russia and Belarus remained in vehement opposition. As already noted, Russia's outgoing president, Vladimir Putin, said the action 'breaks the entire system of international relations.'

4.1.2. Neorealism and neoclassical realism

In aligning itself with Russia's opposition, it is not apparent that Belarus sought any agency in the matter. It follows from the account of Belarus's response to NATO military intervention in Serbia that the Belarusian position might be explained with a *neorealist* account of world politics; Belarus and Russia balanced against the power or threat of the NATO alliance. Even within the neorealist reading of international relations, different explanations are possible. One explanation of Belarus-Russia policy convergence would be that Belarus saw an opportunity to assert its loyalty, and thereby minimise the risk of abandonment were it to require Russia's future assistance. However, there is no evidence to suggest calculations of this kind influenced official thinking. It is more plausible to argue that Belarus responded mechanically to a perceived systemic shift in the balance of power. If the point is not sufficiently clear, then it will become so by exploring the structural situation further, and thinking about the trends Belarusian policy-makers perceived in international politics.

There are arguments in favour of balance of power reasoning. NATO's 2004 enlargement consolidated the alliance's presence in central and eastern Europe. There can be little doubt that Belarus was distrustful of certain Western powers' ambitions. A few months after the Vilnius group acceded to NATO, the United States adopted the Belarus Democracy Act in which Congress vowed explicitly to support the democratic opposition and non-state media groups.[30] This happened in the context of colour revolutions; a few weeks after the adopting of the Belarus Democracy Act, neighbouring Ukraine throbbed with pro-democracy protests (see Chapter 5).

[30] United States Congress (20 October 2004), 'Public Law 108-347' (10/20/2004)

This arguably gave Belarusian officials a reason to seek to balance against the United States. Note that the argument here involves an intervening variable, Belarus's perception of threat, but nonetheless conforms to neorealist analysis as described in Chapter 2. I argued that all the while any differentiation within the state is unimportant in terms of explanatory power, the basic precepts of Waltz's neorealism have not been violated. Belarus can be treated as a unitary actor, responding to the threat of NATO expansion and its members' democracy promotion goals.

There are also problems with this reading of Belarus's position. There is little to suggest that Belarus was in any way constrained by any outside actor to adopt a certain policy *in respect of the recognition question*. Moreover, while It is Belarus's prerogative to formulate its threat agenda, its relations with both the EU and European NATO members were improving in 2008. Although Belarus's Defence Minister, Leanid Mal'tsaw, spoke out against the proposed NATO missile defence shield, he also said on 21 February that the accession of Belarus's neighbours to NATO did not represent a military threat.[31] If Belarus saw the need to balance against EU member states, then it is odd that a process of *rapprochement* had already began and continued. The EU Commission opened its delegation office in Minsk in March 2008 and political dialogue, which had been frozen for several years, would be restored at the end of the year.[32]

Neither the EU nor the United States wielded sufficient leverage to suggest they could imminently threaten Belarus. First, although the EU was an important export market for Belarus, it did not reach its own consensus on the matter (as mentioned above), and its Eastern Partnership project that would seek to engage Belarus had not yet been formally proposed. Secondly, the influence on Belarus of the leading NATO power, the United States, was at an all-time low. The continued presence of a US Embassy in Minsk was uncertain following a row over

[31] *Charter 97* (21 February 2008), 'Mal'tsev: "Vstupleniye stran-sosedei Belarusi v NATO ne sozdalo voennoi ugrozy"' [Maltsev: Entry to NATO of neighbouring countries did not create military threat] (no author)

[32] Sabine Fischer (ed.) (2009), *Back From the Cold: Belarus and the EU in 2008,* European Union Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Paper No. 119 (Paris)

US sanctions imposed on the state petroleum company, *Belneftkhim*. Moreover, the US wielded very little economic leverage over Belarus, with trade between the two states relatively insignificant (see Table 3). The corollary of these points might be that neither EU nor NATO member states could facilitate Belarus taking a different policy position had it wanted to, but while the counter-factual is potentially illuminating, the resolve in Belarus's policy on recognition of Kosovo means it is also speculative.

	Exports	*Imports*	*Balance*
China	613	1 415	-801
EU	14 254	8 566	5 689
Russia	10 552	23 507	-12 955
United States	143	485	-341

Table 3: Belarus's trade with various partners in 2008 in millions of dollars (Source: IMF Direction of Trade statistics)

Neoclassical realism expects that intervening domestic variables act as a filter for system-level variables. If the Belarusian media coverage of the situation is taken as a proxy for the *milieu* in which decisions were being taken, then one readily sees that domestic actors seldom modified the basic 'us versus them' mentality. The state-controlled press was highly critical of the West's stance, and supportive of Russia's opposition. *Zvyazda* found space on its front page to record the Spanish foreign minister's 'official non-recognition' of Kosovo, as well as mentioning that

Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, and Romania were all against the action.[33] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* opined that 'this course is fraught with unforeseeable consequences,' and asserted that the US was the 'decisive [factor], giving the general tone to the position of Western states.'[34] As with official statements, the general understanding presented was one of Western imperialist expansionism: one article drew attention to the Ahtisaari Plan having established NATO as 'the highest organ of power' in Kosovo and, unpacking the perceived implications, quoted a headline from the Spanish *El Pais* referring to Kosovo's 'declaration of dependence.'[35]

The only 'alternative' viewpoints could be found in the independent press. In *Nasha Niva*, Andrey Lyakhovich argued that Kosovo's secession was 'unfavourable for Russia, but good for us [Belarus].'[36] However, even the independent press was largely muted on the issue: the weeklies *Novy chas* and *Salidarnasts'* scarcely mentioned Kosovo (the former managed 200 words in its 25 February issue). If views contradicting the official line existed then they were being self-censored. Given the outright hostility of the president and his cadres to NATO's 1999 campaign, the sensitivity of the topic was well-understood.

The consequence of this uniform *milieu* was that it encouraged consensus among the elite.[37] Public statements from the time support the claim that there was consensus about Kosovo. The Chairman of the House of Representatives, Vadzim Papow, echoed such views in an interview to the journal, *Soyuznoe gosudarstvo*: he spoke of 'the controlled confrontational

[33] *Zvyazda* (19 February 2008). The claim that Bulgaria was opposed is dubious. On 19 March the governments of Bulgaria, Hungary and Croatia issued a joint statement on forthcoming recognition of Kosovo, and Bulgaria agreed to establish diplomatic relations with Kosovo the next day. See: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary (19 March 2008), 'Joint statement by the Governments of Bulgaria, Hungary and Croatia'

[34] Anatoly Rozanov (19 February 2008), 'Vyzov Kosovo' [The challenge of Kosovo] in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya.* The author nonetheless outlined what these 'unforeseeable' consequences might be.

[35] Nina Romanova (19 February 2008), 'V poryadke isklyucheniya' [By way of exception] in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*

[36] Andrey Lyakhovich (21 February 2008), 'Nezalezhnae Kosava patrebnae Belarusi' [Belarusians need an independent Kosovo] in *Nasha niva*

[37] It might also be argued that Belarus's weak institutions limited its capacity to monitor and adapt to events; capacities integral to agency.

character' of world politics, mentioning Iraq, Afghanistan and the secession of Kosovo.[38] He lamented that 'permanent political pressure on Russia and Belarus has the exact same strategic undercurrent' and underscored the importance of the Belarus-Russia Union State as a mechanism for resisting 'selfish geopolitical interests.'[39] Asked about Kosovo's independence in a separate interview, he said Belarus's position was clearly articulated in the president's initial remarks and the parliament's statement.[40] According to Mikolay Charginets, Chairman of the Council of the Republic's Permanent Committee for International Affairs and National Security, the US had engaged in 'open dictatorial actions in the Serbian province.'[41] To the extent that any humanitarian concerns were presented, then sympathy lay squarely with the Serbs. According to *Zvyazda*, 17 February was 'a black day not only for Serbia, bur for all Slavs.'[42]

Consensus arguably reached deeper into Belarusian society. It is possible that much of the opposition to the government shared suspicions about the role of NATO. Although opinions about NATO given in 2016 cannot be taken as reliable evidence of views held eight years previously, it is apparent that today NATO rouses mixed feelings in both opposition circles and independent organisations. According to Dzyanis Mel'yantsow, senior analyst at the independent Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, NATO represents 'a challenge' (*vyzov*) for Belarus.[43] According to an opposition politician, 'I don't think so [that NATO is a threat to Belarus]. But we do not need NATO.'[44] Certainly opinions can be expected to have changed with subsequent

[38] *Soyuznoe gosudarstvo* (April 2008), 'S kakim geopoliticheskimi vyzovami Rossiya i Belorussiya mogut spravit'sya tol'ko v ramkakh Soyuznogo gosudarstva?' [Which geopolitical challenges can Russia and Belarus deal with only in the framework of the Union State] (no author)

[39] *Soyuznoe gosudarstvo* (April 2008)

[40] House of Representatives (25 February 2008), *V.A. Popov dal interv'yu BelTA and pervomy natsional'nomu kanalu Belorusskogo radio* [V. A. Popov gave an interview to BelTA and Belarusian radio channel 1]

[41] *Soyuznoe gosudarstvo* (April 2008)

[42] Leanid Lakhmanenka (19 February 2008), 'Nezalezhnasts' z chuzhikh ruk' [Independence in someone else's hands] in *Zvyazda*

[43] Interview with Dzyianis Mel'yantsow, Minsk, 14 July 2016. Although the interview was conducted in Russian, the interviewee used the English word here, subsequently providing his own translation into Russian.

[44] Interview with Tatsiana Karatkevich, Minsk, 15 July 2016

events. One academic says that he does not consider NATO a threat to Belarus, but before recent events he would not have considered Russia a threat to Ukraine.[45]

Counter-intuitively, consensus has a downside: it discourages the foreign policy elite from monitoring and adapting its position. That said, there was one note struck by the Belarusian state media that did not chime with Russia's official position. Ahead of the declaration of independence, an opinion piece from state-controlled *BelTA* claimed that 'the Kremlin has been exposed as insincere in its position on the Kosovo question. Supporters of the "behind the scenes" hypothesis are convinced: Moscow, paying tribute to tradition and notifying of a long-thirsted return to its lost … geopolitical influence is only playing with official Belgrade.'[46] The suspicion about the integrity of Russia's opposition was repeated the day after the secession. Uladzimir Vasil'kow, also writing for *BelTA*, suggested: 'For the moment official Moscow has expressed its categorical dislike of the separatist scenario. However, so to speak, it is unlikely that Russian diplomacy will go to any lengths on the Kosovo question. The Kosovo precedent in itself is beneficial to Moscow for whom … exist very real questions about the fate of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Taking away the "sacred cow" label from territorial integrity hands Russia the key to resolve in its favour the Caucasus imbroglio (*cherespolositsy*).'[47] With the exception of this one point of difference from Russia's declared position, no one in Belarus bought into the claim made by Western powers that Kosovo was a *sui generis* case. This was despite the fact that precedent has never been the conventional basis of international law, which is customary law.

The Belarusian parliamentary delegation to the OSCE will have heard the various points of view at the OSCE parliamentary assembly's winter session on 21-22 February, where Kosovo was

[45] Private discussion with Viktar Shadursky, dean of the Faculty of International Relations, Belarus State University, Minsk, 16 July 2016. Cited with permission.

[46] Viktoria Nezhdanova (7 February 2008), 'Balkanskii vopros: v plenu illuzii ili v poiskakh kompromissa?' [The Balkan question: hostage to illusions or in search of a compromise?] for *BelTA*

[47] Vladimir Vasil'kov (18 February 2008), 'PoKOSannaya Evropa' [Europe scythed up] via *BelTA*

debated, but by then everyone in Belarus knew what the state's official position was.[48] Likewise, the 16th CIS summit which opened in Moscow on 22 February post-dates the authoritative statements from President, the MFA and the Standing Committees. There may well have been consensus in the CIS about Kosovo, but Uzbekistan had positioned itself apart from Russia on Serbian matters after 1999, and there were different perspectives over Nagorno-Karabakh, and so there may well have been deviations from the 'NATO-aggressor' narrative (see Chapter 6).

4.1.3. The self-determination norm

The third reading of international relations introduced in Chapter 2, social constructivism, prompts consideration of the normative fabric of world politics. Given the firm position of Belarus's officials on events surrounding Serbia, it is no surprise that their rhetoric described the declaration of independence as a violation of international law. Both the press and officials repeatedly refer to Kosovo as a 'precedent.'[49] Bearing in mind that Belarus would act against Russia's preferences subsequently in the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and that its policy would demonstrate its agential capabilities, the legitimacy claims it put forward to defend its position in respect of Kosovo are significant. Were Kosovo couched only in language of alliance politics, then there would be no dissonance were Belarus to adopt a different position in each situation. However, officials appealed to other justifications for the non-recognition policy.

Belarus supported the UN General Assembly seeking an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice. On 3 December 2009, during the Court's proceedings, Belarus's Ambassador to the Netherlands, Alena Hritsenka, argued in her oral evidence that 'there are no

[48] House of Representatives (21 February 2008), 'Novosti' [News]; Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (2008), *Summary Report: Seventh Annual OSCE PA Winter Meeting, Vienna, 21-22 February 2008* (Copenhagen). The OSCE report describes the Kosovo issue as 'divisive' (p.17).

[49] See for example: Igor Kol'chenko (21 February 2008), 'Tsepnaya reaktsiya' [Chain reaction] in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*; Vladimir Vasil'kov (19 March 2008), 'Samoopredeleniye… ne dlya vsekh' [Self-determination… not for all] for *BelTA*; and *Respublika* (19 February 2008), 'Samoprovozglasilis'' [Self-proclamation] (no author)

convincing legal arguments in favour of Kosovo's secession from the Republic of Serbia.'[50] Kosovo did not meet the conditions for 'external' self-determination and the Serbian law fully provided for the possibility of the region's 'internal' self-determination. She said that external self-determination was possible in two cases: (1) former colonies; (2) where a minority group had been excluded from government for a long time.[51] However, the second of these did not constitute 'a broad norm of international law.' In effect through insisting on internal self-determination she was upholding the basic principle of 'Westphalian sovereignty.'[52] Drawing attention to provisions that had existed in the 1974 Yugoslav Republic's constitution for Kosovo's autonomy, she stated that any subsequent restrictions on this autonomy were not justification for secession and that Serbia had not refused to extend new measures of autonomy to Kosovo. Importantly, note that this argument was being made *after* events in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which suggests that the views were not merely instruments of geopolitical rivalry.

The MFA's press secretary added a second dimension to the argument. He pointed out that the Court considered only legal obstacles to the declaration, but had not addressed the issue of the right of the Kosovo Assembly to make that declaration.[53] Belarus thereby challenged the authority of the Kosovo government, and argued that Kosovo's independence violated the primary norm of what Stephen Krasner calls 'international legal sovereignty'[54] This determines which territorial entities are afforded the authority to act in certain ways, such as issuing lawful declarations. It's a curious claim from a young state, whose own independence depended on

[50] International Court of Justice (2009), 'Verbatim record of the public sitting held on Thursday 3 December 2009 at 10am, at the Peace Palace on the Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government of Kosovo (Request for advisory opinion submitted by the General Assembly of the United Nations) / CR2009/27,' pp.26-33

[51] International Court of Justice (2009)

[52] Stephen D. Krasner (1999), *Sovereignty: Organised Hypocrisy* (Princeton NJ), p.10

[53] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (undated), 'Komentarii nachal'nika upravleniya informatsii – press-sekretarya MID Andreya Savinikh v svyazi s zaklyucheniem Mezhdunarodnogo suda po Kosovo [Commentary of the head of the Department of Information/Press Secretary of the MFA Andrey Savinikh in connection with the conclusion of the International Court on Kosovo]

[54] Krasner (2009), p.8

such a claim, and not least from a power whose legal authority historically (as the BSSR) had been recognised despite not meeting the criteria for international legal sovereignty.[55]

Ultimately, Belarus's policy was to staunchly support Russia. Lukashenka lamented the fact that the two states had 'let this happen.' He and his colleagues implicitly expected Russia to act in the role of regional hegemon, and he regretted that Russia had been unable to fulfil its obligations in that role in 1999: 'I very well recognised the situation. It was not worthwhile for Russia to put in a lot of effort resisting the aggression waged against our brotherly people.'[56] When, later in the year, an influential Belarusian commentator and historian, Vadim Gigin, called for redress, he immediately invoked Russia: 'Putin, wake up!' he wrote, 'Get back to the Balkans. Without a Greater Serbia there will not be a Great Russia.'[57] Note that, while Gigin can fairly be described as a Russophile, he is not uncritical of Russia, and is an advocate of West-Russism interpretation of history (see Section 3.1.1.). In other words, a Belarusian nationalist consented to Russia's hegemonic regional role. While the outcome in respect of Belarus's positioning and Kosovo's sovereignty declaration conformed to the neorealist reading of international relations, it would be difficult to argue that it is *necessarily* the case that the international system either 'shaped,' or 'shoved' Belarus to act in this way. There was also consensus within Belarus about the issue, which suggests that domestic-level variables could also explain Belarus's policy. The outcome is overdetermined.

4.2. Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Prisoners of the Caucasus

Abkhazia and South Ossetia renewed their sovereignty claims after the Russo-Georgia war of 7-12 August 2008. The two republics' leaders requested a meeting with Lukashenka on 20

[55] Krasner (2009), p.8
[56] President of Belarus (18 February 2008)
[57] Vadim Gigin (24 December 2008), 'Rossiya, gde tvoi Balkany?' [Russia: where are your Balkans?] for *BelTA*

August in Sochi, where the Belarusian President pledged humanitarian assistance and expressed his view that 'Russia did not create the conflict in Ossetia and Abkhazia – it was a dispute of the people.'[58] In fact, he also set out a clear position on recognition. Referring to a conversation he had with Medvedev the previous day, Lukashenka said: 'I am not preparing to feature in this cacophony and declare that I support somebody, that I approve or disapprove. *That's our position.* Russia behaved correctly [my emphasis].'[59] Despite this, there was wide expectation that Belarus would recognise the sovereignty of Abkhazia and South Ossetia soon after Russia had done so by Duma vote on 25 August – not least from Russia.[60] Russian President Dmitry Medvedev formally signed the decree recognising the republics' sovereignty on 26 August. Two days later Lukashenka sent a message to Medvedev in which he remarked that the complicated situation had left Russia 'no other moral choice.'[61] He referred to the people's right to self-determination according to 'the fundamental international documents' (presumably the UN Charter) and the expediency of the matter being addressed by the CSTO, in which forum a consolidated position must be found. Belarus was, he assured Medvedev, Russia's 'reliable and consistent ally.'[62]

Belarus dispatched a parliamentary delegation to the two republics. On 4 September, following the delegation's visit, parliamentary deputy Mikhail Sasonka said: 'The first step has been taken – the independent republics are recognised by Russia. After that, I am certain, other states will follow.'[63] Despite his certainty, he avoided any direct pledge of Belarusian recognition, at least in the publicly available record summarising his comments. Moreover, whereas in the wake of Kosovo's declaration the MFA had issued a formal statement, no official comment was

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[58] President of Belarus (20 August 2008), 'Aleksandr Lukashenko vstretilsja s prezidentami Yuzhnoi-Osetii i Abkhazii' [Aleksandr Lukashenko met the presidents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia]

[59] President of Belarus (20 August 2008)

[60] US Embassy, Moscow (10 September 2008), *Wikileaks cable 08MOSCOW2719_a*

[61] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* (29 August 2008), 'Soobscheniya press-sluzhby Prezidenta' [Announcement of the President's press service] (no author)

[62] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* (29 August 2008)

[63] House of Representatives (4 September 2008), '"Soyuznoe veche", 4 sentyabrya 2008 g.' [The Union Assembly, 4 September 2008]

forthcoming about Abkhazia and South Ossetia. There was likewise no equivalent of the parliamentary statement issued in the Kosovo case. Without being too zealous about reading significance into the absence of these statements, it is at least consistent with the possibility that a state-wide policy position had not been formulated. Lukashenka would subsequently ask the parliament to consider the matter, which was a largely unprecedented action and, I argue, one that indicated divisions within the Presidential Administration over Russia's actions and the best policy to respond to them. My argument across the next three sections is that Belarus did not conform to expected structural pressures, and that this can be explained by recognising the relevant parts of the elite were differentiated about how Belarus should act. In comparison with the Kosovo situation, Belarus reflected far more about its national interests and its position as a subject of international relations, and this in turn provoked it into seeking some agency so as to provide for its own interests. Perhaps unwittingly, the lack of consensus helped it to retain a policy line separate from Moscow.

4.2.1. Enter the EU – and Russia's strong-arm

Although only a few months separated the Kosovo and Caucasus sovereignty claims, there had been changes that potentially affected the structure of the international system. On the one hand, an evaluation of the distribution of political power in Eastern Europe from mid-2008 needs to take account of the EU's Eastern Partnership (although note my reservations in Section 3.2.2. about describing this as a substantive structural change in international relations). This had been announced in May and the proposed inclusion of Belarus was an olive branch to a state that was otherwise largely isolated from the EU. EU officials were more heavily engaged with Belarus than at the time of Kosovo's declaration, while the two sides stepped-up engagement further during 2009. Javier Solana, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, visited Minsk on 18-19 February 2009 to discuss Belarus's participation in the new initiative. In

March the EU Commissioner for External Relations and Neighbourhood Policy, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, visited Minsk. Belarus will have been on the agenda of the Eastern Partnership's inauguration summit on 7 May 2009.

On the other hand, it is all too easy to draw the causal arrow in a direction from the EU to Belarus, and to claim that the EU prevented Belarus from acting in accordance with its preferences, which, as will be apparent, is the narrative several Russian officials built. While the EU represented an important export market for Belarusian goods (see Table 3 above), the EU officials visiting Belarus had few powers to act autonomously of member state control and, as I will demonstrate, EU engagement was used by Russia rhetorically and unsuccessfully in its efforts to coerce Belarus to act in accordance with Russia's preferences. Although Russia had assented to smaller power neighbours participating in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), there was deep suspicion about the Eastern Partnership. The fact that Poland stood behind the initiative signalled geopolitical rather than economic ambitions to Russian minds.[64] If the elite shared this perception, then neorealism suggests that Russia would push-back against an enhanced EU presence in states such as Belarus and, since Russia was the regional hegemon, no one could rival its power or influence over Belarus. Thus, in line with the analysis in Section 2.2.1., neorealism would predict Russia to forge a linkage between the recognition question and the regional order that it saw itself as responsible for upholding. This would deny Belarus any opportunity to act against Russia's wishes.

There is evidence that Russia was taking measures to counteract prospective changes to the regional balance. Poland, which stood behind the Eastern Partnership, was not only an EU member, but also a NATO one, and the distinction between the two was blurred into the formulation 'the West.' In the month before the launch of the Eastern Partnership, NATO held its

[64] Andrey Terekhov (27 May 2008), 'Poluchite mandat!' [Receive the mandate!] in *Nezavisimaya gazeta*; Vladimir Simindei (28 May 2008), 'Varshavskaya retseptura' [Warsaw's recipe] in *Rossiiskiye vesti*

annual summit in Bucharest. This included discussion of Georgia and Ukraine's prospective membership, and Russia's opposition was voiced in talks on the side-lines of the summit. According to a rumour circulating at the time, Russia hinted that it would recognise Abkhazian and South Ossetian sovereignty if Georgia or Ukraine were given NATO Membership Action Plans, and Putin 'gave a clear signal' (*prozrachno nameknul*) that Russia would annex Crimea and eastern Ukraine.[65]

My claim that EU pressure cannot explain Belarus's position requires some elucidation. In the months after the Russo-Georgia war, the Russian press and diplomats issued a flurry of accusations about the EU's role. These accusations do not withstand scrutiny and look more like a well-orchestrated campaign. This is evident in responses to two statements from EU officials. First, in press comments after of the General Affairs and External Relations Council on 23 February 2009, Ferrero-Waldner was quoted as saying: 'If Belarus recognises it [Abkhazia and South Ossetia], that will kick our relations back to the previous position.'[66] She also noted that any decision on Belarus's participation was for the European Council, which is to say – not her competence. By omitting this important detail, both Russia Today and Interfax wrongly implied that the EU was giving Belarus an ultimatum. The idea that EU pressured Belarus into non-recognition became commonplace in the Russian discourse.

Secondly, the Czech Minister for Foreign Affairs, Karel Schwarzenberg, was quoted as saying: 'the Parliament of Belarus has its own decision, but if they would recognise South Ossetia and Abkhazia it would create a very, very difficult situation.'[67] The Czech Republic held the presidency of the Council of the European Union, which gave them some agenda-setting powers,

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[65] Olga Allenova, Elena Geda and Vladimir Novikov (7 April 2008), 'Blok NATO razoshelsya na blokpakety' [The NATO bloc splits into minority blocs] in *Kommersant*

[66] Darya Sologub (27 February 2009), 'Is Europe Blackmailing Belarus?' in *Russia Today*; *RIA Novosti* (24 February 2009), 'EU warns Minsk recognition of Abkhazia could affect ties' (no author); *Interfax* (24 February 2009), 'Evrosoyuz predostereg Minsk ot priznaniya nezavisimosti Abkhazii i Yuzhnoi Ossetii' [EU cautions Minsk against recognising the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia] (no author)

[67] Sologub (27 February 2009)

although Schwarzenberg could hardly be speaking for the EU. In any case, the issue here is how Russian officials overreacted to a routine comment during a press conference. Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said: 'When my good friend Schwarzenberg publicly says that if Belarus recognises Abkhazia and South Ossetia it can forget about the Eastern Partnership, is it blackmail or is it democracy? About those kind of statements, we have questions.'[68] Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin told *Izvestiya*: 'Schwarzenberg's statement should be regarded as severe EU pressure on Belarus.'[69] Russia's Permanent Representative to the EU, Vladimir Chizhov, spoke of 'unconcealed political pressure.'[70] In addition to Lavrov's seemingly wilful misquoting of Schwarzenberg, the proliferation of responses from Russian official indicated the depth of concern Russian officials felt about what they perceived as a changing regional order.

Based on the available evidence, it is primarily Russian officials that drew a linkage between Belarus's position on Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the EU's new project. Both Belarusian and EU member state officials who were involved in negotiations have rejected the claims. Lukashenka himself said that the EU had not imposed any such condition on Belarus,[71] and the Minister for Foreign Affairs at the time, Martynow, also denied that the EU made any linkage.[72] Nigel Gould-Davies, the British ambassador in 2008, and who no longer works in the British diplomatic service, described the suggestion as 'strange' in my interview with him.[73] Moreover, two sources suggest that, while EU officials may well have tried to persuade Belarus not to extend recognition, diplomats clearly communicated to Belarus that this was not going to be a crucial issue as regards its participation in the Eastern Partnership. This is credible, given that EU policy towards Belarus involved plenty of sticking points as it was, and given the impetus

[68] *Deutsche Welle* (21 March 2009), 'EU's New Eastern Partnership Draws Ire from Russia' (no author)
[69] *RIA Novosti* (6 March 2009), 'Russia says EU pressures Belarus over S. Ossetia, Abkhazia' (no author)
[70] *RIA Novosti* (24 February 2009)
[71] President of Belarus (24 February 2009), 'Glava gosudarstvo posetil Minskii motornii zavod' [The Head of State visited the Minsk motor factory]
[72] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (14 February 2009), 'Interv'yu Ministra inostrannikh del S. Martynova dlya gazety "Frankfurter Al'gemaine Tsaitung"' [Interview of Foreign Minister S. Martynov for the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung newspaper]
[73] Interview, Oxford, January 2017

to make the Eastern Partnership work. It seems unlikely that the EU would prioritise a matter salient for Russia over the value-based cooperation salient for itself; the conditions for Belarus's participation concerned human rights and democracy. The Head of the Presidential Administration, Uladzimir Makey, told US diplomats in private that the EU had quietly expressed understanding and indicated that there would not be any repercussions for Belarus if it recognised the two republics.[74] While the comment might have been made to beseech US diplomats not to make the subject an issue in Belarus-US relations, there is no apparent motivation for Makey to misrepresent EU officials' remarks. Moreover, there is corroboration for the claim from Gigin, who told me: 'Western diplomats, though they looked on Belarus's [prospective] recognition [of the republics' sovereignty] as undesirable, acknowledged that it would not be a substantial hurdle for *rapprochement* between the EU and Belarus, given that they understood the special relationship between Belarus and Russia.'[75] Moreover, the time lag between the original appeals for recognition and EU officials' visits in 2009 suggests that some of the Russian officials' claims are fanciful. If Belarus had wanted to recognise Abkhazia and South Ossetia, there was nothing stopping it from doing so in 2008.

If anyone was applying pressure to Belarus, then it was Russia. Initially, on 27 August 2008, Russia's Ambassador to Belarus, Aleksander Surikov said: 'It is the sovereign right of Belarus to recognise or not recognise their [the republics'] independence, but we count on this recognition from the side of Belarus, being one of our closest allies.'[76] Gould-Davies confirms my interpretation that this was 'diplomatic language… the implication is clear.'[77] When recognition was not forthcoming, however, speculation was that Russia was offering Belarus a deal. Although

[74] US Embassy, Minsk [Vilnius] (24 March 2009), *Wikileaks cable 09VILNIUS155_a*

[75] Private discussion, Minsk, December 2016. Cited with permission.

[76] *Nasha Niva* (28 August 2008), 'My raz'lichvaem na Belarus'' [We are counting on Belarus] (no author); *Zvyazda* (28 August 2008), 'Pasol Racii u Belarusi ne vyklyuchae magchymastsi wvakjozdannya Abkhazii i Pawdnevai Asetsii w sklad SND i Sayuznai dzyazhavy' [The Ambassador of Russia in Belarus does not rule out the possibility of Abkhazia and South Ossetia acceding to the CIS and Union State] (no author). The Russian ambassador was also criticising Belarus's position during the war, see: Yan Buyan (12 August 2008), 'Surikov sdelal vygovor Lukashenko' [Surikov censured Lukashenko] in *Salidarnasts'*

[77] Interview, Oxford, January 2017

details are sketchy, both Belarusian and Russian sources claim that there was bargaining behind doors, and Lukashenka himself would go on to claim in 2014 that he put a list on the table in front of Medvedev.[78] Nevertheless, *Kommersant* cited a Kremlin source as saying that Russia 'had convinced Lukashenko that the decision [about credit] needs to be made by taking into account the situation in the world.'[79] Another source 'close to the Kremlin' was quoted criticising Belarus for 'want[ing] to "pump everything out" of us and at the same time expect[ing] the full freedom to act without taking into account our interests.'[80] It is reasonable to assume the remarks refer to the situation provoked by, and Russia's interests in, the Caucasus.

Unlike in the wake of Kosovo's declaration, Belarus began to use its position as a bargaining chip. By the spring of 2009 tensions spilled into the open. Russia's finance minister, Aleksey Kudrin made animated remarks about the parlous state of the Belarusian economy. These raised the ire of Belarus's leadership and a toing-and-froing of insults followed; Lukashenka publicly called Kudrin 'a numbskull' (*otmorozok*).[81] Lukashenka explained: 'It's already come to this. They [the Russians] came, they said: there will be recognition of Ossetia and Abkhazia – then there will be $500 million.'[82] Moreover, a dividend was being paid for Belarus's foot-dragging on the recognition issue with several EU members. In addition, the release of political prisoners after the Russo-Georgia war, the pigeon-step of allowing two independent newspapers access to

[78] President of Belarus (17 October 2014), 'Press-konferentsiya Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus' A. G. Lukashenko zhurnalistam rossiiskhikh regionalnikh sredstv massovoi informatsii' [Press conference of the President of the Republic of Belarus A. G. Lukashenko for journalists of Russian regional mass media]

[79] Vladimir Solov'ev (20 March 2009), 'Aleksandr Lukashenko upal v tsene' [Aleksandr Lukashenko lost his value] *Kommersant*

[80] Andrey Makhovsky (18 June 2009), 'Mir Minska i Moskvy mozhet okazat'sya peremiriem' [Peace between Minsk and Moscow can become a truce] for *Reuters*

[81] *Izvestiya* (8 June 2009), 'Belorussiya nazvala usloviya polucheniya rossiiskogo kredita' [Belorussia named the conditions for receipt of Russian credit] (no author); Maksim Konovalov, Mikhail Zygar (1 June 2009), 'Aleksandr Lukashenko ischet sredstva ot Rossii' [Aleksander Lukashenko seeks funds from Russia] in *Kommersant*; Vladimir Mamontov, Andrey Reut (5 June 2009), 'Belorussiya i Rossiya: Kto kogo teryayet?' [Belorussia and Russia: Who is losing whom?] in *Izvestiya*

[82] *BelTA* (1 June 2009), 'Aleksandr Lukashenko dal interv'yu krupnym pechatnym izdaniym Rossii' [Aleksandr Lukashenko gave an interview to the major Russian print media] for *BelTA*; *Naviny* (5 June 2009), 'Lukashenko: budet Osetiya i Abkhazia – znachit, budet 500 millionov dollarov' [Lukashenko: Enough! Ossetia and Abkhazia means $500 million] (no author)

the state-run distribution network, coupled with a public display of not pleasing Russia, convinced the EU to engage more fully with the political authorities in Minsk. Belarus was admitted to the Eastern Partnership.

At this point Russia upped the ante by banning imports of 1,600 Belarusian dairy products, ostensibly over health concerns, but *Rospotrebnadzor*'s produce bans often strain credibility (see Chapter 3). Meanwhile nothing Belarusian officials said escaped unnoticed by Russia. On 23 July, the Deputy Head of the Consular Directorate of the Belarusian MFA, Aliaksandr Lukashevich, advised Belarusian nationals to enter the disputed territories from Georgia and invoked *Georgia's* laws in respect of the territories.[83] The Russian MFA responded by calling the announcement 'strange' and vowed to investigate.[84] At the same time *Kommersant* reported a senior Kremlin source threatening to bring financial hardship on Belarus because of Lukashenka's public statements, which it is fair to assume refers to the President's disclosure of a deal for the $500 million.[85] The Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration, Natallya Pyatkevich, said: 'threats against Belarus… are becoming a bad habit. These attempts to stir up a hullabaloo (*azhiotazh*) are absurd, and all the more so when they politicise a technical statement from the MFA. There have been no changes in our position on Abkhazia and South Ossetia.'[86] The last sentence was precisely the problem.

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[83] Vladimir Solov'yev (24 July 2009), 'Belorussiya proyavila nepriznatel'nost': Soyuznoe s Rossiei gosudarstvo na grani raspada' [Belorussia expresses its non-recognition: The Union State with Russia on the verge of dissolution] in *Kommersant.* This may seem trivial, but note how this remark was used to depict Lukashenka as disloyal towards Russia in the propaganda documentary 'Krestniy bat'ka' [The Godfather] made by NTV in 2010.

[84] Vladislav Vorob'yev (23 July 2009), 'Stranniye rekomendatsii: MID RF proverit stepen' ser'eznosti "strannoi" rekomendatsii Belorussii ezdit' v Yu.O. cherez Gruziyu' [MFA Russian Federation verifying the level of seriousness of "strange" recommendations to enter S. Ossetia through Georgia] in *Rossiiskaya gazeta*

[85] Press Service of the President (25 July 2009), 'Anonimiki – amoral'ny' [Anonymity is immorality] in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*

[86] *BelTA* (24 July 2009), Interview with Natalya Petkevich (no author); *Charter 97* (25 July 2009), 'Petkevich vozmushchena vyskazivaniymi "anonimov" iz Kremlya po povodu Lukashenko' [Petkevich indignant with statements from "anonymous sources" from the Kremlin about Lukashenko] (no author)

Before concluding this sub-section, let me reiterate the weak hand of Western powers over Belarus in comparison with Russia. The latter's subsidisation of the Belarusian economy amounted to several billion dollars.[87] In June 2009, the EU provided €10 million to Belarus as part of the Eastern Partnership package, but this was relatively insubstantial. The EU also temporary suspended its travel bans on Belarusian officials but this was an insignificant gesture.[88] The US likewise lifted some sanctions, but again this was a gesture of limited significance. An IMF Stand-By Arrangement (loan) agreed for Belarus in 2009 amounted to $2.46 billion. This is clearly far more significant, but it is tenuous to connect that to the matter of sovereignty recognition; as with the Eastern Partnership, the conditionality attached to IMF dealings with Belarus already had plenty of potential deadlocks given the of the aversion of the Belarusians to implement reforms. Finally, it is worth bearing in mind that the economic value of Georgia to Belarus was slight, and Belarus had little to lose by upsetting the Georgians (see Table 4).

	2008	*2010*	*2012*	*2014*	*2016*
EU	22 820	15 227	26 865	20 125	11 086
Georgia	45	64	70	64	73
Russia	34 059	28 034	43 860	37 371	25 789
Serbia	65	116	149	245	94
Ukraine	4 893	4 439	7 866	5 753	3 810
United States	628	496	708	632	510

Table 4: Belarus's trade volume with various partners in millions of dollars (Source: IMF Direction of Trade statistics)

[87] Margarita M. Balmaceda (2014), *Living the High Life in Minsk: Russian Energy Rents, Domestic Populism, and Belarus's Impending Crisis* (Prague), p.148

[88] European Commission (19 June 2009), 'Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner visits Belarus to encourage democratisation – assistance package of €10 mio announced' in *Press releases*

4.2.2. Elite differentiation

The points made in the previous section show how Belarus's non-recognition confounded the expectations of neorealism. In Chapter 2, I indicated that neoclassical realist explanations can take into account the causal influence of differentiation within the elite. My argument is that this differentiation within the elite was crucial to Belarus's ability to maintain a policy line independent from Russia.

For sure, there were plenty in Belarus keen to support Russia. In the days after the Russo-Georgia war several parliamentarians publicly voiced their approval for Russia's position, including Siarhei Kostyan (the deputy chairman of the lower house's Standing Committee for International Affairs and CIS relations), Charginets, Uladzimir Barshchow, and Siarhei Haidukevich.[89] Haidukevich, whom Andrew Wilson has compared to Russia's firebrand Vladimir Zhirinovsky, crowed: 'Russia has got up off its knees. In this matter Belarus has every reason to support Russia.'[90] Yet there was a quieter contingent that stood against recognition. Later, Makey told US officials that recognition would not help Belarus's relations with Russia. The leaked cable reports that 'he [Makey] did warn that there were elements in the PA [President's Administration] and government who were predisposed towards recognition.'[91] The reference to 'elements' in favour of recognition strongly suggests that there were also elements who shared his inclination to avoid recognition, which is confirmed by Belarus's policy. On 27 October, the speaker of the Belarusian parliament, Uladzimir Andreichanka, was non-committal when asked about the matter by journalists, saying only that parliament would consider recognition if a

[89] House of Representatives (26 August 2008), 'MTRK "Mir"' [Television company "World"]; Mikola Buhaj (28 August 2008), 'Raseya myanye kartu s'vetu' [Russia changes the world map] in *Nashe Niva.* The relevant paragraph was not included in the print edition, but remains available in the online version.

[90] Buhaj (28 August 2008). On Haidukevich see: Andrew Wilson (2005), *Virtual Politics: Faking Democracy in the Post-Soviet World* (New Haven CT), pp.196-198; Andrew Wilson (2011), *Belarus: The Last European Dictatorship* (New Haven CT), pp.197-198

[91] US Embassy, Minsk [Kyiv] (20 October 2009), *Wikileaks cable 09KYIV1822_a*

motion was brought.[92] Andreichanka was only a messenger, but the message was that there was no decision higher up.

The ambiguity in Belarus's position was mirrored in the tightly-controlled state media. Whereas on 27 August both the official newspaper of the government (*Respublika*) and the parliament (*Narodnaya gazeta*) devoted ample space to Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's statement of Russia's recognition, the official newspaper of the Presidential Administration (*Sovetskaya Belorussiya*), whose agenda is tightly controlled (see Section 1.4), did not mention the two republics. The significance of the silence is brought out by earlier remarks from Surikov, the Russian Ambassador: 'Belarus's maintaining silence [during the Russo-Georgia war] is not at all comprehensible to us. … We always render support when international organisations criticise Belarus for the absence of human rights. There is always a resounding announcement [of support for Belarus] from Russia.'[93] The authors in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* carried the formal line from Lukashenka: an opinion piece from Anatol' Rozanaw said: 'As to the position of Belarus in this conflict, that has been clearly articulated by Lukashenko during his meeting in Sochi with the Russian leaders. Commentary on his remarks is superfluous.'[94] Writing in the same paper the following day, Igor Kol'chenko reflected on the immorality of politics and drew attention to the forthcoming SCO summit, suggesting that one should await its outcomes.[95]

Belarus was temporising and, faced with mounting pressure from Russia, Lukashenka did his utmost to clear his yardarm. He formally passed the matter to the Belarusian parliament. He had already hinted on 18 September 2008 that he wanted to disown responsibility for the

[92] Belapan (27 October 2008), 'New Belarus speaker noncommittal on recognition of Georgian rebel regions'

[93] Yan Buyan (12 August 2008)

[94] Anatoly Rozanov (29 August 2008), 'Razgovorchiki v stroyu…' [Chatter in the ranks…] in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*

[95] Igor Kol'chenko (28 August 2008), 'Rossiya sdelala priznaniye' [Russia gave recognition] in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*

decision, telling the press that he 'would not like to take this decision individually.'[96] He was soon speaking in more concrete terms. Referring to himself in the third person, he said: 'If it is the will of the [Belarusian] people and the parliament, then the President will sign the corresponding decree.'[97] Lukashenka pre-empted Russian criticism by pointing out that this was 'the route the Russians took … the Parliament … will discuss it.'[98] He had already warned Russia: 'If we are to take a decision about Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it will be our decision, not a decision under pressure from Russia. I will not stand for any pressure in this regard.'[99]

Although the issue was indeed passed to the parliament, those expecting a swift decision were about to be frustrated. In January the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, Valer Ivanow, told *RIA Novosti* that the parliament would debate the issue when the spring session opened on 2 April and that 'the decision will be made.'[100] However, the matter was not included on the agenda for the first day of the parliament's session, and instead allocated to the Standing Committee for International Affairs. The Parliament's Speaker, Andreichanka, stated that it was necessary to consider the political and economic consequences of the republics' recognition, confirming that appeals for their recognition had been received, but on the specific question of whether a decision would be reached he remained non-committal: 'we live in hope.'[101] Siarhai Maskevich, a deputy sitting on the parliament's Committee for International Affairs and CIS Relations, echoed these comments, underscoring the need to avoid 'destabilising

[96] President of Belarus (18 September 2008), 'Interv'yu Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus' A. G. Lukashenko zapadnoevropeiskim SMI' [Interview of the President of the Republic of Belarus A. G. Lukashenko to West European mass media]

[97] President of Belarus (24 December 2008), 'V Belarusi postepenno vyravnivaetsya sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe razvitie regionov' [The socio-economic development of the regions in Belarus is gradually levelling-out]

[98] President of Belarus (24 November 2008), 'Interv'yu informatsionnomu agentstvu "Frans-Press"' [Interview with information agency 'Agence France-Presse']

[99] President of Belarus (24 November 2008)

[100] *RIA Novosti* (22 January 2009), 'Belarus to consider recognising S. Ossetia, Abkhazia on 2 April 2' (no author)

[101] *Charter 97* (2 April 2009), 'Belorusskie "deputaty" otsenivayut posledstviya priznaniya Yuzhnoi Ossetii i Abkhazii' [Belarusian 'deputies' evaluate the consequences of recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia] (no author)

the situation' and pursuing Belarus's national interests.[102] He explained: 'A group of deputies, together with lawyers and other experts, is studying this question and the consequences of the decision.' The Minister for Foreign Affairs corroborated this: 'We are carefully studying the situation… for the moment we have not taken a decision about whether or not to recognise them.'[103] In a seeming contradiction of Lukashenka, Maskevich insisted that the parliament would only offer its opinion and that the decision was for the President to take.

If the parliament seriously thought itself charged with resolving the issue, it is difficult to believe that recognition would not have been forthcoming. Most of the parliamentarians had been cherry-picked by Lukashenka in the mid-1990s, when union with Russia was the declared foreign policy ambition of Belarus, and nearly half belong to the *Edinstvo* faction that lists amongst its goals development of common structures and politics with Russia. In fact, the truth is probably found in a US Embassy cable from five months later, which cites confidential government sources as stating that the parliament was in fact waiting for a definitive statement from Lukashenka.[104] The problem was that neither the President nor his Administration had resolved their uncertainties, and Lukashenka later said publicly that he would not give the parliament any guidance.[105] The limited significance of the parliament meant that it was wholly unprepared to do any actual decision-making. It was clear that there was some thinking about the implications of Russia's actions for other post-Soviet states, even if Lukashenka claimed that suggestions of threats to Belarus were exaggerations.[106]

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[102] Aleksandr Gabuev, Maksim Konovalov (2 April 2009), 'Aleksandr Lukashenko vyrazil nepriznatel'nost' [Aleksandr Lukashenko expressed non-recognition] in *Kommersant*; Fedor Stefanovic (2 April 2009), 'Profil'naya kommissiya parlamenta rassmatrivaet obraschenie Abkhazii i Yuzhnoi Ossetii' [Special parliamentary commission to look at the appeal of Abkhazia and South Ossetia] in *Belorusskaya delovaya gazeta*

[103] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (14 February 2009)

[104] US Embassy, Minsk [Vilnius] (19 September 2008), *Wikileaks cable 08VILNIUS786_a*

[105] Dzmitry Ulasaw (6 March 2009), 'Lukashenko insists that he will not give directives to parliament regarding whether or not to recognise Abkhazia, South Ossetia' for *BelaPAN*

[106] President of Belarus (18 September 2008)

4.2.3. In search of agency

The first effort made by Belarus was to endeavour to turn it into a multilateral issue. In his message to President Medvedev, Lukashenka had emphasised the expedience of discussing the breakaway republics at the forthcoming CSTO summit. In *Sovetsyaka Belorussiya*, political scientist Aleg Bukhovets wrote: 'For Russia, of course, it is natural to use the moral approval of the influential international organisation [the SCO] … In this regard the path – suggested by Lukashenko to Medvedev – to put the issue of Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the agenda of the imminent CSTO summit is the most correct and pragmatic course.'[107] Lukashenka's motives for ensuring the matter was on the CSTO's agenda can only be speculated about: was Belarus seeking additional information before making a decision? Was Belarus expecting there to be a consensus in support of Russia? Was Belarus looking to buy additional thinking time and/or deflect pressure being applied to it? It is probable that Lukashenka was taken unawares by the CSTO's failure to collectively agree to recognise the republics, instead issuing a collective statement which blamed Georgia for the conflict and supported Russia's role as a peacekeeper in the region.[108] This suggests that smaller powers in the region were uncertain about Russia's hegemonic role, and unwilling to consent to it having the free hand it longed for.

The failure to find a consolidated CSTO position frustrated Belarus. Sasonka claimed that if 'having lived for decades in the same state [the USSR], we cannot find agreement and mutual understanding, if we do not join efforts to find a consolidated position, then we really can become… a resource appendage to the West.'[109] When Lukashenka was asked about the CSTO's collective non-recognition of the provinces on 18 September, he emphasised that this was the

[107] Oleg Bukhovets (2 September 2009), 'Dvusmislennost' otsenok' [Ambiguous assessments] in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*

[108] Collective Security Treaty Organisation (5 September 2008), 'Declaration of the Moscow Session of the CSTO Collective Security Council'

[109] House of Representatives (4 September 2008), 'Novosti - 'Soyuznoe veche,' 4 Sentyabrya 2008' [News – Union Assembly, 4 September 2008]

situation 'at the moment.'[110] Two months later he claimed: 'I think very many are prepared to recognise [Abkhazia and South Ossetia], a great many.'[111] An article already cited from *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* shows that Belarusians were also following the outcome of discussions within the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), although they too had been at best lukewarm: neither the joint statement nor the declaration from the Dushanbe summit mention the Russo-Georgia war or the separatist regions.[112] It is only Russian President Medvedev's press conference that claims that there was 'unity.'[113] If anything, he conceded there was no unity going into the summit, asserting that some members' interpretations 'differed significantly from the real state of affairs.'

The consequence of differentiation within the elite was that Belarus better understood its own position. Although certain state newspapers continued to praise Russia, *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* retained a more thoughtful approach, commenting: 'South Ossetia has become a reference point for the widest, and most reflective, comprehension of the model of world order. But is the cost [of these events] adequate?'[114] Generally there was a far more nuanced discussion in the media. Some commentators were decidedly unenthusiastic about Abkhazia and South Ossetia's independence. *Nasha niva's* edition of 28 August argued that recognition of the republics' independence would further isolate Belarus from Europe and reaffirm the views of those outside Belarus who view it as a client state of Russia.[115] In an article the following week, Mel'yantsow wrote: 'Russia is not ready for a Cold War with the West, but she is fully able to

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[110] President of Belarus (18 September 2008)

[111] President of Belarus (11 November 2008), 'Interv'yu gazete "Wall Street Journal" [Interview with 'the Wall Street Journal newspaper]

[112] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (17 September 2008, [28 August]), 'Joint Statement of the Meeting of the Council of the Heads of State of The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation'; President of the Russian Federation (27 August 2008), 'Dushanbe Declaration of the Heads of SCO Member States'. Although Belarus was not a member of the SCO, it would become a 'dialogue partner' in 2009.

[113] President of the Russian Federation (28 August 2008), 'Answers to Journalists' Questions after a meeting of the Council of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation'

[114] Dmitry Kryat (2 September 2008), 'Vremya reshat'?' [Time to decide?] in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*

[115] Buhaj (28 August 2008)

conduct regional wars for territory and political influence.'[116] Belarus was more secure than other post-Soviet states, he said, but its policy of manoeuvring between Russia and the West could not survive heightened conflict between Russia and the West. If Belarus wants to retain its independence, he concluded, it will need to move towards integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. It is apparent that Belarusian officials understood Mel'yantsow's viewpoint and sought to disentangle the issue of recognition from its alliance commitments. It hedged its bets.

On the one hand, despite Lukashenka's ability to irritate his Russian colleagues, he repeatedly asserted his loyalty to Moscow. He initially described Russia's military intervention as having been carried out 'calmly, wisely and splendidly (*krasivo*).'[117] To a Western press audience he emphasised Belarus's alliance with Russia: 'Do not forget we are an ally of Russia. Where it is possible and does not contradict our interests, we need to act as allies you will agree. You, you know, in the European Union were not unanimous about Kosovo. But this is what I liked: you acted like allies, as a coherent whole.'[118] The interesting point here is the public implication that there might not have been unanimity on the issue between Belarus and Russia. It was during this same interview that he was disinclined to perceive a threat to his own state, stating that since there were no separatist movements it would be an exaggeration to envisage a repeat of the scenario in Belarus, which suggests – in view of the salience of the issue for Russia – it would have been a simple concession for Belarus to make.

On the other hand, Belarus clearly pushed back against Russian agenda-setting for the alliance, and seeking to find ways of balancing its own interests against Russia's power. Belarus initially refused to sign up to the CSTO Collective Rapid Reaction Forces, and Lukashenka declined the invite to the summit where the agreement would be signed. He again refused to sign the

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[116] Dzyania Mel'yantsaw (4 September 2008), 'Izalyatsiya Rasei i nastupstvy dlya Belarusi' [Russia's isolation and the consequences for Belarus] in *Nasha Niva,* pp.3-4

[117] President of Belarus (19 August 2008), 'Aleksandr Lukashenko v Sochi provel peregovori s Dimitriem Medvedym' [Alexander Lukashenko held negotiations with Dimitry Medvedev in Sochi]

[118] President of Belarus (18 September 2008)

agreement at a later meeting in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. His advisor, Rybakow, hinted that Belarus was dissatisfied with Russia's persistent pressure and felt its sovereignty being undermined: 'As a sovereign and independent state, Belarus will decide for itself which CSTO documents to sign and when.'[119] There were two issues here. One is that Belarus's commitments to support Russia, and for integration in the post-Soviet space, were contingent on guarantees that its sovereignty would not be compromised.[120] The second was that Belarus belatedly understood itself as over-dependent on Russia. For a while this had not been the case, and Russia was primarily viewed as a source of subsidy in return for loyalty, but the subsidies were drying up.[121] According to a US cable in late 2009, Belarus was working harder to decrease its dependence: 'Makey … has seen no change in GOR [Government of Russia's] preference for dictating to its "partners." He personally believes that recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by GOB [Government of Belarus] will not change Russia's heavy-handedness towards Belarus although some in the GOB, he said, have a different view.'[122]

Makey was instrumental to the efforts to formulate a more effective foreign policy. He had been appointed head of the Presidential Administration in July 2008, and has been a key figure in shaping the way of thinking inside Belarus. He would later be appointed foreign minister, and carry across with him to the ministry influential colleagues such as Rybakow. I argue that this altered the function of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, such that it started to fulfil policy-making functions alongside policy implementation. What is apparent in this period 2008-2009 is that Belarus began to think seriously about its role in international relations, rather than merely its relations with Russia. Lukashenka said: 'If someone thinks recognition by Belarus of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is merely support of Russia, that person is misled. It is, of course,

[119] Aleksandr Gabuev and Maksim Konovalov (31 July 2009), 'Ot Rossii otryvaetsya kollektiv' [The collective breaks away from Russia] in *Kommersant*

[120] Private discussion with Vadim Gigin, Minsk, December 2016. Cited with permission.

[121] Balmaceda (2014). Chapter 5 describes what she calls 'the low years' of heavily reduced subsidies.

[122] US Embassy, Minsk [Kyiv] (20 October 2009)

indirect support… But it is, first and foremost, our relations Belarus-Abkhazia-South Ossetia.'[123] This suggests he does not see Belarus as accountable to Russia alone. 'I could take any decision, right up to signing a decree,' he added.[124] Although the decree would presumably be one of recognition of sovereignty, the point Lukashenka is making is that Belarus has agency.

Actors generally feel some requirement to legitimise any policy, and it is apparent Lukashenka grappled a little with this. A good indication of the cleft stick he found himself in is given by his analogies given to different audiences. Speaking to the Russian media, he asked: 'would it be consistent, if Kosovo is not recognised in due course, whereas [Russia] now behaves just the same way as the West in recognising South Ossetia and Abkhazia? It would seem to be, you know.'[125] To a Western newspaper the question was reversed: 'If you recognised Kosovo, why would you not recognise Abkhazia?'[126] In the president's mind everyone was applying double standards, although his alliance commitments ensured that comments made about 'the West' were harsher, and that comments about Russia were leavened with justifications for the illegal action. This was echoed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Martynow, who repeated: 'we expressed our understanding of Russia's actions [via the CSTO declaration].'[127] Moreover, although in his first communication to the Russian president, Lukashenka had spoken of Abkhazia and South Ossetia's right to self-determination, and hence acknowledged the possibility of 'external' self-determination, but this argument was never repeated. In general, it seems that for Lukashenka – and there is sufficient evidence to add: to those around him – the recognition of the two republics was inconsistent with what had been internalised as the norms and principles of international law.

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[123] President of Belarus (18 September 2008)

[124] President of Belarus (18 September 2008)

[125] President of Belarus (8 September 2008), 'Stenogramma press-konferentsii Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus A. G. Lukashenko SMI regionov Rossii' [Transcript of press conference of the President of the Republic of Belarus A. G. Lukashenko with mass media of the Russian regions]

[126] President of Belarus (11 November 2008)

[127] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (14 February 2009)

In respect of smaller powers' agency, an expectation of the social constructivist reading of international relations outlined in Chapter 3 was that where norm-makers violate a norm, the smaller powers, which are typically norm-takers, are more likely to put up resistance. Russia's attempts to legitimise its support for Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and more generally to redraw the territorial borders within the region, provoked Belarus to modify its own support for Russia. The subjectivity of Belarus enabled its articulation of its agency in a way that might not have been possible had Russia acted consistently with the international norms both states had advocated previously.

Throughout the year following Abkhazia and South Ossetia's declarations of independence, President Lukashenka continued to hold meetings with the leaders of the two republics. In fact, prior to Russia extending recognition, Belarus seemed to be both aware of and welcoming the prospective event. After the Sochi meeting on 20 August, Abkhazian President Sergey Bagapsh was quoted as saying that Lukashenka offered to initiate talks about incorporating the republics into the Union State of Belarus and Russia.[128] Meeting the Abkhazian president seven months later, Lukashenka seemed to *de facto* recognise their sovereignty, saying: 'Matters always build up after the acquisition of independence.'[129] Yet behind the scenes, forces were working to ensure Belarus did not do so. To explain why Belarus adopted the policy it has required opening up 'the black box' of decision-making. It requires understanding the 'transmission belt' along which structural pressures passed.

The reported remarks of the Head of the Presidential Administration cited earlier indicate that the Presidential Administration was divided. Referring to withstanding Russia's strongarm

[128] Interview with *Vremya Soyuza,* cited in: *Novy chas* (12 September 2008), 'Yany pra nas: zamezhnaya presa pra Belarus'' (no author) [Them about us: Foreign press on Belarus]

[129] *Charter 97* (24 March 2009), 'Lukashenko uzhe fakticheski priznal nezavisimost' Abkhazii' (no author) [Lukashenko practically recognised the independence of Abkhazia]

tactics, Makey told US diplomats: 'We don't see a way out.'[130] Yet Belarus reaped benefits from both the EU and Russia by maintaining an ambiguous position; it asserted its commitments to Russia as its ally, but employed a minimal hedging tactic. The purpose was to keep other states involved in Belarus and not allow Russia to turn its hegemony into domination. The policy worked because there was sufficient differentiation within the elite to convince different outside powers that things were going their way. Towards Russia, Belarus strived to create the impression that it has effectively recognised the republics, and formally doing so would count for little. This is really only the continuation of ties between the republics and Belarus that pre-existed the Russo-Georgia War. Towards Western powers, Belarus knows that having not established diplomatic relations works in its favour. Belarus cannot be said to have extended recognition. In the period since the war, Belarus has established diplomatic relations with Tuvalu (2012), South Sudan (2013), and East Timor (2014); it retains the capacity to act otherwise.

4.3. Changed sovereignty and Crimea

Crimea claimed independence only briefly following a referendum on 16 March 2014, after Russia had begun its operation to annex the peninsula. The Russian-side claimed that the referendum meant Crimea was no longer under Ukrainian sovereignty, and was therefore free to join the Russian Federation. Both the crisis and war in Ukraine escalated the hassle for Belarus: on the one hand expected by Russia to fulfil its role as a loyal ally; on the other, all-too-conscious of the strain its relations with Ukraine would be put under if it fully supported Russia's position. Belarus's relationship with Ukraine is a far more important national interest than its relationship with Georgia, since Ukraine is Belarus's second largest export market (see trade figures in Table 4). At the same time, Belarus's economy is overwhelming tied to Russia's. If economic relations with Ukraine were to deteriorate, Belarus would find itself ever more vulnerable and sensitive to

[130] US Embassy, Minsk [Vilnius] (24 March 2009)

Russia's actions. Therefore, for Belarus, having some agency concerning Crimea's status mattered.

4.3.1. The role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Lukashenka discussed the Crimean referendum in a phone conversation with Putin on 18 March. Unusually though, the first formal statement came from the Belarusian MFA and not the President. While I am cautious about being zealous in respect of the significance of the ordering of official statements, I would suggest that the MFA was the driving force behind the policy position Belarus adopted. The former Head of the Presidential Administration, Makey, now filled the role of Minister for Foreign Affairs. Makey was of a different pedigree to his predecessor, Martynow, whose previous ambassadorial roles are unlikely to have granted him comparable responsibility afforded Makey. Interviewees seemed to agree that the MFA was playing an increasingly significant role. Tatsiana Karatkevich described it as 'our most successful ministry,' and Yauheni Preiherman thinks that under Makey it has been far more active than previously.[131] While one might argue that Martynaw's viewpoints diverged less from the presidential administration, this does not agree with the opinions of interviewees. Preiherman says of Martynaw: 'he was the same sort of person [as Makei] …. Not necessarily pro-Western, but pro-diversification.' Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the highly-regarded Rybakow followed Makei across to the MFA.

The President echoed the MFA's comments a few days later, on 23 March, in an interview to the Russian press where he gave the first clear articulation to his views. Prior to this, even the press notice of the telephone discussion between Lukashenka and Putin was cautious. In Russia, the Kremlin declared that '*the leaders noted the importance and historical significance* of today in

[131] Interview with Tatsiana Karatkevich, Minsk, 15 July 2016; interview with Yauheni Preiherman, Oxford, 31 May 2016

full accordance with practically the unanimous will of the people [my emphasis].'[132] In contrast the Belarusian President's office merely referred to 'an exchange of views concerning Ukraine and the situation with the carrying out of the referendum in Crimea.'[133] In his first post-annexation interview, Lukashenka said that he did not like it when the integrity and independence of a state were broken.[134] However, the policy position of Belarus was not yet fully decided, and Lukashenka did not exactly please Ukraine which recalled its ambassador for consultations in response to some comments apportioning blame to the authorities in Kyiv.[135] Five days later Lukashenka gave an hour long interview to the Ukrainian television programme *Shuster Live*. Subsequently he would give major interviews to *Euronews* (October 2014), the Russian regional press (October 2014), and *Bloomberg* (March 2015) where the topic of Crimea was raised.

On 21 March, Putin had signed the decree that, from Russia's perspective, incorporated Crimea and Sevastopol into Russia. This was widely condemned by Western states, leading to a UN General Assembly resolution 'on the territorial integrity of Ukraine' on 27 March. Belarus voted against the resolution, which I would submit was in keeping with its efforts to avoid taking a firm position in spite of the plainly expressed fealty to Russia. Indeed, my main argument in this sub-section is that Belarus endeavoured to pursue a policy comparable to the one chosen in the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. However, in order to make the policy work under structural pressures Belarus had to upgrade its statecraft. It achieved this by presenting itself as a platform for negotiations between Russia and the West; this has allowed it to divert external forces trying to shape its foreign policy. I argue that it could only do this if it had a full understanding of itself as an autonomous subject.

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[132] President of the Russian Federation (18 March 2014), 'Telefonniy razgovor s Prezidentom Belorussii Aleksandrom Lukashenko' [Telephone conversation with the President of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko]

[133] President of Belarus (18 March 2014), 'Sostoylsya telefonniy razgovor Prezidenta Belarusi s Prezidentom Rossii [A telephone conversation was held between the Presidents of Belarus and Russia]

[134] President of Belarus (23 March 2014)

[135] Yagor Martsinovich (26 March 2014), 'Ukraina adklikala pasla z Belarusi paslya zayavaw Lukashenka' [Ukraine recalled its ambassador from Belarus after Lukashenka's announcement] in *Nasha Niva*

4.3.2. Belarus as subject

The Belarusian leadership was actively reflecting on events. As Lukashenka said publicly: 'It is bad that medium-sized, small states begin to think that they cannot protect themselves and maintain their territorial integrity.'[136] In his inimitable way, he presented it as a justification for the Crimean referendum, but that is a marginal point. Indeed, the implications of Russia's actions concerning Crimea startled many across the whole of the Commonwealth of Independent States, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 6. The argument made by many Russians than it was historically Russian territory did not pass muster with Lukashenka. The President remarked wryly: 'Well, let's return, then, to the time of Batu Khan… then it will be necessary to give back to Kazakhstan, Mongolia, or someone else too, practically all the territory of Russia, western Europe, and eastern Europe.'[137] Certainly, parallels were once again being drawn to other instances of violated territorial integrity. The MFA's initial statement criticised any 'one-sided and biased interpretation of international law to satisfy geopolitical interests, and attempts to declare the uniqueness of certain international situations and territories whilst ignoring others.'[138] The statement was carefully worded, such that it could be interpreted favourably by any outside power. Importantly, it satisfied Ukraine. The Press Secretary of the Ukrainian MFA said: 'I do not see any support for Russia's actions in the statement. This is a positive signal from Belarus.'[139] The statement's criticism of 'politicians, who are in reality far removed from the situation happening in the region,' probably excluded Russian politicians, but this was not made explicit.

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[136] President of Belarus (23 March 2014)

[137] President of Belarus (14 October 2014), 'Interv'yu telekanalu "Evron'yus"' [Interview with TV station 'Euronews']

[138] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (19 March 2014), 'Zayavleniye Ministerstva inostrannikh del Respubliki Belarus'' [Announcement of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus]

[139] BelaPAN cited in: *Narodnaya volya* (21 March 2014), 'MID Ukraina ozhidaet ot Belarusi osuzhdeniya rossiiskoi anneksii Kryma' [MFA Ukraine expects criticism from Belarus about the annexation of Crimea (no author)

Furthermore, that this was deliberate is apparent from the comment of the MFA's spokesperson the following day: 'Anything that concerns its interpretation is for you to do yourselves.'[140]

It is possible that there has been a degree of policy coordination between Belarus and other states in respect of Russia. Experts within Belarus have different views on whether or not these states actively discuss policy preferences. Andrey Kazakevich suggested that the common positions of Belarus and Kazakhstan are evidence of coordinated policy, whereas Karatkevich is certain that there are no formal or informal discussions on these issues outside of the umbrella of the Eurasian Economic Union and its predecessor organisations, at which Russia is represented.[141] Moreover, Belarus and Kazakhstan became competitors rather than collaborators during the Ukraine crisis in offering themselves as hosts of peace talks.

In some respects, it was far harder than ever for Belarus to resist Russia's demands. The structural conditions within which Belarus was operating had modified further since 2008. The advent of the Eurasian Union put additional structural pressures on Belarus to recognise the transfer of Crimea to Russia because the two states were now in a customs union. As a Russian journalist pointed out to Lukashenka, in a customs union the states need to clearly define where the states' territories end.[142] Even more importantly, Belarus and Russia were supposed to form a Union State, the terms of which caused a rift in 2002 (see Chapter 5), with Belarus insistent that the two foundational states must be equals. Now Russia had unilaterally sought to change the borders of the Union State. At the same time, participation in the EU's Eastern Partnership did allow Belarus some rhetorical leverage: asked about Crimea, Lukashenka told a Russian audience Belarus's position on Abkhazia and South Ossetia would 'maybe... shed some light on Crimea for

[140] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (20 March 2014), 'Otvety nachal'nika upravleniya informatsii – press-sekretarya MID Dimitriya Mironchika na voprosy zhurnalistov v khode brifinga provedennogo 20 marta 2014g. [Answers from the head of the Department of Information – Press Secretary MFA Dimitry Mironchnik to journalists' questions in the course of the briefing for 20 March 2014]

[141] Interview with Andrey Kazakevich, Minsk, 14 July 2016; Interview with Tatsiana Karatkevich, Minsk, 15 July 2016

[142] President of Belarus (17 October 2014)

Russians.' Specifically, he claimed that recognition would have led to EU sanctions 'like you have now in Russia, only squared.'[143] This appears to be an effort to play to Russia's narrative. Lukashenka alluded to threats at a meeting between him and Javier Solana in mid-2009, but Belarus had already long been dragging its feet on the issue. In any case, the EU simply was not worth that much to the economy that it could cause the damage implied. However, a thaw in Belarus-EU relations did grant Belarus some rhetorical leverage in 2014.

Belarus was careful not to renege on what it understood as its alliance commitments to Russia, whilst being firm about where they stopped. I will come back to the limits of alliance commitments in due course, but one might infer from Lukashenka's remarks of 23 March 2014 an acknowledgement that Russia had acted illegally:

> *'If you ask me what choice I will make … we will be with Russia and there should not be any further speculations about it. …[I]f we had to choose, we will choose the Russian Federation.*
>
> *'…Why? Let me draw some parallels. Was the bombing of Iraq by Americans, NATO legal? We know it was not. What position did the allies of the USA and NATO take? Even Georgia, Ukraine (that are not part of NATO) sent their troops there. They strongly supported this illegal campaign. What happened in Egypt, Tunisia and then in Libya; what is happening in Syria? The western world sticks to the same position. They, first of all, Americans, understand that what they do there is illegal. But they act together; they are bound by agreements and arrangements.*
>
> *'In this case, why should we act against Russia? We are with Russians.'*[144]

Again, in his April 2015 Message to the Belarusian People and the National Assembly, Lukashenka reiterated Belarus's alliance choice: 'God forbid that it happens, but if necessary we will be shoulder to shoulder with Russia.'[145] In his words: 'we closely coordinate our foreign policy with Russia. We are adopting joint plans about coordinated actions in foreign policy. …. We

[143] President of Belarus (17 October 2014)

[144] President of Belarus (23 March 2014)

[145] President of Belarus (29 April 2015), 'Obraschenie s poslaniem k belorusskomu narodu i Natsionalnomu sobraniyu' [Address and message to the Belarusian people and National Assembly]

sacredly adhere to this approach.'[146] Belarus asserted its loyalty, and to some extent the quoted comments disclose something about Belarusian accountability. Agency, Gayatri Spivak said, was related to 'accountable reason… that one acts with responsibility, that one has to assume the possibility of intention, one has to assume even the freedom of subjectivity if one is to be responsible.'[147] For Belarus, alliance with Russia was 'a choice' (an intention) that brought responsibilities of support.

In keeping with its commitments to be loyal to Russia, Belarusian officials directed the blame at other parties. According to Makey: 'I want to say that everything that happened in Ukraine is largely the fault of our European partners.'[148] Lukashenka was less diplomatic than Makey. In remarks that drew censure from Ukraine, and led to the recall of Ukraine's ambassador from Minsk, he said, allegedly quoting his own words spoken to a Ukrainian crowd: 'I said to them… "look for the reasons not in Russia, but in yourselves. As a minimum – you gave the Russians a reason to reunify with Crimea. You are to blame, not Russia."'[149] Moreover, as always, Russia could count on approving voices in the Belarusian parliament. Mikalai Samoseika, chairman of the House of Representative's Standing Committee for International Affairs and CIS Relations, told *Respublika*: 'We have more than once said at different levels that we favour the [territorial] integrity of the Ukrainian state. However, what has happened in Crimea is nothing other than the free expression of the will of the people living on the peninsula: Russians, Ukrainians and Crimean Tatars. However, we relate to the results of the referendum, it is necessary to consider and respect the free expression of the majority will of the population.'[150] This position was representative of the wider Belarusian population, amongst whom 62%

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[146] President of Belarus (29 April 2015)

[147] Cited in Colin Wight (2006), *Agents, Structures and International Relations: Politics as Ontology* (Cambridge), p.206

[148] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (undated), 'Polnaya stenogramma interv'yu Ministra inostrannikh del Respubliki Belarus' Vladimira Makeya cheshkoi gazete "Lidove noviny" (g.Minsk, 9 aprelya 2014 g., opublikovano 26 aprelya 2014 g.) [Complete transcript of the interview of the Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Republic of Belarus Vladimir Makey to Czech newspaper 'Lidove noviny']

[149] President of Belarus (23 March 2014)

[150] House of Representatives (27 March 2014), '*Novosti'* [News]

considered the annexation to be 'the restoration of historical justice' according to a survey in June 2014.[151]

At the same time, Belarus insisted that it had to pursue its own national interests. These did not necessarily converge with Russia's, a point that had not been made in respect of Kosovo (perhaps because interests did converge), and was only weakly made in respect of the Georgian republics. Belarus thereby disclosed its intentions not always to act in line with Russia's expectations. It would, effectively, balance against Russia in certain issue areas; against this background repeated calls to discuss the matter in fora such as the CSTO make sense. Lukashenka declared that, even in its role as Russia's ally, 'we [Belarus] can have our own position and point of view.'[152] The Minister for Foreign Affairs was more vocal about this later:

> *[Interviewer] 'And how did Russia react to Belarus's decision not to recognise the annexation of Crimea?'*
>
> *[Makey] 'You know, we are an autonomous independent state. Building our political economy and our foreign policy, we proceed on the basis of decision-making in our national interest. We are not prepared to listen and fulfil orders from a capital of any large world power, and it's unimportant which part of the world it is situated in. Our relationships with the European Union, USA, Russia, and other countries confirm that.'*[153]

The position Belarus adopted, then, was deliberately non-committal. The President said: 'As for the recognition or non-recognition, Crimea, *just like Ossetia and Abkhazia*, *is not an independent state*. Today Crimea is part of the Russian Federation. No matter whether you recognise it or not *de facto* it remains. Belarus has already declared its position on the matter. … Whether Crimea will be recognised as a region of the Russian Federation *de jure* does not really

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[151] Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (4 July 2014), 'Vsesil'na li propaganda?' [Is propaganda all-powerful?]

[152] President of Belarus (29 April 2015)

[153] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (19 May 2015), 'Stenogramma interv'yu Ministra inostrannikh del Respubliki Belarus' Vladimira Makeya gazete "The Washington Times" (19 Maya 2015 g.)' [Transcript of interview of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus Vladimir Makey with 'The Washington Times']

matter. Everybody recognises Russia. We are not going to meddle in it [my emphasis].'[154] It was now convenient to remark that Abkhazia and South Ossetia were not sovereign.

Moreover, Belarus tried to protect itself from criticism by offering to host peace talks between Russia and Ukraine. It turned a prospective threat into an opportunity; Belarus could demonstrate that its ostensibly 'neutral' position (really always closer to Russia than Ukraine) was invaluable. This would allow Lukashenka to assuage criticism from Russian journalists: 'If I had acted after they [presumably: Russia] recommended to me after the reunification [*sic*] with Crimea, would there be this platform for negotiations[?]'[155] This was articulated more clearly by Makey: 'Perhaps someone [i.e. Russia] has some negative sediment left over from this [non-recognising the transfer of Crimea to Russia], but we proceeded on the principle that our policy yields benefits for the region, and for all sides in the conflict. There is supposed to be a third side, who is not drawn into the conflict, who can provide a platform for negotiations, offer his services for the organisation of these negotiations with the goal of restoring peace and stability in the region as soon as possible.'[156] Following Paul Schroeder, this was a policy of 'transcendence': an attempt to surmount anarchic relations by not getting dragged into conflictual politics, and instead striving to solve the problem and curtail the threat.[157] In truth, Belarus was only providing a meeting room and a tea trolley, but it garnered plenty of prestige.

This 'neutral' position has taken some effort to maintain. On 27 March, the UN General Assembly voted on a resolution on the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Belarus voted against Resolution 68/262 along with Russia and nine other states, and this has led many to argue that Belarus recognises Crimea as part of Russia. Although other statements may well lean towards that conclusion, the UN vote cannot do so. It was part of Belarus strategy of striving to keep both Russia and Ukraine satisfied. As well as voting the same way as Russia, the Belarusian national

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[154] President of Belarus (23 March 2014)
[155] President of Belarus (29 April 2015)
[156] The Foreign Minister of the Republic of Belarus (19 May 2015)
[157] Paul Schroeder 1994), 'Historical reality vs. neorealist theory' in *International Security, 19:1,* p.117

cartographer printed maps designating Crimea as part of Ukraine. A Belarusian journalist, enquiring about the mapmaker's designation of sovereignty, was informed the map was printed in line with an official instruction from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[158] In Kazakevich's view: 'The strategy was to work in two directions. Yes, Belarus went against this [UN] resolution, but at the same time Lukashenka met with some representatives of the Ukrainian authorities despite the objections of Russia. So it was a two-handed strategy, and actually it worked. It was risky, but it was more or less successful.'[159]

The resolution was plainly supportive of Ukraine. That was its purpose. A state voting for the resolution: (1) 'affirms its commitment to the sovereignty… and territorial integrity of Ukraine'; (2) 'underscores that the referendum… cannot form the basis for any alteration of the status of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea or the city of Sevastopol'; and (3) calls upon all States… not to recognise any alteration of the status of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol on the basis of the above-mentioned referendum.'[160] Voting against the resolution falls short of recognising Crimea and Sevastopol as legitimate parts of the Russian Federation, albeit that, granted, abstaining would be more truly compatible with remaining 'neutral.' The resolution itself did not pressurise Belarus into a position fully aligned with Russia, and it is simply not known what discussions took place between Belarus and Russia ahead of the General Assembly vote. However, for Belarus the issue was one of not overtly criticising Russia: it also voted against a General Assembly resolution in late 2016 that referred to Russia as an 'occupying power.'[161]

Belarus would face similar pressures to sign up to a firm position in other fora. At the Eastern Partnership's Riga summit in May 2015 a joint declaration was issued by the EU and the

[158] Private discussion with Artyom Shraibman, London, September 2017. Cited with permission.
[159] Interview, Minsk, July 2016
[160] United Nations General Assembly (1 April 2014), '68/262 Territorial integrity of Ukraine'
[161] United Nations General Assembly (19 December 2016), '71/205 Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (Ukraine)'

participants which ultimately read: 'The EU reaffirms its positions taken…, including on the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol. The Summit participants reaffirm their positions taken in relation to "UN General Assembly Resolution 68/262 on the territorial integrity of Ukraine."'[162] This was undeniably a compromise; the EU had hoped that all sides would refute the legality of the annexation. The MFA's Press Secretary, Dzmitriy Mironchik, explained: 'Belarus's position is well-known. We favour a non-confrontational character for the Eastern Partnership with a positive agenda, including for "the neighbours of the neighbours."'[163] However, given that the originally proposed text was blocked by Armenia as well as Belarus, the two prospective signatories most amenable to Russia, it is unclear whether concerns about the 'confrontational' wording was determinant here. The two states may have been under some pressure from Russia to take a stand. Commenting on Belarus's positioning in the original UN vote, Karatkevich stressed that no one knows the substance of talks between Belarus and Russia ahead of the vote.[164]

On 26 June 2015, Belarus's delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE, declined from agreeing to a resolution condemning the annexation of Crimea. According to Belarus's representative, Viktar Guminsky: 'We will go along with our general policy on this question. We did not vote for this at the UN, nor in the Eastern Partnership. We declared that we cannot vote for this point, and for this reason that is our position.'[165] Again, not approving the resolution cannot be interpreted as supporting the annexation. Belarus's position on recognising

[162] European Union External Action Service (2015), 'Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit' (Riga, 21-22 May 2015)

[163] Nina Vasil'yeva (22 May 2015), 'Na Rizhskom vzmor'e' [At the Riga seaside] in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*

[164] Interview, Minsk, July 2016

[165] Tatiana Korovenkova (26 June 2015), 'Belorusskaya delegatsiya ne podderzhit punkt ob anneksii Kryma v rezolyutsii 24-i sessii PA OBSE' [Belarusian delegation doesn't support the article about the annexation of Crimea in the resolution of the 24th session of the parliamentary assembly of the OSCE] for *BelaPAN*

Russia's relations to Crimea was tested again, however, in 2016. A UN General Assembly vote referred to Russia as an 'occupying power,' and Belarus voted against the resolution.

Somewhat confusingly, in July 2017, Belarusian officials broke with the policy described by Guminsky. Following the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly annual session, four of six Belarusian delegates voted in favour of the final declaration which referred to Russia's 'aggressive practices,' the 'annexation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea,' and Russia's 'occupation' of both the Crimean peninsula and the Donbas.[166] Arguably, since Minsk had hosted the talks, the votes in support of the summit declaration reflected euphoria at having successfully hosted the event rather than a considered position or statement about Russia's actions.[167] Certainly, the delegates had all abstained from the Ukraine-sponsored resolution on 'restoring the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine' two days earlier that they were now indirectly supporting. Moreover, the former position was a formulated policy as one of the delegates, Valer Varanetsky, explained: 'This is our conscious position of observing neutrality [on Ukraine].'[168] Those voting in favour of the Minsk Declaration included the Russophile, Siarhai Rakhmanow, and generally the vote looks a little odd. One of the two who voted against, Haidukevich, commented: 'There was no agreement about a single position – each voted as he saw necessary.'[169]

Across all of the sovereignty recognition claims studied, Belarus's position was one of consistent adherence to the norm of territorial integrity. This is particularly interesting in 2008 since, despite protesting its loyalty to Russia, Belarus showed itself unprepared to allow Russia to

[166] Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (2017), *Minsk Declaration and Resolutions Adopted by the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly at the Twenty-Sixth Annual Session, Minsk, 5 to 9 July 2017*

[167] This is Artyom Shraibman's opinion. Private conversation, London, September 2017. Cited with permission.

[168] *Tut.by* (9 July 2017), 'Chetire belorusskikh deputata podderzhali deklaratsiyu s osuzhdeniem "aggressii Rossii protiv Ukrainy"' [Four Belarusian deputies supported a declaration condemning "Russian aggression against Ukraine"]

[169] *Tut.by* (9 July 2017)

prospectively modify the normative framework that governed the regional order. The annexation of Crimea repeated the scenario in altered form. In Section 2.2.3., I listed as one of social constructivism's expectations that smaller powers will challenge the legitimacy of norms where norm-makers do not comply with the norm. What appears to have happened is that the smaller power, Belarus, asserted the norm against the prospective norm-maker, aiming to circumscribe the latter's future freedom of action.

This confounds neorealism, which would predict that Russia coerced Belarus to support its position. Instead, it suggests an intervening domestic variable was in some way determinant, as expected by neoclassical realism. I have argued that elite differentiation granted Belarus the flexibility to articulate agency; the lack of domestic consensus was significant. Although the counterfactual cannot be proven, I tentatively suggest that, were there consensus against recognition, Russia would have been less engaged with Belarus with the consequence it would have been more likely to resort to coercive means. The expectation among Russian elites that Belarus would recognise the claims constrained Russia's power.

Chapter 5: Belarus and regime change

This chapter is concerned with how Belarus responded to regime change in third states. Belarus primarily aligned itself with Russia because the latter protected it from threats. At first glance, this is a strategy that can be explained in terms of neorealism and alliance theory. However, this chapter throws light on the sources of threat that Belarus's leaders were protecting themselves from. I argue that regime security became a core issue on Belarus's threat agenda during successive waves of regime change, and relate this to Steven David's theory of omnibalancing. If regime security is deemed to be more important than direct external threats, then neoclassical realism is a better fit in respect of Belarusian policy. Indeed, I argue that Belarus's leaders believed that Russia was the external power most likely to do what was deemed necessary to keep the incumbent Belarusian regime in power. As evidence that this was the case, I point to the 2010 regime change in Kyrgyzstan: for the first time, the Belarusian elite had reasons to doubt Russia's commitments to incumbent regimes. This spurred Belarus to engage in some form of balancing against Russia. While this could be interpreted as hedging behaviour, I submit that omnibalancing provides a more plausible and persuasive explanatory framework. Neoclassical realism therefore provides analytical leverage missed by neorealism. Moreover, as a prospective regional 'norm-maker,' Russia's actions alarmed Belarusians.

The chapter is structured as follows. The first section describes Aliaksandr Lukashenka's consolidation of power in Belarus following his election to the presidency in 1994, and analyses the Belarusian ruling elite's response to the ousting of Slobodan Milosevic from power in Serbia. I then look at the Belarusian elite's response to each of the colour revolutions in post-Soviet republics: the Rose Revolution in Georgia (2003), the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004), and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan (2005). The third section considers the 2010 ousting of the Kyrgyz president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev; the case where Belarusian and Russian perspectives

diverged. The fourth and fifth sections briefly cover the Arab Spring regime changes and the post-Maidan (2014) regime change in Ukraine. Since my argument has by that point already been explicated fully, I use them as supporting evidence for my claims.

5.1. The overthrow of Milosevic

Serbia's Bulldozer Revolution, the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic in October 2000, is often considered the first of the 'colour revolutions'; the wave of pro-democracy movements that toppled autocrats in the former communist world. Milosevic and Lukashenka had cordial relations. I showed in the previous chapter how Belarusian officials reacted to NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999, with Lukashenka visiting Milosevic as a gesture of support in the early days of the NATO campaign. Like many observers, before Serbia's 2000 elections, Lukashenka may have presumed Milosevic's grip on power in Serbia unshakeable. He was not shy subsequently to say that he would take actions to prevent a similar scenario in Belarus: 'There will be no Kostunica in Belarus. No way! […] People know I will protect myself, I will not sit in a bunker like Milosevic.'[1] Milosevic's fate clearly resonated with the Belarusian leader.

In fact, Lukashenka had gone to significant efforts to consolidate his grip on power in the years prior to the Bulldozer Revolution. After a brief honeymoon period after his election in 1994, approval ratings had seldom risen about 45%, which suggested that the president's grip on power was less assured than appearances might suggest.[2] First, the president moved against the parliament. To ensure the opposition did not obtain a significant representation, government propaganda in the 1995 parliamentary elections depicted them as the progeny of Nazi collaborators.[3] Even a small opposition unnerved Lukashenka, and when the parliament launched

[1] BBC Monitoring (July 2001), 'Belarusian leader ready to provide political asylum to Milosevic'

[2] Vasili Silitski (2005), 'Preempting Democracy: The Case of Belarus' in *Journal of Democracy, 16:4,* pp.83-97

[3] Silitski (2005), p.86

impeachment proceedings against Lukashenka he moved to close it down. Following a referendum in 1996, he managed to exclude the opposition from the legislature and to create a new bicameral puppet National Assembly. Secondly, in the mid-1990s the constitutional court ruled that Lukashenka's frequent resort to decree powers was illegal, which motivated the president to shut down its independence. During the same referendum mentioned, he claimed for the president exclusive powers to appoint judges to the constitutional court and elevated the status of presidential decrees, such that no one could constitutionally challenge their authority. Thirdly, Lukashenka moved to emasculate potential rivals both inside and outside of the government, typically by putting them in prison under dubious pretexts, though the most infamous cases were the unsolved disappearances. Most prominent among these were Yury Zakharanka and Viktar Hanchar, who were abducted in May and September 1999 respectively.[4] Both were organising oppositional movements against Lukashenka with an eye on the 2001 presidential elections, and few doubt they were abducted and murdered, possibly on Lukashenka's orders. When an investigation under the auspices of the prosecutor-general pointed the finger of blame at a special police unit under the command of Viktar Sheiman, Lukashenka fired the prosecutor-general and appointed to the role Sheiman himself, who unsurprisingly halted investigations.[5]

Already at this juncture, Lukashenka and his colleagues viewed 'regime change' through the prism of external intervention. To their minds, Serbia served as an example of egregious

[4] Although this episode is not directly relevant to Belarus's agency, it is such a vital event in explaining the consolidation of Lukashenka's rule and establishing a culture of fear in elite circles in Belarus that to discuss the perspectives of Belarusian officials without touching on this contextual information would be an omission. Good summaries can be found in: Brian Bennett (2011), *The Last Dictatorship in Europe: Belarus Under Lukashenko* (London), pp.68-73; Aleksandr Feduta (2005), *Lukashenko: Politicheskaya biografiya* (Moscow), p.512 ff.; Grigory Ioffe (2014), *Reassessing Lukashenka* (Basingstoke), pp.142-143; Andrew Wilson (2011), *Belarus: The Last European Dictatorship* (New Haven CT), pp.190-192

[5] As part of the investigations, the KGB arrested Dzmitri Pawlychenka, who is thought to have headed the specially formed 'death squad': shooting gallery records show him practising his marksmanship prior to the disappearances. The intermediary between Sheiman and Pawlychenka was Yury Sivakow, who 'borrowed' a pistol used for state executions on the days of the disappearances. When the KGB informed Lukashenka of the findings of the investigation, the president promptly intervened to pardon Pawlychenka and fire the chief of the KGB.

outside intervention for the purposes of redrawing the post-Cold War world order in ways favourable to Western actors. Although issued later, at the time of Milosevic's death in 2006, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' press secretary commented that the toppled leader's 'principled politics did not suit the plans of the architects of the new world order.'[6] Similarly, the earlier mentioned statement by the two chambers of the Belarusian parliament asserted the legitimacy of the ousted president for acting the way he did: 'Being the head of a sovereign state, he had the right and was obliged to defend the integrity of his country, and stand up for her security. Until the end he fought for the unity of his state and stubbornly defended his innocence in court. Despite a years' long trial, the ICTY [International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia] could not prove his guilt. Milosevic leaves this world a moral victor.'[7]

Although these statements were made after the regime changes discussed in the next sub-section, they are sufficiently consistent with long-standing views from the Belarusian-side to conclude that officials thought the preservation of the Serbian state justified Milosevic's actions. For example, at the conclusion of the NATO bombing, Lukashenka insisted: 'I regard Milosevic as a legally elected president […]. He was elected by his people. It is a friendly state.' With regard to accusations that Milosevic was a war criminal, the Belarusian president expressed disagreement: 'They [presumably: the West] have declared many people criminals, all those who disagreed with them were criminals by that democracy. So were we. So I look on this with a

[6] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (2006), 'Kommentarii nachal'nika upravleniya informatsii – press-sekretarya MID A. Popova dlya belorusskikh SMI v svyzi s konchinoi S. Miloshevicha' [Commentary for the Belarusian media by the head of the Information Department-Press Secretary of the MFA in connection with the passing of S. Milosevic]

[7] House of Representatives (20 February 2008), 'Zayavleniye postoyannoi komissii Soveta Respubliki po mezhdunarodnym delam i natsional'noi bezopasnosti i postoyannoi komissii Palaty predstavitel'ei po mezhdunarodnym delam i svyazyam s CNG v svyazi s provozglasheniyem v odnostoronnem poryadke vremennymi organami samoupravleiya Kosovo nezavisimisi kraya' [Statement by the Permanent Standing Committee of the Council of the Republic for International Affairs and National Security and the Permanent Standing Committee of the House of Representatives for International Affairs and CIS Relations in connection with the unilateral declaration by the temporary organs of self-government of Kosovo of the province's independence]

certain amount of scepticism.'[8] This contrasted to the prevalent view of Western officials about the legitimacy of Milosevic's rule. If legitimacy is understood, following Martin Seymour-Lipset, as 'the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society,'[9] then Western powers concluded that Milosevic's rule was illegitimate.

Given the rhetorical support leading Western actors were giving to Milosevic's rival, Vojislav Kostunica, a plausible reading of the Belarusian positioning would be to argue that it was balancing against a coalition of Western powers. However, domestic concerns are an important and relevant consideration; clearly this involves a perception that external powers' involvement threatened the Belarusian regime. At this stage, I can only describe the prospective intervening variable at the domestic-level without making any claim about its significance. The following two sub-sections will evaluate the preponderance of international and domestic concerns, and therefore allow for an interpretation about whether neorealism or neoclassical realism is the most helpful reading of international relations.

Belarus had its own parliamentary elections later in October 2000. The first round of voting in the Belarusian elections took place ten days after the fall of Milosevic. Officials in Minsk watched events unfold with deep concern, particularly given that analysts in Belarus were actively discussing how oppositional candidates would fare. Two days after the Serbian vote, Aleg Manaev, the director of the polling company IISEPS, expected a range of oppositional politicians to be elected and that they would wield political influence in the coming session.[10] As protestors filled the streets of Belgrade, Lukashenka took measures to ensure there could be no repeat scenario in Minsk. In a lengthy speech on 2 October, three days before Milosevic's downfall,

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[8] *BBC Monitoring, Former Soviet Union* (10 June 1999), 'Belarusian leader ready to provide political asylum to Milosevic'

[9] Martin Seymour-Lipset (1981, [1963]), *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (London), p.61

[10] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* (26 September 2000), 'Kakoi budet politicheskaya osen'?' [What will autumn in politics be like?] (no author)

Lukashenka outlined the need for centralised control of the state: 'In the crucial moments [like those] our country has been through in the past ten years, the strengthening of state power is what has happened objectively in all the world's practical experience. Our Belarus cannot avoid this process.'[11] This recalls his notorious remark given to Russia's NTV in 1995, where he claimed: 'Germany was raised from ruins thanks to firm authority. […] German order evolved over the centuries and under Hitler it reached its peak.'[12]

It was presumably the editors that added the postscript to an article about the Serbian elections in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*. The unattributed postscript noted: 'Attention is drawn to the completely open efforts of the West to replace Milosevic at any cost' and warned of the negative consequences bound to follow such actions.[13] The newspaper also claimed that opposition figures in Belarus were drawing 'inspiration' from the situation in Belgrade and Kostunica's success; the paper emphasised that 'official Minsk' condemned all political extremism and external pressure.[14] The themes that would recur in official rhetoric and press reports throughout subsequent regime changes were thus already firmly established. Attributing blame to NATO member states was inevitable: in the formulation of one article, the 'boomerang' of the bombing campaign was coming back to strike its executors.[15]

It seems clear that the Belarusian authorities were connecting what was happening in Belarus to their own domestic election cycle. Domestic politics was therefore part of the transmission belt across which external events passed, although there is insufficient evidence to

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[11] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* (3 October 2000), 'Al'ternativy izbirannomu kursu net' (transcript of speech given by Lukashenka the preceding day)

[12] BBC Monitoring, Former Soviet Union (1995). A recording of the remarks is readily found via YouTube. Lukashenka later implausibly denied that he had said such things, accusing Poles (sponsored by the CIA) of spreading fake stories. cf. His claim, cited below, that the USA was spreading 'untrue information' via Poland.

[13] Vasily Sergeev (3 October 2000), 'Oppozitsiya nachinaet davit'' [The opposition starts to apply pressure] in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*

[14] Vasily Sergeev (3 October 2000)

[15] Lyudmila Maslyukova (4 October 2000), 'Tuchi nad Balkanam' [Storm clouds over the Balkans] in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*

consider whether there was differentiation within the Belarusian elite about the issue. In the wake of the disappearances referred to above, no one was prepared to publicly dispute what Lukashenka and his closest circle were saying. At the same time, the disappeared had built a support base, and whether or not that was fully purged from the political system is difficult to gauge. Belarus's political elite could adopt both domestic and foreign policy in response to a perceived threat. Although part of the opposition neutered itself by boycotting the parliamentary election, the government took further precautionary measures in its domestic policy such as banning exit polls and refusing accreditation to hundreds of election monitors at the last minute.[16] The foreign policy sphere proved trickier: if Belarus sought to balance against what it perceived as a Western coalition of powers acting to redraw the global order, then it needed Russia to spearhead a rival alliance, yet Russia's actions only disappointed.

Russia's eventual recognition of Kostunica was criticised sharply by the Belarusian side. *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* suggested that the Russians had either missed what had happened or simply got bored (*v Moskve otkrovenno prozevali*: the verb here could mean 'overlooked' or 'yawned through,' and the context does not make it clear which is meant).[17] Russia's diplomatic efforts to invite both Yugoslav candidates to Russia for negotiations were described as 'laughable,' and the Russian foreign minister's visit to Belgrade as 'a fire measure.' Certainly, Russia's shifting policy as events unfolded was incoherent. Whereas it arguably spied an opportunity to improve its image in the West and also to restore its historically strong position in the Balkans, it ultimately achieved nothing. When Milosevic fell, Russia was lagging behind many other states because it had not endorsed Kostunica, despite the fact that leaks from European governments suggested that behind closed doors Vladimir Putin acknowledged that Milosevic

[16] Silitsky (2005), pp.89-90

[17] Alina Betrova (7 October 2000), 'Rossiya priznala novuyu vlast' Yugoslavii' [Russia recognised the new powers in Yugoslavia] in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*

would be gone.[18] The germane point for my analysis is that Russia was no use as part of a balancing alliance once it recognised the new regime. Moreover, it is apparent from this that the overthrow of Milosevic had not evinced fears of democracy promotion among Russian elites.

5.2. "There will be no rose, orange, or banana revolution"[19]

Neither the Belarusian president nor the Ministry of Foreign Affairs commented while the Rose Revolution unfolded in Georgia. Street protests began after allegations of manipulation during the November 2003 parliamentary elections. Independent exit polls corroborated the claims of Mikheil Saakashvili, an oppositional candidate, that he should have been declared the winner. On 23 November, the incumbent president, Eduard Shevardnadze, declared a state of emergency and sought to mobilise the security services. When the security services made it clear that they did not support Shevardnadze's actions, the latter resigned.

In Belarus, the state-controlled media reported the protests with only limited interpretive comment. Igar Kol'chenka, writing for *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, considered that 'the combination of Shevardnadze's periodic flirtations with the USA and quarrels with Russia have created an explosive mixture.'[20] There were repeated references to 'external factors' in the press coverage, but reports were not dominated by anti-Westernism. This may reflect a degree of resignation that Russia was unprepared to mount a challenge to the powers perceived to have sponsored Saakashvili's campaign, and this rather deprived Belarus of any agency since it could not take an independent line. As with the Serbian regime change that brought Kostunica to power, so Russia

[18] Jamestown Monitor (6 October 2000), 'Did Moscow misplay the Yugoslav election crisis?' *Monitor, 6:189*

[19] President of Belarus (8 January 2005), 'V Belarusi budet sokhraneny mir, spokoistviye i stabil'nost'' [There will be peace, calm, and stability in Belarus]

[20] Igor Kol'chenko (11 November 2003), 'Vybor posle vyborov' [The choice after the elections] in *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*

set about establishing relations with the new regime in Tbilisi, perhaps motivated by security concerns along the Pankisi gorge – a known transit route used by insurgents and terrorists.[21]

Belarus's policy therefore sought to shore up regime security without engaging in balancing behaviour. On the one hand, Lukashenka did use speeches over subsequent months to explain the dangers of changing a political system, and criticise Western powers for being 'pushy' and trying to prise Belarus away from Russia.[22] On the other hand, he did not seek to form an anti-NATO coalition. He used a major speech to indicate reluctant tolerance for NATO expansion.[23] He acknowledged that nothing was done against the will of new member states, and that in some cases they actively beseeched the deployment of troops and bases [*sic*] to their territory. Moreover, Belarus and NATO had common challenges to deal with which were not going away; in this regard Belarus would be a security donor in the region. Perhaps most significantly, the president said that NATO's enlargement 'greatly pales before EU enlargement.' This suggests the kind of threat Belarus's elite perceived was not a military one. This interpretation of Belarusian perspectives was consistent with statements made during the period between the Bulldozer and Rose Revolutions. In September 2001, Lukashenka accused the Americans of 'exerting pressure' on Belarus through Poland: 'From whose territory is our country being showered with untrue information? From Poland… Poland has become a bridgehead from which the invasion of the former Soviet Union advances.'[24] Despite the military imagery, he was

[21] Andrei P. Tsygankov (2010, [2006]), *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity* (Oxford), p.148

[22] President of Belarus (23 September 2004), 'Stenogramma vystupleniya pered studencheskoi molodyozh'yu' [Transcript of speech before students/youth]

[23] President of Belarus (22 July 2004), 'Vystuplenie Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus' A. G. Lukashenko "Vneshnyaya politika v novom mire"' na soveschanii s rukovoditelyami zagranuchrezhdenii Respubliki Belarus'' [Speech of the President of the Republic of Belarus A. G. Lukashenko "Foreign policy in the new world" at the gathering of heads of the foreign missions of the Republic of Belarus]

[24] BBC Monitoring, Former Soviet Union (2 September 2001), 'Belarusian president calls Poland "bridgehead" of US intervention

referring to soft power, and mentioned by name Radio Liberty and Radio Ratsyya (a short-lived pro-democracy internet radio channel[25]).

There were further reasons to discount any explanation for Belarus's positioning in terms of alliance blocs. Belarus and Russia were engaged in a spat about a Constitutional Act for the Union State of the two nations. Lukashenka had started his rule promising to reintegrate Belarus and Russia. In early 2002 Putin berated Lukashenka for wanting to recreate 'something that would look like the USSR.'[26] He suggested that Belarus could become the ninetieth federal unit of the Russian Federation, and later amended this only to propose that the Union State would be based on the Russian constitution, which still implied that Belarus would effectively become an *oblast'* of Russia.[27] This was not exactly what Lukashenka had in mind. (The re-integration proposals were tied up with Lukashenka's ambitions, and many commentators think he had designs on ruling a reunified polity. By contrast, Putin's proposal cast Lukashenka as a regional governor.) Russia's proposals roused barbed remarks from counterparts in Minsk who perhaps thought Putin was trying to liquidate a Yeltsin-era project. The Belarusian foreign minister, Mikhail Khvastow, may have been right in claiming that Putin's proposals were intentionally unacceptable to Belarus, but then Putin also rightly pointed out that Belarus's economy was a mere 3% of Russia's GDP.[28] Around this time, Lukashenka criticised Russia's soft power: 'Pressure is currently being put on Belarus [by Russia] through weapons of mass destruction, there is no other name for them, that is the mass media.'[29] However, the prevalent target for the president's complaints during this period was the United States.

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[25] Nigel Roberts (2008), *Belarus: The Bradt Travel Guide* (Chalfont St. Peter), p.84

[26] Alex Danilovich (2006), *Russian-Belarusian Integration: Playing Games Behind the Kremlin Walls* (Aldershot), p.127

[27] President of Russia (14 August 2002), 'Transcript: Answers to journalists' questions after the Russian-Belarusian talks'

[28] Danilovich (2006), p.128

[29] BBC Monitoring, Former Soviet Union (1 July 2003), 'Text of Belarusian president's interview ahead of Independence Day'

It was following Ukraine's Orange Revolution that Belarus most noticeably began to take reactive measures. This could be explained in respect of both domestic and international factors. The protests in Kyiv, that began following rigged elections in November 2004, were too close to home for comfort. At the same time, Russia was galvanised to react in a way it had not in the Serbian or Georgian situations. Ivan Krastev said that the Orange Revolution had a revolutionary effect on the Russia's foreign policy thinking: 'it was Russia's 9/11.'[30] A more coordinated resistance started to take shape. With protestors camped in Kyiv's Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence square) refusing to disperse, Lukashenka told an international audience that there had been two efforts to destabilise the situation inside Belarus. He was presumably intending his remarks as a warning to outside powers: 'to approach Belarus from the position of Serbia, Yugoslavia, Georgia, and even Ukraine, would be unwise and even a big mistake.'[31]

The shift in Russia's position was decisive for Belarus. The belief that the colour revolutions were the result of Western manipulations was already widespread in Russia. Vitaly Tretyakov, a Russian political analyst, argued that if Ukraine reoriented to the West, then 'within the next two years velvet revolutions will take place – according to the Kyiv scenario – in Belarus, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and, possibly, in Armenia.'[32] President Vladimir Putin had already twice congratulated Russia's preferred candidate, Viktor Yanukovych, on winning the election despite the backdrop of Western monitors crying foul about voting fraud. Ultimately, the declaration of Ukraine's Supreme Court, contrary to the Central Election Commission's published results, that Viktor Yushchenko had won the vote initiated a rerun of the election.

In January 2005, Lukashenka declared that 'there will be no rose [*rozovaya*], orange, or banana revolution' in Belarus.[33] The reference to a banana revolution was presumably intended

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[30] Ivan Krastev (20 October 2005), 'Russia's post-orange empire' for *Open Democracy*

[31] President of Belarus (6 December 2004), 'Interv'yu mezharabskomu telekanalu al-Arabiya' [Interview with pan-Arabia TV station *al-Arabiya*]

[32] Igor Torbakov (13 December 2004), 'Russian analysts ponder orange revolution's implications for Kremlin dominance in the CIS' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 1:145*

[33] President of Belarus (8 January 2005)

to evoke an analogy with the so-called banana republics of Latin America. Interestingly, Lukashenka's remarks were made a few days ahead of a similar statement by Sergey Ivanov, Russia's defence minister, who asserted that Russia 'react[s] and will react to exports of revolution to CIS states, no matter and what colour – pink, blue, you name it.'[34] (Note that Lukashenka's statement could also be translated as 'pink, orange, or banana.') Whether or not there had been coordination between Belarus and Russia this early is unclear, but there was a clear shift in Russia's position that would have been welcomed by Belarusian officials. The two states now pursued very similar policies to forestall regime change.

In the wake of events in Ukraine, Belarus could now use Russia to balance against other powers. There were various further reasons for it to do so. In April 2005, the US president, George W. Bush, welcomed Ukraine's Yushchenko to Washington and the two leaders spoke of the wish to 'spread freedom' throughout the world.[35] The common perception of Belarusian and Russian officials was that the US had financed the regime change. In their view Russia's pre-election support for Yanukovych – Putin had appeared alongside the Ukrainian candidate on the campaign trail in an overt gesture of support – served to support the *status quo* regional order. In accordance with the constitution, Yushchenko won the vote legitimately. Yet Russian officials saw things differently. For Vladislav Surkov, deputy director of the Russian president's administration, the colour revolutions were 'unconstitutional coups' and 'a very real threat to sovereignty.'[36] In fact, it was only the 2014 regime change in Ukraine that was unconstitutional.

Domestic policy focused on building both elite and societal consensus inside Belarus. TV documentaries were churned out to make clear the official position, crudely emphasising the stability and prosperity of Belarus under Lukashenka's rule, and contrasting this situation with the

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[34] Council on Foreign Relations (13 January 2005), 'The World in the 21st Century: Addressing New Threats and Challenges.' Lecture delivered by Sergey Ivanov.

[35] Steven Woehrel (2005), 'Ukraine's Orange Revolution and U.S. Policy,' *Congressional Research Service, Report for Congress* (1 July) [leaked via Wikileaks]

[36] Cited in Thomas Ambrosio (2009), *Authoritarian Backlash: Russian Resistance to Democratization in the Former Soviet Union* (Farnham), p.42

lawlessness of revolutions.[37] Raids of the homes of opposition-friendly pollsters were accompanied by the sentencing of a prospective Lukashenka election rival to five years in prison. The Belarusian court sentenced Mikhail Marynich, a former Minister of Foreign Economic Relations, for stealing office equipment. Ludicrously, the alleged victim publicly denied that any items had been stolen.[38] In addition, the Belarusian president brought one of his most trusted strongmen, Viktar Sheiman, back into high office. Although there could be many reasons for this move, the possibility that Lukashenka's disquiet about events in Ukraine motivated the appointment should be considered among them.[39] Sheiman himself indicated that his appointment was an effort to shore up defences against a colour revolution scenario, saying that his goal was to consolidate the power system and avoid troubles like those affecting Ukraine.[40] The consequences of consensus have already been seen in the previous chapter. If Belarus was to have any agency in its foreign relations, then consensus was, counter-intuitively, not necessarily helpful. It created an informational *milieu* whereby Belarus could do nothing but align itself in stern opposition to the regime changes. It created a situation whereby there was very little space to monitor and adapt policy. However, two regime changes in Kyrgyzstan bring out differences. In the first case, there was consensus in Belarus; in the 2010 regime change, there was not.

Kyrgyzstan's 2005 Tulip Revolution presents a couple of differences from the earlier colour revolutions. Unlike his peers in many former Soviet republics, Askar Akaev was not a former Communist Party heavyweight, and independent Kyrgyzstan had proven more liberal than neighbouring states in Central Asia. Unlike the regime changes in Georgia and Ukraine, the protests began not in the capital, Bishkek, but at Osh in the south of the country. It is better

[37] Elena Korosteleva (2012), 'Questioning democracy promotion: Belarus' response to the "colour revolutions" in *Democratization, 19:1,* pp.44-45

[38] David Marples (3 January 2005), 'Belarus: "Tightening the Screw",' in *Eurasian Daily Monitor, 2:1*

[39] David Marples (8 December 2004), 'Belarus: The return of Sheiman' in *Eurasian Daily Monitor, 1:142*

[40] Marples (8 December 2004)

described as a *coup d'etat* than a revolution, since the protests were largely organised by clans that felt excluded from power.[41] (This differed from grassroots activism sparked by electoral fraud in the cases of Georgia and Ukraine, although in view of the fact that their 'revolutions' brought election winners to power it is questionable whether or not the label is appropriate here too.) Nonetheless, happening a few months after the Orange Revolution, and with some involvement of Western third sector organisations, observers naturally connected it to the earlier regime changes.

Once again, Belarus's domestic policy clearly responded. In March 2005, Lukashenka mobilised several military units and called up reservists.[42] The state-media continued to pump out documentaries and excerpts from books helpful to the regime's cause.[43] On 3 March, *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* re-printed an edited version of a tract headed 'Operation "Kill the State",' written by Russian State Duma deputy Rifat Shaykhutdinov.[44] The article's publication in the Presidential Administration's official newspaper ensured wide readership.[45] The newspaper is distributed to state-owned enterprises, and is used by the Presidential Administration to communicate both Lukashenka's statements and directives. According to *Sovetskaya Belorussiya*, as well as the reprinted article, the 'revolutions' in Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine had served as 'blatant examples of US and EU's use of developed technologies for expanding the boundaries of the empire that [they were] forming.' Shaykhutdinov's article outlined step-by-step the alleged 'special operation' of Western powers in Ukraine, pursued to ensure that Yushchenko won, and there can be little doubt that this and other articles were being reprinted to communicate the proper 'interpretation' around the country. The chairman of the KGB, General Stephan

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[41] Paul Kubicek (2011), 'Are Central Asian leaders learning from upheavals in Kyrgyzstan?' in *Journal of Eurasian Studies, 2:2*, pp.115-124

[42] Korosteleva (2012), p.45

[43] Korosteleva (2012), p.45

[44] *Sovetskaya Belorussiya* (1 March 2005), 'Operatsiya "Ubit' gosudarstvo"' [Operation 'Kill the State'] (no author). The article was originally published on 29 November 2004 on the website www.reformy.ru, and was subsequently included as a chapter in Shaykhutdinov's 2006 book/novel *Oxota na vlast'* ("The Hunt for Power").

[45] There are no publicly available circulation or readership figures for state-media in Belarus.

Sukharenka, admitted that the goal was to ensure everyone knew who stood behind the colour revolutions. Commenting on a KGB-produced policy document for parliamentary deputies, titled 'Analytical report on colour revolutions: a possible scenario for Belarus,' he explained: 'We have sufficient information to disseminate to our deputies, so that they can prepare their electors and inform them of our understanding of the situation.'[46]

The KGB report was a foreshadow of a text that would be published by Russia's Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, General Valery Gerasimov, much later in 2013. This later text has come to be known in some quarters as 'the Gerasimov doctrine,' and describes in detail the supposed use of non-military methods by Western powers alongside conventional force to bring about regime change during the Arab Spring, and explicitly saw these in the same light as the colour revolutions of earlier years.[47] Although more recent commentators have treated the Gerasimov text as an outline of Russia's foreign policy,[48] it was clearly written about the West's actions, and anticipated them being turned on Russia. Already, in 2005, the sentiments coming from Minsk and Moscow was very much in tune with one another, and it is likely that the authorities in Minsk thought they would be the target of external intervention before Russia. What is striking is how similar the 2013 Gerasimov text is to reports about the 2005 KGB report.[49] This suggests that the provenance of these ideas has a history that can be traced at least to 2004-2005.

Belarus's intended balancing against Western powers was once again evident in its seeking to build a multilateral resistance to regime change. On 2 April 2005, Lukashenka firmly pressed the case that Western actors were to blame for the series of 'revolutions.' Although he

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[46] Korosteleva (2012), p.45

[47] Valery Gerasimov (2013), 'Novye vyzovy treboyut pereosmyslit' formy i sposoby vedeniya boeviykh deistvii' [New challenges demand rethinking the ways and means of combat operations] in *Voenno-Promishlennii Kur'er*

[48] e.g. Mark Galeotti (6 July 2014), 'The "Gerasimov Doctrine" and Russian Non-Linear War' on *In Moscow's Shadows* [Galleoti's personal blog]. Galleoti later distanced himself from this interpretation.

[49] See, for example: Viktor Martinovich (12 December 2005), 'Protokoly chestistkikh mudretsov' [The wise Checkists' protocol] in *BelGazeta*

laid some blame at the incumbent presidents of the states concerned, geopolitics was the dominant feature of his commentary. He lamented: 'It is sad when one of the countries in the CSTO is subjected to such an attack and destruction. When, in principle, they overthrow our colleague we pretend that nothing is happening. You understand that every country in this organisation plays its role. We were waiting for a definite response from other states. It, as you saw, did not come – if we are to put it briefly.'[50] There was here veiled criticism of Belarus's allies within the CSTO; this can be interpreted as the recognition of a negotiated order within the region itself, which fosters mechanisms to protect all members of that order from extra-regional intervention.

The EU's actions seemed to reinforce Belarusian governmental sensitivities. In September 2005, a text adopted by the European Parliament criticising Belarus's 'deteriorating' record on human rights and media freedom provoked a statement from the MFA that accused EU politicians of seeking 'political capital' and trying to divert attention from its own internal socio-economic problems.[51] Of particular relevance for the issue of regime change, Belarus in particular criticised the EU text for '[calling] on the Council and the Commission to raise the issue of Belarus with the Russian authorities with a view to defining a common responsibility for bringing about concrete democratic changes in that country.' This, according to the Belarusian MFA, was 'direct interference in the affairs of a sovereign state and falls outside the framework of international law. [Belarus] confirms its position about the impossibility and complete hopelessness of the so-called "export of colour revolutions."'[52] The European Parliament's Belarus policy is of limited direct significance: the parliament's role does not extend to the common foreign and security

[50] President of Belarus (2 April 2005), 'Aleksandr Lukashenko otvetil na voprosy predstavitelei belorusskikh i zarubezhnykh SMI' [Aleksandr Lukashenko answered questions from the representatives of Belarusian and foreign media]

[51] European Parliament (29 September 2005), 'European Parliament resolution on Belarus'

[52] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (no date), 'Kommentarii i.o. nachal'nikha upravleniya informatsii – press-sekretarya MID R.O. Yesina otnositel'no rezolyutsii Evroparlamenta po Belarusi' [Commentary of the acting head of the Department for Information of the MFA R. O. Yesin concerning the Europarliament's resolution about Belarus]

policy. Although it does have delegations for third states, these are for fostering relationships with local parliaments, and the EU did not establish a representative office in Minsk until 2008.

Belarus deferred to Russia, as a prospective norm-maker, to stand up for non-interference in other states' affairs. Belarusian officials' subjectivity did not therefore encompass its own accountability in respect of the system; as rhetoric around the Bulldozer Revolution has shown, this was deemed Russia's role. This meant that Belarusian subjectivity articulated only the most minimal agency. Events in 2010 came as something of a shock.

5.3. The second Kyrgyz revolution

Following the Tulip Revolution, the new president Kurmanbek Bakiyev quickly reneged on promises to reduce presidential powers. Whereas Kyrgyzstan had been the most politically liberal state in central Asia, it was soon scoring badly on democracy evaluations such as the Freedom House rankings.[53] State assets were redistributed in favour of his clan loyalists, and members of other clans were excluded from power. The protests that culminated in Bakiyev's ouster were ignited by an increase in domestic fuel prices, and the 'revolution' was arguably a grassroots movement initially, although clan rivalries came to dominate subsequent developments.[54] The situation developed quickly, with the dozens killed in clashes between protestors and security services on the second day of protests (7 April), and Bakiyev resigning on 15 April.

Structurally, Bakiyev's downfall occurred against the backdrop of global economic crisis and local rivalry concerning military bases. Russia remained the hegemonic power in Central Asia. However, as shown be the figures cited in Chapter 3 (Table 2), China had displaced Russia as the main source of trade and investment. Russia did agree to provide an emergency relief loan of $2 billion to Bishkek in February 2010, and in return Bakiyev promised to close down the American

[53] Kubicek (2011), p.116
[54] Kubicek (2011), pp.116-117

air base at Manas.[55] As part of the deal, the Russians also acquired a controlling stake in a Kyrgyz torpedo manufacturer, and so it appeared that Russia was consolidating its regional hegemony.[56] Once Bakiyev had the first instalment of the loan, he negotiated new and more favourable terms with the US for their continued use of the Manas base, which naturally infuriated the Russians. At this point, it appeared that the United States was outflanking Moscow, but Bakiyev's fall handed Russia 'a modicum of revenge.'[57]

The 2010 events in Kyrgyzstan were viewed by the Belarusian president in the dark shadow of the earlier colour revolutions. Belarus staunchly supported Bakiyev throughout, and, following Bakiyev's escape to Minsk, the refusal of the Belarusian authorities to fulfil an extradition request from the new Kyrgyz government was an action that implied its non-recognition of the legitimacy of the new leadership in Bishkek. Moreover, this challenged Belarus's alignment/alliance with Russia, because Russia had immediately given rhetorical support to the new government in Bishkek, and expected Belarus to extradite Bakiyev in line with Article 66 of the Chisinau Convention signed by both states in 2002.[58] (As well, both Belarus and Kyrgyzstan were signatories of the 1993 OSCE Minsk Convention, which covered extraditions, and was invoked by the new rulers in Bishkek.[59]) Opinions are divided about the kinds of pressure Russia applied to Belarus to support it by recognising the new government and extraditing Bakiyev, but parliamentary deputies appeared on television bemoaning 'Russian pressure.'[60] Belarus could therefore have acted differently when, with flagrant disregard to President

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[55] Alexander Cooley (2012), *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia* (Oxford), p.67

[56] Cooley (2012), pp.123-124

[57] Cooley (2012), p.127

[58] Commonwealth of Independent States (2002), 'Convention on Legal Assistance and Legal Relations in Civil, Family and Criminal Matters' [The Chisinau Convention]

[59] *Salidarnasts'* (27 April 2010), 'Bakiyev lishen neprikosnovennosti i obvinen v organizatsii massovikh ubiistv' [Bakiyev deprived of immunity and accused of organising mass murder] (no author)

[60] BBC Monitoring (29 April 2010), 'Fear of Russia prompts Belarus to shelter ousted Kyrgyz leader.' Tatsiana Holubeva said: 'Taking such a haughty attitude and threatening us in plain language is not the business of the Russian president.' A regime-loyal political scientist, Aleksey Belyayev, said: 'Every state freely conducts in own foreign policy, and instructions from other states will be perceived as direct pressure and blackmail.'

Medvedev's appeals, it granted the ousted president asylum. The Prosecutor's Office told Interfax there would be no comment on the reasons behind its refusal of the Kyrgyz request.[61] Lukashenka, speaking to reporters in a church when Bakiyev initially arrived in Minsk, had said he was willing to accept the fallen president because 'betraying people is the most shameful act that can be in this world.'[62]

Despite the shadow of the colour revolutions, Lukashenka distinguished the latest 'revolution' from the previous ones. He gave his first comment in a briefing with journalists on 14 April 2005. Speaking of ongoing troubles in Kyrgyzstan, he said: 'It's an anti-constitutional coup. … There's no need to draw parallels with what happened during the Tulip Revolution. First, on that occasion they did not shoot people. Second, Askar Akaev at that time renounced his duties. The current president has not renounced his duties…'[63] There was then an effort to identify normative differences between the two situations. In respect of the ongoing regime change, the non-constitutional aspect was underscored, whereas external intervention had been the focus of critiques during the colour revolutions.

The most significant difference was that official Minsk did not see the Western hand behind the regime change. As previously, the authorities sought to elucidate their views about regime change. The term 'fifth column' was routinely employed, and therefore clearly connecting actions to outside sponsorship. But significantly Russia was invoked in this context. As early as 6 April (i.e. possibly speaking before any news from Kyrgyzstan), Lukashenka was accusing Russia of supporting the opposition in Belarus. He promised that he would acquaint Belarusians and 'the West' with information he had about a recent uproar among opposition websites, noting that 'the centres of these oppositional clans are to be found in Russia. And what we will show you … will

[61] Interfax (15 June 2010)

[62] Tanya Korovenkova (19 April 2010), 'Demonstrations staged in front of Belarusian embassy in Kyrgyzstan' for *BelaPan*

[63] President of Belarus (15 April 2010), '14 Aprelya Aleksandr Lukashenko posetil Mozyrskii raion v khode rabochei poezdki po yuzhnym regionam strany' [Aleksandr Lukashenko visited Mozyr region during the course of a working trip in southern regions of the country on 14 April]

leave you speechless (*vypast' v osadok*) because it left me speechless.'[64] The idea that Russia was interfering in other states with regime change goals shaped Belarus's subsequent positioning. Although initially Lukashenka claimed not to know 'who stands behind' the events.[65]

Lukashenka did not hesitate to criticise external actors: 'Today everyone is silent: the USA is silent, and Russia, you know, what announcements they made [*sic*]. Somehow neither of them said it was an anti-constitutional coup… […] They were supposed to declare the unacceptability of such actions by the Kyrgyz opposition.'[66] Events in and around Bishkek did not conform to Lukashenka's normative expectations. I have already presented sufficient evidence to infer that regime change was a salient issue for Belarusian officials, and that supporting 'legitimate' rulers constituted a norm that Belarus considered external actors had a duty to enforce. As the regional and systemic norm-makers respectively, Russia and the United States were *supposed* to come forward with criticism, and yet neither did so. Lukashenka may have expected the United States to flout the rules, given the recent history of regime change in the post-Soviet space, but he was disappointed by Russia's inaction. Russia was expected, as previously it did, to have spoken out against regime change as interference in sovereign affairs.

Bakiyev asserted his legitimacy in the CIS headquarters. In doing so his call for a return to the constitutional order was an assertion that his ousting was in breach of the negotiated regional order. It had, at the very least, created a situation that had no legitimacy under international law and no support. The Russian analyst Fyodor Lukyanov wrote: 'The new authorities [in Bishkek] made a big mistake by immediately dissolving the parliament, and now a legal vacuum has been created until the elections. It should have been filled with the aid of an external arbiter capable of legitimising the proceedings. But Russia … does not have its own system of institutions that

[64] *Salidarnasts'* (6 April 2010), 'Aleksandr Lukashenko: Ja vse bol'she nachinayu verit' v sushchestvovanie pyatoi kollonoi' [Aleksandr Lukashenko: I all the more begin to believe in the existence of a fifth column] (no author)

[65] President of Belarus (15 April 2010)

[66] President of Belarus (15 April 2010)

might have facilitated this. First, because neither the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, nor the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), nor the CIS possesses a universal or at least widely recognised entitling authority like the OSCE or the Council of Europe. Second, and this is even more important, in the ranks of these organisations no one, apart from Moscow itself, is interested in setting a precedent for the external legitimisation of regime change.'[67]

Russia downplayed the significance of Bakiyev's choice of venue. Interfax quoted 'a high-ranking source in the Russian Foreign Ministry': 'This affair bears no relation to the CIS. […] While making his statement, Bakiyev *as a private person* was indeed in the building in which the CIS executive council, as well as other organisations, is renting premises for work. … The matter has not been agreed with the Russian side as the country presiding over the CIS [my emphasis].'[68] Russia thereby reserved to itself the ability to invoke the CIS affiliation, and went out of its way to state that it was neither an exclusive nor permanent CIS venue. For good measure, the source added that there were no CIS symbols by Bakiyev when he spoke.

Lukashenka capitalised on the situation. Russia's support for the regime change, according to the Belarusian political analyst Aliaksandr Klaskowski, 'struck many post-Soviet leaders unpleasantly. [It means] they have no confidence of Russia's [continued] support, and Lukashenka articulated what many people were thinking. In this way, he claimed informal leadership of the post-Soviet space.'[69] Although the last clause is probably an exaggeration, it indicates that Belarus saw an opportunity to wield some agency in the situation. This became pressing given Russia's absence from the role. From the vantage point of smaller powers in the region, Russia, the most powerful actor, had spearheaded the resistance to democracy promotion in the wake of the Orange Revolution. Kyrgyzstan showed that regime change need not be about

[67] BBC Monitoring (26 April 2010), 'Russia: Kyrgyz revolution may lead to renewed superpower rivalry – website'

[68] Interfax (21 April 2010), 'Bakiyev: "Tol'ko smert' ostanovit menya"' [Bakiyev: Only death will stop me]

[69] BBC Monitoring (22 April 2010), 'Reasons for Belarusian leader's support for ouster Kyrgyz leader examined'

democratisation, and that it could equally be the replacement of one authoritarian leader with another. Russia challenged the status of other states as sovereigns in the international system.

The extent of Russia's role in the ousting of Bakiyev is probably minimal. The regime change occurred against a backdrop of domestic troubles, and it seems likely that these played the main determinant role, though they were skirted over by Lukashenka. It seems unlikely that international factors were decisive, but commentators at the time argued that Russia helped the process once it was underway.[70] As Evgeniya Al'bats remarked, 'there is much talk about the participation of Russia [in Bakiyev's downfall]. … Russia was obviously not on the side of Bakiyev in all this commotion.'[71] As she pointed out in a separate interview, when Bakiyev did talk to Russian officials, none of the officials in Moscow described him as 'president' in their post-discussion remarks.[72] Certainly, in March 2010 Russia's state media withdrew its support for President Bakiyev, which led the Kyrgyz government to attempt to block Russian media although the grip and reach of the latter ensured that this was a futile task.[73]

The evidence strongly suggests that there was a differentiation of opinions within Belarus about Russia's role. On the one hand, interviewees in Belarus tended to the opinion that Russia's role in Bakiyev's ouster was limited. Kazakevich also doubts that 'these events consciously acted on the minds of the Belarusian elites [all that] greatly.'[74] He adds: 'Of course, some lessons were learned [about retaining power]. But, in general, the influence was limited, and it can't be

[70] Articles that focus on domestic variables include Amanda E. Wooden (2014), 'Kyrgyzstan's dark ages: framing and the 2010 hydroelectric revolution' in *Central Asia Survey*, 33:4. Analysts claiming a large role for Russia in events included several commentators on *Ekho Moskvy* radio station, most prominently Yevgeniya Al'bats. BBC Monitoring (19 April 2010), 'Russian pundit Al'bats suggests Belarus likely to accept toppled Kyrgyz leader' citing programme *Osoboe mneniye*. See also the International Crisis Group's policy briefing 'Kyrgyzstan: A Hollow Regime Collapses' which notes the prevalence of the Russia-orchestrated coup viewpoint amongst political elites.

[71] BBC Monitoring (19 April 2010), 'Russian pundit Al'bats suggests Belarus likely to accept toppled Kyrgyz leader'

[72] BBC Monitoring (19 April 2010)

[73] Eurasia Daily Monitor (1 April 2010), 'Russian Mass Media Attack Bakiyev' via *The Jamestown Foundation, volume 7: issue 63*

[74] Interview, Minsk, July 2016

compared to the Ukrainian crisis where Russian involvement was direct and, of course, the scale of this involvement was much, much greater.' On the other hand, a Belarusian parliamentary deputy, Igar Karpenka, called on Russia to 'temper imperial ambitions.'[75] Another parliamentary deputy, Tatsiana Holubeva, also spoke of Russia's 'imperial views.'[76] There is partial corroboration from an interviewee in the Russian documentary film, *Krestniy Batka* (the Godfather). The interviewee, disguised and identified as a KGB employee, claims that Lukashenka offered refuge to Bakiyev because he wanted to emulate him, and wanted to plunder Belarus the way Bakiyev had Kyrgyzstan, and disliked the way he was being squeezed from power.[77]

Contrary to Lukashenka's claim that no external power supported the 'legitimate' Bakiyev, there is some evidence to suggest that the United States did not support the coup initially. On 7 April, the day opposition forces announced that they had established a provisional government headed by Rosa Otunbayeva, an official in the United States' State Department, Philip Crowley, said: 'I believe we continue to think the government remains in power. … We have no indication that the government has ceased to function.'[78] He explained that representatives from the Kyrgyz government were at that moment in the air *en route* to Washington for pre-planned meetings. The United States clearly continued acting on the assumption that Bakiyev was President. Asked if the US supported the government or the opposition, Crowley replied: '[T]here is a sitting government. We work with that government.' On 8 April, Crowley reiterated that 'there is a president who has not yielded power… It's not for us to take sides one way or the other.'[79] Although some thought claiming not to take sides was tacit consent, this is not at all clear.

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[75] Anton Khodasevich (26 April 2010), 'Belorusy sovetuyut Moskve umerit' ambitsii' [Belarusians advise Moscow to temper its ambitions] in *Nezavisimaya gazeta*

[76] Anton Khodasevich (26 April 2010)

[77] NTV (2010), 'Krestniy Batka (part 2)' [The Godfather]

[78] US Department of State (7 April 2010), *Daily Press Briefing* (transcript)

[79] US Department of State (8 April 2010), *Daily Press Briefing* (transcript)

The Belarusian state-owned press was on message: Russia likely played a crucial role. *Zvyazda* provided a digest of world press reaction including *the Daily Beast* and *Washington Times* pointing the finger of blame at Moscow (if not for this detail, they are perhaps not obvious choices of newspapers to cite).[80] The state telegraph agency summarised an article from *the Guardian* which suggested Russia was attempting to imitate the West with its own colour revolution.[81] Bakiyev's public statements were widely printed in the Belarusian state press, most notably the withdrawal of his resignation on 21 April.[82] Media reported Bakiyev as saying that he had only announced his resignation the previous week (15 April) because Russia had recommended that he did so in such a way that he 'could not act otherwise.' According to Bakiyev, Putin told him that he would not be blamed for the bloodshed if he stepped down, but would be held responsible if he remained in office and a civil war 'suddenly occurs.'[83]

Belarus also empathised with Kyrgyz complaints of Russian pressure, which facilitated its projection of the situation in Central Asia to Belarus. Russia had imposed duties on Kyrgyz fuel exports, which Bakiyev described as 'a shock for the Kyrgyz economy. Especially since Kyrgyzstan is a member of the WTO. Also, I've more than once said that Kyrgyzstan is prepared to join the Customs Union with Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus […].'[84] This will have recalled for Belarus the tactics applied by Russia in respect of it. Bakiyev was also critical of Russia's actions surrounding the agreed Manas base closure: 'No sooner had we annulled the agreement with the USA – the very next day the leadership of Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in one voice

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[80] Syrhai Racolika (22 April 2010), 'Susvetniya SMI ab situatsyi w Kirgizii' [Global press about the Kyrgyz situation] in *Zvyazda*

[81] *BelTA* (22 April 2010), 'Moskva ustroila perevorot v Kyrgyzstane, no ne spravlyaetsya s ego posledstviyami – The Guardian' [Moscow organised a coup in Kyrgyzstan, but can't cope with its consequences] (no author)

[82] e.g. *BelTA* (23 April 2010), 'Bakiyev: yuridicheski ja ostayus' prezidentom, poka moyu otstavku ne primet parlament' [Bakiyev: Legally I remain president all the while the parliament has not accepted my resignation]; Zoya Barantsova (22 April 2010), 'Bakiew: Ja ne pryznayu svayu adstawku' in *Zvyazda* [Bakiyev: I don't recognise my resignation].

[83] *Narodnaya gazeta* (23 April 2010), 'Kurmanbek Bakiyev: Ja ob'javil ob otstavke po rekomendatsii Putinu' [Kurmanbek Bakiyev: I announced my resignation on Putin's recommendation] (no author)

[84] *Narodnaya gazeta* (23 April 2010)

announced they were prepared to provide their bases for the transportation of American cargo to Afghanistan. […] This was a slap in the face from the Russian leadership.'[85]

As with the Abkhazia and South Ossetian sovereignty recognitions, Belarus sought to multi-lateralise the issue. Lukashenka asked why the CSTO had not met to discuss events in Kyrgyzstan, drawing attention to the fact that Russia chaired the organisation – and answered himself: 'It's not hard to guess why.'[86] (A claim, incidentally, repeated by Bakiyev the following day.[87]) This is consistent with the viewpoint that Russia was not interested in discussing it because Belarusian officials believed Russia's interests were served by the events. In the president's words: 'If the CSTO couldn't react in time and influence the situation – then such is the organisation. If events develop further in the same direction then I assure you that the organisation has no future. […] What kind of an organisation is it if blood is being spilt in one of our countries, a coup takes place and… silence.' [88] In other words, Belarus was not satisfied with the status quo regional arrangements. The Russian-side defended its position by claiming that the CSTO's remit did not cover internal upheavals. The Interfax news agency quoted a 'high-ranking CSTO official' saying that the CSTO's Collective Rapid Reaction Force was not intended for such matters.[89]

There was the habitual refusal to discuss the subject publicly. On 22 April, the MFA's spokesman cursorily replied to a question about Bakiyev: 'You have all heard the statement of the President of the Republic of Belarus. He invited Kurmanbek Bakiyev to Belarus. The allocation of [any] status is a judicial procedure. For the time being it is too early to speak about it.'[90] On 22

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[85] *Narodnaya gazeta* (23 April 2010)

[86] BBC Monitoring (22 April 2010), 'Reasons for Belarusian leader's support for ousted Kyrgyz president examined' citing *Vremya novostey*

[87] *BelTA* (23 April 2010), 'Bakiev obvinjaet ODKB v bezdeistvii' [Bakiyev accused the CSTO of inaction]

[88] President of Belarus (25 April 2010), 'Prezident Respubliky Belarus' Aleksandr Lukashenko prinyal uchastie v golosovanii v mestnye sovety deputatov' [The President of the Republic of Belarus Aleksandr Lukashenko participated in local government voting]

[89] BBC Monitoring (7 April 2010), 'Collective Security Forces to stay away from Kyrgyz conflict – source'

[90] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (22 April 2010), 'Otvety nachal'nika upravleniya informatsii – press-sekretarya MID Andreya Savinikh na voprosy prestavitelei SMI v khode brifinga, provedennogo 22 Aprelya

June, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Siarhai Martynaw, was equally curt when talking alongside his Russian counter-part: 'Belarus has no special policy in relation to Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Stemming from humane and humanitarian motives, Belarus at the level of the President of our country invited Kurmanbek Salievich [Bakiyev] to Belarus, and our policy ends at that.' There is no doubting that Belarusians viewed Bakiyev as the legitimate president. Martynaw also commented:

> *'The heads of state – participants of the CSTO, having met in May, came to a common position that at the given time the functioning structures of the Kyrgyz state lack legitimacy, which is supposed to be acquired with the appropriate political and democratic steps of the new powers in Kyrgyzstan. … Unity in terms of the approach of practically all states, probably, of the post-Soviet space is in itself an important political-moral factor, but the Kyrgyz people will resolve [the problems].'*[91]

What is clear is that the intervening variable of domestic perceptions is needed. Lukashenka responded to critical comments by President Medvedev, which 'for certain had in mind Belarus,' by asserting: '[Belarus has] always moved to meet Russia's expectations… As to the re-settlement [of Bakiyev], then, it seems to me, he [Medvedev] had in mind his predecessor in the post of President of the RF, Vladimir Putin, who in his time fixed up Akayev and many others.'[92] Lukashenka listed the many others. He recalled that in 2005 Putin had said Akayev was welcome in Moscow: 'Why was that considered possible at that time, but that a former president comes to Belarus is considered impossible?' Medvedev's more recent comments were accused of demonstrating Russia's double standards in respect of Kyrgyzstan.

2010 goda' [Answers of the head of the Department of Information/Press-Secretary of the MFA Andrei Savinkh to questions from representatives of the mass media in the course of a briefing held on 22 April 2010]

[91] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (22 June 2010), 'Materialy podkhoda k presse Ministra inostrannikh del Respubliki Belarus' Sergeya Martynova po itogam peregovorov s Ministrom inostrannikh del Rossiiskoi Federatsii Sergeem Lavrovym (MID Belarus', 22 iyunya 2010 g.)' [Materials from the appearance before the press of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus Sergey Martinov on the results of negotiations with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov]

[92] *BelTA* (25 April 2010), 'Lukashenko prinyal uchastie v golosovanii v mestnye sovety deputatov XXVI sozyva' [Lukashenko took part in the voting for local councils of deputies 26th convocation]

Lukashenka looked to bargain with Russia. He congratulated Ukraine on striking a good deal with Russia over the extended lease on their base at Sevastopol, and reminded Russia that it had two military facilities in Belarus for which it was not paying any rent ('If the President of Russia has forgotten about this, it's time to remember.').[93] This was a gentle threat to demand ransom for the use of the facilities: the Hantsavichy radar station and a naval communications centre near Vileyka. One way to interpret this is to say that Belarus was both trying to balance against *and* bandwagon with Russia; bandwagoning at the system-level, while seeking to balance at the regional level.

This looks too quick though. Russia's foreign policy strained the anti-democratic alliance. It made 'meddling' in its neighbours' affairs a formal aspect of its foreign policy. It was less apparent that Russia was the outside power 'most likely to do what was necessary' to keep the incumbent, and the smaller power looked more vulnerable to domestic threats. This suggests that regime security dominated thinking, and that omnibalancing is more appropriate than hedging as an analytical frame for explaining Belarus's foreign policy.

In fact, Russia had announced that its foreign policy might not mean supporting incumbents before the first Kyrgyz regime change. In February 2005, Russia formed a new section inside the presidential administration, the Directorate for Interregional Relations and Cultural Contacts. In principle, this was part of a set of anti-colour-revolutionary measures.[94] However, Gleb Pavlovsky, working as a consultant to the Kremlin, explained the new thinking in the Kremlin in such a way as to rouse doubts about its intentions among allies. Russia's foreign policy goal, he said at a public event, strived to restore great power status, and he indicated that subversive methods would be employed. In his words: 'The President of our partner country or ally country, while preserving the role of our central interlocutor, will not be regarded by Russia

[93] President of Belarus (25 April 2010)
[94] Silitski (2005), p.345

as the one and only representative of society.'[95] In other words, Russia was prepared to work with opposition parties and NGOs if they better served Russia's national interest, which meant these domestic forces, sponsored by Russia, loomed larger on the elite's threat agenda. Whatever Pavlovsky intended to convey with these words, for elites in Belarus and elsewhere they signalled danger. Lukashenka's remark, noted at the beginning of this sub-section, about oppositional movements having their 'centres' in Russia, suggests that official Minsk forged an uncomfortable link in 2010.

5.4. The Arab Spring: "Colour revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East"

There was nothing obviously novel about the Belarusian leaderships' rhetoric surrounding the Arab Spring. One might also question whether Belarus particularly needed to position itself in respect of them: Belarus had diplomatic and trade relations with Egypt, Libya, and Syria, although the importance of these relations was far slighter than for the relationships discussed earlier in this chapter. Some statistics for goods trade is given in Table 5. This section is consequently only brief, and reiterates points made earlier in this chapter.

There is a clear divide between Western and Russian analysts framing of the Arab Spring, and therefore smaller powers in Russia's region did have some possibility for supporting one or other side diplomatically. Western analysts tend to distinguish between the regime changes in the post-Soviet space and the Arab Spring, and treat them as separate clusters of events. By contrast, for Russian analysts the Arab Spring is typically perceived to be the continuation of the earlier colour revolutions. The article referred to earlier, penned by the Russian Chief of Staff Gerasimov, described 'colour revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East' and thereby forged a direct link.

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[95] Vladimir Socor (8 February 2005), 'Kremlin Redefining Policy In "Post-Soviet Space"' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 2:27*

	Egypt	**Libya**	**Syria**	**Tunisia**
2005	37	16*	31	0.9
2010	63	3*	48	30
2015	186	0.9	41	17

Table 5: Belarus's trade with key states affected by the Arab Spring in millions of dollars. Compare with the figures in Table 4. (Data for Belarusian exports only; no data for imports from Libya for 2005 or 2010.) (Source: IMF Direction of Trade statistics).*

The Belarusian leadership aligned itself with Russia and against Western interpretations of the situation. On 5 March 2011, two months after Ben Ali had fled Tunisia and with North Africa in tumult, Lukashenka said: 'It's all backfiring on you [Americans] (*eto vam eshche aknutsya*). And badly. It's an example of the unprincipled and two-faced politics of the United States. It won't get better there.'[96] The president immediately made it clear that this was a subjective interpretation of events; an interpretation determined by projecting perceived US policy onto the self. 'I think it's better for you to work with us than subvert us.'[97] The plural pronoun presumably covering all political regimes deemed illegitimate or unfavourable by the US. This was apparent, too, in his reflections during the NATO-led intervention in Libya to enforce UN Security Council Resolution 1973.

Yet it is unclear how trusted Russia was now. On the one hand, Western actors remained objects of suspicion. Minor protests in Belarus against the jailing of the 2010 presidential candidate, Andrei Sannikaw, who is well-connected in Brussels-circles, coincided with NATO's

[96] President of Belarus (5 March 2011), 'Stenogramma interv'yu Prezidenta Respubliki Belarus' A. G. Lukashenka' [Transcript of the interview of President of the Republic of Belarus A. G. Lukashenko]

[97] President of Belarus (5 March 2011)

Libya intervention. On the other hand, Lukashenka's remarks to a Belarusian audience seem to have suggested foes were all around: 'Remember this one thing – we will not be given a quiet life. We learned this in the middle of last year, they [unclear who – PH] warned us: we will show you (*pokazhem kuz'kinu mat'*) in April-May. And they did.'[98] This would seem to be a reference to the aftermath of Bakiyev's ousting, and Belarus's refusal to extradite, although the next part makes it sound like EU or the USA are the states being described. 'They started with rumours, fomented a hullabaloo; today it is simple to do with the internet and other democratic bases of society. It's good that they haven't started to wage war, like in Libya, Egypt, Tunisia, Spain, Greece, etc. … So wake up and keep your wits about you, if you want to live in a peaceful country.' (Belarus's support for Qaddafi arguably went much further. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reported that Belarus shipped arms to Qaddafi in the days before a UN arms embargo came into force.[99] Belarus predictably dismissed 'foreign media lies,' but Belarus's role in the illegal arms trade is widely known.[100])

As I showed to be the case in respect of earlier regime changes, there was a tendency to connect the Arab Spring to an overarching narrative of Western expansionism. Belarus's foreign minister, Siarhai Martynaw, blamed the 'chaos' sweeping the world on the fact that the 'winners' of the Cold War prioritised 'egoism and gloating' over common sense. Likewise, Valiantsyna Leanenka, a member of the House of Representative's Permanent Commission for International Affairs and CIS Relations, spoke of 'a clash of civilisations.'[101] It was 'absolutely clear,' according to her, that recent events were a consequence of 'the hegemonic politics of the United States of America.' Resolution 1973 was 'a fig-leaf, which tries to cover up the real goals – prevailing

[98] President of Belarus (27 May 2011), '27 maya Aleksandr Lukashenko provel soveshchanie posvyashchennoe aktualnym voprosam ekonomiki' [On 27 May Aleksandr Lukashenko held a meeting devoted to current economic questions]

[99] *The Guardian* (1 March 2011), 'Libya received military shipment from Belarus, claims EU arms watchdog' (no author)

[100] *Reuters* (28 February 2011), 'Belarus denies reports of visit by Gaddafi plane' (no author). A good summary of Belarus's involvement in the arms trade is given in Wilson (2014), pp.185-190.

[101] House of Representatives (22 March 2011), 'Stolichnoe televidenie' [Capital television]

economic interests.' This was echoed in remarks by Lukashenka: 'Surely everyone understands this is a war for resources, for oil. Everyone understands perfectly.'[102] Moreover, such expansionism went against the grain of what ought to be. Leanenka argued: 'We must not forget that the Arab world is the Islamic World, and it is difficult for Western values to take root.'[103]

5.5. Post-Maidan Ukraine

The previous chapter touched on events that began in Ukraine in November 2013. While Viktor Yanukovych remained in power, Belarus clearly stood by him. In Lukashenka's words: 'We, Russia, and others support Ukraine and her stability […] and the current president.' Significantly, speaking in January 2014, he saw external actors behind unfolding events: 'Already there, it looks like, the opposition are not the ones controlling the process. It's gone too far there.'[104] Clearly the forces behind events were, in the president's opinion, Western: 'After the collapse of the Soviet Union they came for us in earnest (*vzyalis' za nas osnovatel'no*).' As discussed in Section 3.4.2., this concurred with the dominant view among Russian elites and society about the Maidan.[105] The situation changed quickly in mid-February 2014, with clashes between riot police and protestors escalating, and protestors shot dead by unidentified snipers on 18-20 February. Although an agreement was reached on 21 February between the government and the opposition, on 23 February Yanukovych fled Ukraine to Russia.

The reading of the situation is of utmost importance for evaluating the legitimacy of the subsequent government. If, as Western officials typically think, the Maidan was a popular mass movement against the political regime, then that regime lost its legitimacy by not responding to

[102] President of Belarus (21 April 2011), 'Poslanie belorusskomu narodu i natsional'nomu sobraniyu [Message to the Belarusian people and the National Assembly]

[103] House of Representatives (22 March 2011)

[104] President of Belarus (22 January 2014), 'Vstrecha s rukovoditelyami krupneishikh belorusskikh SMI' [Meeting with the heads of the major Belarusian media]

[105] Levada Center (5 April 2016), 'Maidan and Russia-Ukraine Relations.' According to the Levada survey of Russian public opinion, 80% of Russians thought Maidan was a *coup d'etat*.

social demands for change.[106] It is, though, very difficult to know the extent of participation in, or support for, the Maidan protests. Most of the polls of Ukrainians conducted during the protests were by partisan organisations. The International Republican Institute's polling from March 2014 suggested moderate support for the protests, with 25% calling it a revolution, and 22% a call for closer ties with the EU, although 17% did think it was a *coup d'etat*.[107] Support was clearly weaker in the south and east according to the IRI poll. What is clearer is that the protests in Kyiv sparked civic action across the country, with tens of thousands joining regional protests, while lustration campaigns and civic associations were a manifestation of a wide-reaching and popular desire to make officials accountable.[108]

A couple of days before Yanukovych fled Ukraine, Lukashenka sent a message of condolence for lives lost on the Maidan. The message was support for Yanukovych as much as it was sympathy for the victims and their families: 'Belarus always condemns lawless actions of participants in political conflicts and unconstitutional methods of resolving domestic disagreements.'[109] Lukashenka discussed the situation in Ukraine with Putin on 24 February,[110] and with former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma on 4 March.[111] Likewise, on 27 February, Minister of Foreign Affairs Vladimir Makey emphasised the need 'to restore stability… to provide for the functioning of the relevant organs of power, which must be legitimate.'[112] It would seem

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[106] Lipset (1981, [1963]), pp.65-67, discusses how political regimes lose legitimacy.

[107] International Republican Institute (2014), *Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Ukraine, March 14-26, 2014.* The methodology looks sound.

[108] Richard Sakwa (2015), *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands* (London), p.91

[109] President of Belarus (20 February 2014), 'Aleksandr Lukashenko napravil soboleznovanie Prezidentu Ukrainy Viktoru Yanukovichu' [Aleksandr Lukashenko sent condolences to the President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich]

[110] President of Belarus (24 February 2014), Sostoyalsya telefonnyj razgovor prezidentov Belarusi I Rossii [The presidents of Belarus and Russia held a phone conversation]

[111] President of Belarus (4 March 2014), Sostoyalsya telefonnyj razgovor prezidenta Belarusi Aleksandra Lukashenko s eks-prezidentom Ukrainy Leonidom Kuchmoi [The President of Belarus held a telephone conversation with the ex-president of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma]

[112] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (28 February 2014), 'Materialy podkhoda k presse Ministra inostrannikh del Respubliki Belarusi Vladimira Makeya i Ministra innostrannikh del Respubliki Latvii Edgarsa Rinkevicha, 27 Fevralya 2014, g. Riga' [Materials from the appearance before the press of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus Vladimir Makei and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia Edgars Rinkevics, 27 February 2014, Riga]

that by 'legitimate' Makey meant Yanukovych because, answering a separate point, he remarked that EU states had previously claimed Ukraine was a 'model' for Belarus to follow, whereas now 'they say that it's not a model, and that Yanukovych is a dictator.' In other words, Makey emphasised that EU states had changed in their relationship to Yanukovych.

The shootings on Maidan cemented many EU officials' perceptions about the illegitimacy of Yanukovych. The lack of clarity at the time about who ordered the shootings should have complicated the picture. A leaked recording between the Estonian foreign minister and Catherine Ashton, the EU high representative for foreign and security policy, indicated the latter was taken aback at the suggestion anyone other than Yanukovych could have been behind the shootings ('I hadn't picked that up. Gosh!'). The suggestion was that the Maidan leaders were involved in the sniper shootings, and there has been debate among scholars about who was responsible for the 20 February killings; it's important to underscore that the content of the phone conversation was no more than a suggestion based on hearsay.[113] In any case, both EU and Russian narratives interpreted events in starkly different terms. For the Russians, accusing the Maidan leaders and the far right of being behind the shootings, the opposition to Yanukovych was discredited and could not be the building block of a legitimate government. Belarusian officials do not appear to have made any public comments apportioning blame, although the already quoted remarks by

[113] Andrew Wilson (2014), *The Ukraine Crisis and What It Means for the West* (New Haven CT and London) holds the government responsible, stating that the snipers were positioned in government buildings (pp.88-90). Parts of his additional evidence come from sources inside the new government, who have a vested interest in blaming the ousted authorities. Sakwa (2015) is receptive to the argument that people linked to the new government – i.e. the protesters – were behind the shootings (p.90), although he relies too heavily on the leaked telephone conversation. He claims the snipers were located in the Philharmonic Hall, which was under the control of insurgents, although does not indicate how the Maidan leaders could have obtained a specially-trained sniper team. The most damning evidence is the failure of the new authorities to properly investigate the shootings. While there were clearly weapons and fatalities on both sides, it seems unlikely that the snipers were not either under government control or, arguably, as the subsequent authorities implied, moved in from Russia as support for Yanukovych. The evidence supporting the second possibility is too closely connected to the new authorities to be fully credible however. For details see: Wilson (2014), pp.88-90.

Lukashenka put Belarus on Yanukovych's side all the while he was still in Ukraine. Yanukovych's departure from Ukraine was a turning point.

Asked on Ukrainian TV whether or not he considered the interim government in Kyiv under Arseniy Yatsenyuk legitimate, Lukashenka did not give a direct answer. He stated that the new government was functioning and that Belarus would work with it. 'As to recognition or not,' he asked rhetorically, 'what would it change?

> *'I'm against this approach: We don't recognise [the government], and that's that. Well, time will move on and we will recognise. […]*
>
> *'As to Yanukovych – what kind of a President is he for me? Take his last speech: "Comrades, ladies and gentlemen, I am alive and well, I am commander of the armed forces." There's instantly a question: "Where is your army?" The President ought to be with his people no matter what. […]*
>
> *'…[Y]ou are supposed to sacrifice yourself. And how? To sit in your residence, to let the power go to your head* [upivat'sya vlast'yu]*, and then when it is difficult to run away? No. I do not recognise this.'*[114]

The president focuses on the question of recognition rather than legitimacy. However, to recognise one government rather than another would seem to be an acknowledgement of its legitimacy. What was clear was that the Poroshenko government, despite the previous one falling through the unconstitutional removal of Yanukovych, fulfilled the criteria for legitimacy in other ways. It did 'engender and maintain the belief that [it was]… the most appropriate' regime in Ukrainian society. This was confirmed by presidential elections in May 2014, and parliamentary election in October 2014. In the former, Yanukovych's Party of the Regions picked up a mere 3% vote share, which reiterated that the ousted party was no longer a legitimate political force. The Party of the Regions did not contest the parliamentary elections, claiming that

[114] President of Belarus (28 March 2014), 'Interv'yu prezidenta Respubliki Belarus A. G. Lukashenko programme Shuster Live' [Interview of the President of the Republic of Belarus A. G. Lukashenko to the programme Shuster Live]

they were illegitimate, although voter turnout was over 50%.[115] To argue that Belarus's position was different from Russia's requires attention to nuance though, because arguably even Russia *de facto* recognised the post- Yanukovych regime. Rilka Dragneva-Lewers, a specialist in international law in the former Soviet Union, says that 'no government (even Russia) refused recognition… Although the Kremlin has challenged the legitimacy of the post-Yanukovych regime on several occasions, they have attended high level meetings, etc.'[116]

Certainly, Belarus showed far more tolerance than Russia with the new regime in Ukraine. Lukashenka did not publicly repeat Russian officials' claims that interim president Oleksandr Turchynov was illegitimate.[117] On 29 March Lukashenka met Turchynov and spoke of 'a common point of view' on many issues, as well as attributing previous misunderstandings between the two states to 'incorrect information.'[118] This last point is significant. According to the President, 'much was disclosed. I heard a lot from the horse's mouth (*iz pervykh ust*) that, sadly, I didn't and couldn't know.'[119] Yet, for Belarus's leaders, the events in Kyiv were certainly not dissociated from the 'colour revolutions,' and on 6 November 2015 Lukashenka said that efforts for a seizure of power in Belarus via 'colour revolutions or Maidans [*ploschadi*]' had failed – thereby at a

[115] The elections were not held in the occupied Crimea or easternmost parts of Ukraine. Turnout in Donetsk oblast' was 32%, and in Lugansk 33%, in both cases excluding the districts where no voting occurred. These figures were far lower than in the rest of the state. While the lack of vote in these regions raises important concerns about representation, it should not raise serious questions about the legitimacy of the vote in the state as a whole. Only 27 of 450 seats in the Rada (i.e. 6%) were not filled due to the inability to hold the vote. Source for figures: Central Election Commission of Ukraine

[116] Private correspondence, quoted with permission

[117] For example, Russia's ambassador to the UN, Vitaly Churkin, repeatedly referred to Yanukovych as the 'legitimate president' in remarks at the UN Security Council meeting called by Ukraine on 3 March 2014. There was instrumental value to Russia in maintaining this line; Churkin held up a letter from Yanukovych requesting Russian intervention. Churkin's speech here, and his remarks at the Security Council two days earlier, were littered with exaggerations and distortions: he claimed that Kyiv had seen an 'armed takeover by radical extremists,' probably overstating the involvement of far-right groups, and referred to 'self-defence groups' in Crimea who were really Russian military personnel. United Nations Security Council (2014), 'Record of the 7125th meeting' and 'Record of the 7124th meeting.'

[118] President of Belarus (29 March 2014) 'Aleksandr Lukashenko vstretilsya s ispolnyayushchim obyazannosti Prezidenta Ukrainy Aleksandrom Turchynovim [Aleksandr Lukashenko met the acting president of Ukraine Aleksandr Turchynov]

[119] President of Belarus (29 March 2014)

certain level equating the two scenarios.[120] However, Belarus was more accommodating than Russia to the opposition that had assumed power, and there were some clear uncertainties about Russia's role in the broader situation which encouraged Belarus to maintain a somewhat independent policy line.

Belarus's subjectivity across the development of the regime changes discussed has evolved. From the toppling of Milosevic onwards, Lukashenka had very strong opinions. The ostensible role of Russia in the downfall of Bakiyev startled Lukashenka and those around him, and I have argued that Belarus projected the situation onto itself; this is consistent with Steven David's theory of omnibalancing. This meant modifying its position slightly, and withdrawing unreflective consent to Russia's regional hegemony. I am not suggesting that Belarus withdrew consent to Russia's regional role, only that it sought to renegotiate the boundaries of that role. It primarily focused on the CSTO as a forum for doing so, although found limited success. The key point is that Belarus's subjectivity allowed it to articulate some agency. This contradicts the expectations of neorealism, whereby Russia would be expected to marshal its allies in support of its position.

[120] Tatiana Polezhai (6 November 2015), 'Lukashenko: stavka na silovoi zakhvat vlasti v Belarusi putem "tsvetnyh revolyutsii" i "ploschadei" proval'naya' [Lukashenko: bets on seizing power in Belarus by means of "colour revolutions" and "Maidans" have failed] for *BelTA*

Chapter 6: Beyond Belarus

This chapter seeks to apply empirical findings from Chapters 4 and 5 to other smaller powers in the post-Soviet space. As explained in Chapter 2, I do not include the three Baltic states since their integration in the EU and NATO creates a significantly different institutional milieu. This does not automatically imply that the basic arguments about agency I have made are any less relevant to these cases, though it would require more extensive consideration of the context than was provided in Chapter 3. In addition, I have excluded Ukraine since it is reasonably considered a middle power, although I have noted that the distinction between small, middle and great powers is somewhat arbitrary. In any case, Ukraine has significantly greater resources and capabilities than the remaining non-Russian republics. With a population of roughly 45 million, only Uzbekistan (c. 30 million) could be classed in the same category, yet Ukraine's nominal GDP and military size comfortably outstrip Uzbekistan's across the whole period since independence. Moreover, sections of my thesis have analysed and evaluated Belarus's response to the situation in Ukraine in both 2004 and after 2013, and this is an additional relevant consideration when deciding to exclude Ukraine from the study – Ukraine has been the *object* for much of the text. Of course, to a lesser extent this also applies to Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, although I will touch on these states. I proceed by analysing responses to sovereignty recognitions in Section 6.1, and then turn to responses to regime change in Section 6.2.

6.1. Sovereignty recognition

My analysis of smaller powers positioning in respect of sovereignty recognition in Chapter 4 involved norms of territorial integrity and self-determination. Specifically, I looked at the separatism of Kosovo, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia. For the reasons given in Chapter 4, I also

looked at the claim Russia now has sovereignty over Crimea. The key findings were that, while a neorealist account of balance of power and alliance formation initially appeared relevant, Belarus's refusal to support Russia in the other cases confounded the expectations of neorealism. Belarus proved able to articulate agency, albeit to a limited extent. I argued that there was internal differentiation inside Belarus, which enabled the state to monitor and adapt its actions in respect of the international system. This introduction of an intervening variable conforms to the neoclassical realist reading of international relations.

One of the expectations of neoclassical realism outlined in Section 2.2.2. was that the smaller power would engage in some hedging behaviour. The issue of sovereignty recognition bore out this expectation. I then argued that internal differentiation, as a filter through which systemic pressures passed, inflected Belarus's subjectivity, and this translated into a differentiated foreign policy. The positioned-practice actors responsible for Belarus's foreign policy adjusted an overarching policy of alignment with Russia so that it included some contrary behaviour. This compensated for threats perceived by part of the elite, but which were not perceived by the other parts of the elite. The absence of consensus proved crucial for the articulation of agency. To connect this to the broader argument of the thesis, I suggest that a valid interpretation is that Belarus renegotiated aspects of its consent to Russia's hegemonic role within the post-Soviet space. Its consent was not unconditional.

6.1.1. Central Asia

Three of the states in Central Asia would generally be described as political and military allies of Russia. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan have all been signatories of the Russia-dominated Collective Security Treaty since its inception in 1994, and they agreed to Russia's proposals to form the CSTO in 2002, thereby consolidating their security alignment. Their basic alignment choice was one of bandwagoning with Russia (although they may describe it as

balancing with Russia). The status of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan requires additional comment, which is provided below. I will consider the five states' positions in turn.

Kazakhstan gives moderate support to the findings in the case of Belarus. It is clear that domestic-level concerns modify system-level pressures to some extent, not least in light of the sensitivity of territorial integrity to the Kazakh elite, although it is less apparent that there was any differentiation within the elite about foreign policy preferences. The sensitivity to territorial integrity was apparent from the moment of its independence since, as I remarked in Chapter 3, the Russia-Kazakhstan border is poorly demarcated by geography. Moreover, the north of the state is heavily populated by ethnic Russians. The 1997 decision to move the state capital from Almaty to Akmola (unimaginatively renamed Astana in the process; Astana is simply the Kazakh translation of 'the capital') is usually attributed to concerns of a Russian irredentist claim on part of the territory.[1] According to Neil Macfarlane, writing in 2003, Kazakhstan 'lack[ed] the capacity to control its borders, let alone defend its territorial integrity.'[2] Furthermore, in 2003 the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, had referred to 'serious territorial problems' between the two sides which provoked an angry response in Kazakhstan.[3] To Kazakh ears it recalled Soviet-era remarks by Nikita Khrushchev about moving the (then Soviet Socialist Republic) border deeper into Kazakh territory. The dispute was ostensibly settled in 2005, but not without harsh rhetoric and criticism on both sides of the border; Kazakh citizens protested outside the Russian Embassy even though the Kazakh-side was arguably the victor in the dispute.[4]

[1] The official explanations were that Almaty is prone to earthquakes, and the relocation of administrative services would give a much needed boost to the economy in the north of the country.

[2] S. Neil Macfarlane (2003), 'European Strategy Towards Kazakhstan' in Robert Legvold (ed.), *Thinking Strategically: The Major Powers, Kazakhstan, and the Central Asian Nexus* (Cambridge MA), p.142

[3] Marat Yermukanov (27 January 2005), 'Russian-Kazakh Border Agreement Sparks Nationalist Reaction' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 2:19*

[4] Marat Yermukanov (27 January 2005)

At the system-level, Kazakhstan did not renege on a basic alliance commitment to Russia. When, in spring 2009, Russia complained about Kazakh participation in NATO's Cooperative Lancer/Cooperative Longbow '09 exercises in Georgia, Kazakhstan meekly withdrew.[5] The exercises, under the aegis of the Partnership for Peace, were deemed by Russia to contradict obligations under the Collective Security Treaty. The CSTO general secretary, Nikolai Bordyuzha, described the exercises as both 'an attempt to aggravate the situation in the Caucasus region' and also 'support for the aggressive moves against the Saakashvili regime against his citizens in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.'[6] As well, Dmitry Rogozin, serving as Russia's envoy to NATO at the time, formally requested to NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer that the exercise be either cancelled or relocated out of the CIS – of which Georgia formally remained a member albeit that the process of withdrawal was underway.[7]

Despite this meekness in the military sphere, in the wake of the 2008 sovereignty declarations, Kazakhstan sought earnestly to emphasise its own sovereignty. For example, in early 2011, Russia succeeded in obtaining Kazakh agreement for a joint air defence system. The Kazakh chief for air defences, Alexander Sorokin, was very swift to state in public that it would be the Kazakh air force patrolling the border, including responsibility for the Russian-side.[8] Allowing Russia any responsibility for Kazakh airspace would be deemed a risky concession. However, wedged between two considerably more powerful states, China and Russia, both of whom are permanent UN Security Council members and nuclear states, there has long been awareness of both opportunities and threats that has led it to pursue some balancing against Russia. In 1994 President Nursultan Nazarbayev spearheaded the formation of a Central Asian Union (CAU)

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[5] Jamestown Foundation (21 April 2009), 'Amid Intensifying Russian Complaints Kazakhstan Boycotts NATO Exercises in Georgia' (no author)

[6] *Interfax: Russia & CIS military information weekly* (24 April 2009), 'Newly independent states; NATO exercise in Georgia an attempt to escalate tension in the Caucasus'

[7] *Interfax: Russia & CIS military information weekly* (17 April 2009), 'Foreign military review; Estonia will not attend NATO drills in Georgia'

[8] Roman Muzalevsky (10 January 2011), 'Russia and Kazakhstan Agreed to a Joint Air Defense Shield' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 8:6*

between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, which sought to coordinate military, political, and economic policy independently of Moscow. The CAU was hindered by rivalry between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan for regional leadership, and saw few palpable results.[9] In 2007, Nazarbayev proposed a new Central Asian Union, which was presented as a political and economic project, although Uzbek lack of interest meant that project was stillborn.

A consistent line was kept across the 2008 sovereignty declarations. It stood beside Russia in criticising those Western states which recognised Kosovo's independence. Like Belarus, Kazakhstan found sufficient agency to refrain from following Moscow's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The foreign minister, Marat Tazhin, spoke of the 'double standards in the implementation' of the principle of territorial integrity.[10] Meanwhile, the prime minister, Karim Masimov, mimicked his Belarusian counterparts in tying the issue of Kosovan recognition and Abkhazian/South Ossetian recognition. He told Echo Moscow radio station during an interview: 'This question has been discussed, and we have an official position. Kazakhstan did not recognise Kosovo and does not recognise Abkhazia and South Ossetia. We consider that borders are defined and Kazakhstan will not recognise any new states.'[11] This, he clarified, was Kazakhstan's position on all frozen conflicts (there are cases of Kazakhstan establishing diplomatic relations with new states where there has been consensus recognition, such as South Sudan in 2011). As with Belarus, while Kazakhstan advocated Russia's regional primacy and thus responsibility for regional order, its consent did not grant Russia unlimited powers to act.

Rhetorical pressure from Moscow did not relent, and as late as 2010 Russia's ambassador to Sukhumi, Semyon Grigoryev, insisted that political recognition of Abkhazia would be

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[9] Alexei Vassiliev (ed.) (2001), *Central Asia: Political and Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era* (London), p.25. Note that Vassiliev calls it the Central Asian Alliance, although his comparable use of the word alliance in the context of the Union State of Belarus and Russia makes it clear that this is a translation matter.

[10] UN General Assembly (27 September 2008), 'Speech of H. E. Mr Marat Tazhin, Minister of Foreign Affairs' [Opening Session, 63rd Session of the General Assembly]

[11] Echo Moskvy (12 December 2008), Interview on Andrey Venediktov's programme

forthcoming 'from Minsk to Astana,' which was hardly a broad spectrum and envisaged Abkhazia integrating into the customs union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan.[12] Indeed, this pressure may explain Kazakhstan's position on the annexation of Crimea, which is less neutral than the one Belarus was able to preserve. The Kazakh Ministry for Foreign Affairs issued a statement following the Crimea referendum which seemed to endorse Russia's position with its reference to 'a free expression of the will' of Crimean people and expressed 'understanding' of the decision of the Russian Federation on the matter.[13] Despite reaffirming Kazakhstan's commitment to principles of international law concerning territorial integrity, there was little distancing from Russia rhetorically. This was despite distaste for certain statements emanating from Russia. Not for the first time, firebrand Vladimir Zhirinovsky stepped up to question the legitimacy of Kazakhstan's territorial borders.[14] There is a paucity of evidence to suggest that the protests of oppositional movements against Russian imperialism reverberated within official circles, although Kazakhstan did abstain from the UN General Assembly vote on the territorial integrity of Ukraine on 27 March 2014. While there was some defence cooperation between Kazakhstan and Ukraine, this predated the onset of problems in Ukraine (the two sides signed an agreement on joint production of armoured personnel carriers in 2012[15]) and so does not represent any reactive balancing against Russia. Kazakhstan voted with Russia against the General Assembly resolution of 19 December 2016 that referred to Russia as an 'occupying power.'

Kyrgyzstan took a position independent of Russia in the case of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which it explained in terms of international legal norms. Unlike some other powers allied

[12] *Interfax: Russia & CIS military information weekly* (27 August 2010), 'Corridors of power; Recognition of Abkhazia by Minsk and Astana a matter of time – Russian diplomat'

[13] Richard Weitz (24 March 2014), 'Kazakhstan Responds to Ukraine Crisis' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 11:55*

[14] George Voloshin (27 March 2014), 'Kazakhstan's Pro-Russia Course May Alienate Ukraine' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 11:58*

[15] George Voloshin (27 March 2014)

to Russia, but in common with Kazakhstan, it either did not try to, or failed to, resist Russia's rallying for support concerning the annexation of Crimea. The Georgian separatist republics notwithstanding, Kyrgyzstan arguably presents the most compelling evidence in support of the neorealist reading of international relations. It keenly supported Russia's position on Kosovo, with its foreign minister, Ednan Karabayev, having gone on record in January 2008 voicing concerns that Kosovan independence would set a precedent and that its policy towards Kosovo would be decided accordingly.[16] He is recorded telling US diplomats that Kyrgyzstan feared renewed 'bloody' conflicts in the CIS, although he conceded that the US Under-Secretary of State gave a 'compelling' presentation on the self-determination question at the OSCE ministerial-level meeting in Madrid.[17] Kyrgyzstan was able to maintain its position after the Russo-Georgia war. The head of the Western Countries desk in the foreign ministry, Kanat Tursunkulov, told US diplomats that his country would take a balanced approach, but for him territorial integrity trumped self-determination because of the complex ethnic situation in the south of Kyrgyzstan.[18] In principle, this might suggest the domestic-level perception of the potential consequences was decisive.

However, in 2014 Kyrgyzstan quickly bowed to Russia's expectations for recognition of the annexation. On 20 March, the Kyrgyz foreign ministry had issued a statement blaming the 'ill-considered actions and corruption of the previous government' for the crisis in Ukraine. According to the ministry, 'the results of the referendum represent the will of the absolute majority … this is the objective reality.'[19] The statement called for stability in 'Ukraine and the given region as a whole' and, by having recognised what it considered the legitimacy of the referendum, there is no doubt it now saw Crimea as a part of Russia. Contrary to Tursunkulov's

[16] US Embassy, Bishkek (12 February 2008), *Wikileaks cable 08BISHKEK154_a*

[17] US Embassy, Bishkek (11 January 2008), *Wikileaks cable 08BISHKEK39_a*

[18] US Embassy, Bishkek (28 August 2008), *Wikileaks cable 08BISHKEK886_a*

[19] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan (20 March 2014), 'Zayavlenie Ministerstva innostrannikh del Kyrgyzskoi Respubliki ot 20 marta 2014 goda' [Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic on 20 March 2014]

prioritising of territorial integrity, official Bishkek was giving greater weight to self-determination. In fact, this suggests domestic-level variables were not all that decisive, not only because of the salience of the territorial issue for Kyrgyzstan, but also because its own experience of popular revolt away from the state capital indicates regime security concerns. While the nature of bargaining between Kyrgyzstan and Russia can only be supposition, it is relevant that Kyrgyzstan was engaged in discussions about accession to the Customs Union, and it seems plausible to think Russia forged a link between the two issues.[20] As mentioned in Chapter 4, being in a customs union requires agreement about a common external border. It is true that Kyrgyzstan was absent for the UN General Assembly vote on 27 March, which affirmed the territorial integrity of Ukraine. While this may have disappointed Russia, Kyrgyzstan's supportive position was already on record. It is noteworthy, however, that it abstained from the UN General Assembly vote of 19 December 2016, which referred to Russia as an 'occupying power' in Crimea.

Tajikistan offers support for the findings of the Belarusian case. Like Belarus, it rejected the independence of Kosovo, and diverged from its ally by maintaining a non-recognition policy line on Abkazhia and South Ossetia. There is evidence suggestive of both a normative dissatisfaction and differentiation among the elite concerning Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In respect of the former, the sensitivities surrounding territorial integrity is best illustrated by a demarcation agreement ratified a couple of years after these cases. In January 2011, Tajikistan settled a long-running dispute with China, which yielded 1% of territory it had previously claimed to China.[21] Despite the loss of territory, Tajikistan's foreign minister, Khamrokhon Zarifi, spoke of a great victory over China, which had claimed as much as 20% of Tajik territory, and other officials

[20] Alexey Malashenko (10 April 2014), 'Kyrgyzstan: Where Change Confirms Continuity' for *Carnegie Russia*

[21] Alexander Sodiqov (24 January 2011), 'Tajikistan Cedes Disputed Land to China' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 8:16*

parroted his triumphal sentiments.[22] Pro-government experts spoke of the inviolability of Tajikistan's borders, while oppositional voices saw a defeat for Tajik diplomacy. These positions were predictable enough, but open debate in the parliament on the issue disclosed the salience of territorial integrity in both government and opposition circles. Indeed, a dogged movement for Pamiri autonomy in the Tajik part of Badakhshan cautions the authorities against endorsing self-determination. Russia's violation of the territorial integrity norm in 2008 therefore provoked resistance: an official is reported as having observed that Samarkand and Bukhara were 'historically Tajik cities,' which may have been a deft way of recognising the inherent risks (it seems unlikely that Tajikistan had any revanchist designs).[23]

There is cursory evidence of differentiation within the elite. On 29 August 2008, President Emomali Rakhmon appeared on Tajik national television supportive of Russia. He asserted: 'Our countries are natural strategic partners … [which] envisions … support for each other's actions. Of course, this also applies to the group of measures that Russia is taking in the Caucasus.'[24] At the same time, a Wikileaks cable indicates that the Tajik Ministry of Foreign Affairs drew parallels between Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Kosovo.[25] The director of North American and European affairs in the foreign ministry is reported telling US officials said Russia had put Tajikistan in 'a difficult position' and that they were unlikely 'to take a public stand.'[26] On Kosovo, the chairman of the Tajik Assembly of Representatives' Committee for International Affairs, Asomuddin Saidov, had criticised the 'precedent' and claimed that it 'goes against generally-accepted international norms, especially when done without the approval of the UN Security Council.'[27]

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[22] Alexander Sodiqov (24 January 2011)

[23] US Embassy, Dushanbe (28 August 2008), *Wikileaks cable 08DUSHANBE1108_a*

[24] Natalya Krainova (1 September 2008), 'S. Ossetia Talks of Joining Russia' in *The Moscow Times*

[25] US Embassy, Dushanbe (13 February 2009), *Wikileaks cable 09DUSHANBE185_a*

[26] US Embassy, Dushanbe (28 August 2008)

[27] *Regnum news agency* (18 February 2008), 'Glava mezhdunarodnogo komiteta parlamenta Tadzhikstana: Moe mneniye – Tadzhikstan ne priznaet nezavisimost' Kosovo' [Head of the Tajik

Despite these protestations, with regards to both Kosovo and the Georgian separatist republics, Tajikistan generally adopted a 'hiding' policy.[28] Officials were cagey about whether to support referral of Kosovo to the International Court of Justice, evidently preferring to keep out of the matter.[29] Regarding the Georgian situation, an official in the foreign ministry responded to a US demarche by stating that his department could not offer a comment without government guidance, and that the government was not responding to his requests for guidance.[30] The same official later reiterated that Tajikistan does not recognise the two republics' independence, though mentioned too that Tajikistan supports Russia's right to defend its citizens, thereby attributing legitimacy to Dmitry Medvedev's remarks.[31] The policy was not always coherent, which is at least consistent with a diversity of elite opinions. Tajikistan hid from formal policy statements about Crimea too, and did not attend the UN General Assembly debate and vote on Ukraine's territorial integrity in March 2014.

Turkmenistan's institutional capabilities are limited. Formally the state proclaims a foreign policy of 'permanent neutrality.'[32] In the foreign policy realm, a recent text by Annette Bohr notes that there are 'only a handful of experienced officials,' although the serving foreign minister, Rashid Meredov, has been in post since 2001.[33] It has fewer institutional ties even than

parliamentary international committee: My opinion is that Tajikistan won't recognise the independence of Kosovo] (no author)

[28] On 'hiding' see my comment in Section 2.2.2.

[29] US Embassy, Dushanbe (5 September 2008), *Wikileaks cable 08DUSHANBE1127_a*

[30] US Embassy, Dushanbe (28 August 2008)

[31] US Embassy, Dushanbe (20 March 2009), *Wikileaks cable 09DUSHANBE354_a*

[32] See: UN General Assembly (12 December 1995), 'A/RES/50/80: 90th Plenary Meeting, 12 December 1995.' The policy has also been described as 'positive neutrality,' most notably by Luca Anceschi (2009), although 'permanent' is the adjective in the official English version of the General Assembly resolution. See: Anceschi (2009), *Turkmenistan's Foreign Policy: Positive Neutrality and the Consolidation of the Turkmen Regime* (London).

[33] Annette Bohr (2016), *Turkmenistan: Power, Politics, and Petro-Authoritarianism,* Chatham House Research Paper (no place)

Belarus, and its foreign policy is driven by gas markets and the propaganda about its neutrality.[34] The latter, for example, led it to seek a mediation role in the Afghanistan conflict, although little materialised. It has expressed no opinions publicly about the sovereignty of any of the cases studied in Chapter 4, and it is difficult to obtain insights into opinions held inside the country on specific issues. Pro-Russian attitudes, and the reach of Russian state media, almost certainly mean that most of the public supported Russia's position on Georgia.[35] Of course, public consensus has little or no bearing on foreign policy of such a centralised and authoritarian state. Another influence on the elite is Turkey, resulting from common linguistic and ethnic heritage, and if there were any communications on the issue between the two sides then Turkish elites are unlikely to have encouraged Turkmenistan articulating pro-Russian positions on Abkhazia and South Ossetia, worried about a precedent for Kurdish separatism.[36] However, there is insufficient evidence to make any conclusions in respect of Turkmenistan. It was absent for both relevant UN votes on post-2013 Ukraine.

Uzbekistan has occupied the most nuanced position of the Central Asian smaller powers with regard to institutional ties since 1991. It was a signatory of the CST between 1994 and 1999, although did not agree to participate initially in the CSTO. Between 1999 and 2005, Uzbekistan belonged to the rival GUUAM arrangement that had formed two years earlier (as GUAM), and which had its origins in changes to the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty in 1996-7 that were favourable for Russia's potential troop deployments.[37] Accordingly, there is an argument that the

[34] Bohr (2016) notes that, despite the UN vote, there is no process within the UN to determine what constitutes neutrality. Anceschi (2009) argues persuasively that Turkmenistan's neutrality boils down to a mechanism for putting distance between Ashgabat and Moscow.

[35] US Embassy, Ashgabat (26 August 2008), *Wikileaks cable, 08ASHGABAT1119_a*

[36] Turkey's position was given in a press release on 26 August 2008. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey (26 August 2008), 'No. 158 - Press Release Regarding the Independence of Georgia (Unofficial Translation)'

[37] Martha Brill Olcott, Anders Aslund, and Sherman W. Garnett (1999), *Getting It Wrong: Regional Cooperation and the Commonwealth of Independent States* (Washington DC), p.166-167

initial iteration of GUAM sought to balance against Russia. In addition, Uzbekistan joined the China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in 2001, and allowed the US military to establish bases on its land: this pattern of institutional memberships and range of cooperation immediately gives the impression that Uzbekistan actively engaged in a form of hedging behaviour, not fully committing to one or other major power. In 2006, it resigned the CST and became a member of the Russia-led alliance bloc. The period 2006-2012, then, was one of alignment for Uzbekistan with Russia.

At the time of the Kosovo, Abkhazia and South Ossetia sovereignty claims, Uzbekistan was therefore more patently pursuing a policy of bandwagoning with Russia. Despite this, it managed to abide by a non-recognition policy in respect of both the Balkans and the Caucasus, and later issued only vague commentaries about Crimea (by which time it had exited the CSTO). This policy could be interpreted as a further part of a hedging strategy, or indeed as a policy of 'hiding,' which perhaps does little more than underscore the regrettably vague usage of the terms in scholarship. What is common to both of these terms, however, is the significance of domestic-level variables: the policy positioning reveals that Uzbekistan could articulate some agency even within an overarching policy of soft bandwagoning with Russia. Cooperation with the CSTO may have been helpful given concerns about terrorism originating from instability in Afghanistan, but Uzbekistan did not approve of giving Russia a free hand.

Separatism did have significant issue salience with the Uzbek rulers. President Islam Karimov to some extent consolidated his rule by exploiting the dangers inherent in nationalism, pointing out the intractability of aligning nation and state in the region.[38] The People's Movement of Turkestan, a political movement advocating pan-Turkism in Central Asia, was outlawed in Uzbekistan in the early 1990s.[39] Meanwhile, Birlik ('Unity'), a nationalist party, relied

[38] Lawrence P. Markowitz (2009), 'How master frames mislead: The division and eclipse of nationalist movements in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan' in *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 32:4,* pp.716-738

[39] David Nissman (14 July 1995), 'Opposition parties in Central Asia remain under fire' in *Prism, 1:11*

on a secessionist narrative formed in the dying days of the USSR. In the pre-independence period it promoted language rights and tapped into ecological concerns about the Aral Sea, although ethnic violence in the Ferghana Valley unveiled the complexities of nationalism in the region and, combined with independence, weakened its support base.[40] It is reasonable to assume that Karimov's government was reluctant to be seen to back any secessionism in the former Soviet Union; this would stoke beliefs that the post-1991 territorial settlement was not final. This had internal resonance given the prospective secessionist claim in the autonomous Karakalpakstan region of western Uzbekistan.

On the question of Kosovo's sovereignty Uzbekistan has never made a formal statement declaring a position. This was despite Uzbekistan having previously seen opportunities to rile Russia over its support for Kosovo and Serbia as a single state; in the late 1990s one author suggests Karimov deliberately took a position opposed to Russia on NATO's bombing.[41] With the declaration of independence in February 2008, the Uzbek government issued a brief statement that said all matters of independence should be settled at the United Nations.[42] It subsequently ignored US diplomatic approaches to clarify its position.[43] On the question of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, a US diplomat described that: 'Consistent with Uzbek interests [to maintain ties with different sides], Tashkent appears to be trying to maintain a nuanced position that avoids antagonizing Russia or the West.'[44] In private, the Uzbek Minister for Defence apparently accused Russia of provoking Saakashvili,[45] although I expect this was mostly a case of playing to the American ear. Visits to Tashkent of both President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin gave Russia ample opportunities to make its expectations known.[46] Uzbekistan's foreign minister,

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[40] Markowitz (2009)

[41] Eric A. Miller (2006), *To Balance or Not to Balance: Alignment Theory and the Commonwealth of Independent States* (Aldershot), p.55

[42] US Embassy, Tashkent (21 February 2008), *Wikileaks cable 08TASHKENT233_a*

[43] US Embassy, Tashkent (28 April 2009), *Wikileaks cable 09TASHKENT593_a*; US Embassy, Tashkent (5 September 2008), *Wikileaks cable 08TASHKENT1037_a*

[44] US Embassy, Tashkent (3 September 2008), *Wikileaks cable 08TASHKENT1029_a*

[45] US Embassy, Tashkent (5 September 2008), *Wikileaks cable 08TASHKENT1034_a*

[46] US Embassy, Tashkent (23 March 2009), *Wikileaks cable 09TASHKENT345_a*

Vladimir Norov, is reported to have told the serving US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, R. Nicholas Burns, that the state disapproved of Russian *and* Georgian aggression, which at least acknowledged that Russia had misbehaved alongside Saakashvili.[47] He also stated that Uzbekistan had no intention of 'act[ing] like Belarus,' which was interpreted by the US cable as meaning that Uzbekistan would not seek to use the issue as leverage with Russia.

In response to the annexation of Crimea, Uzbekistan joined the ranks of states giving vaguely worded responses. The state media did not provide any discussion of the matter, although the government issued two statements in March 2014 affirming Uzbekistan's commitment to the principle of state sovereignty; one before and one after the referendum.[48] The first statement, issued on 4 March, said that events 'create the real threats to sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country and cannot but arouse a deep alarm and concern in Uzbekistan [*sic*].'[49] Note that this was issued before Kyiv had lost control over the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of south-eastern Ukraine. The second statement, issued on 25 March, underscored that Uzbekistan's official position 'remains unchang[ed]' despite intervening events.[50] Unlike Belarus, Uzbekistan abstained from the vote at the UN General Assembly on 27 March, which possibly suggests disapproval of both Russian and Western positions.

In a speech at the SCO Karimov referred to the need for a settlement between Russia and Ukraine, which contradicted the official Russian position that it was not a party to the conflict.[51] In Karimov's words: 'I am convinced that the proposals of Uzkbekistan expressed as early as 4 March 2014 that the ultimate and most effective resolution of the emergent problem is the

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[47] US State Department (30 September 2008), *Wikileaks cable 08STATE104488_a*

[48] Umida Hashimova (2 May 2014), 'Online Commentary in Uzbekistan Divided on Crimea' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 11:82*

[49] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan (4 March 2014), 'Statement of the Information Agency "Jahon" on the Events in Ukraine'

[50] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan (25 March), 'The Position of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the situation in Ukraine and the Crimean Issue 25.03.2014'

[51] Umida Hashimova (17 October 2014), 'Defending Uzbekistan's Sovereignty in Face of the Ukraine Crisis – A Net Assessment of Developments in Uzbekistan Since the Start of 2014' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 11:184*

organisation of a direct negotiations process between Russia and Ukraine directed at ceasing the confrontation in Ukraine.'[52] For Uzbekistan's foreign policy, the SCO may have been the crutch it leaned on to resist any pressure from Russia. Relations with the West had faltered following its use of force at Andijan in 2005 (see Section 6.2.1.), and increasing isolation from Western powers reduced its capacity to use them as a means for articulating variable positions in different situations. Though, as observed above, there was a perceived need to engage in some form of balancing against Russia. In 2000, for example, Karimov repeatedly criticised Russia's Central Asia policy for exaggerating terrorist threats so as to scare states into a more overt Russian-led military alliance.[53]

In fact, each of the Central Asian states except Turkmenistan was a member of the SCO. Their unwillingness to support Russia and recognise the sovereignty of Abkhazia and South Ossetia would seem reasonably to have been facilitated by that organisation's discussions on the matter. China's position in Central Asia became much stronger around this time, as indicated by the trade figures given in Table 2 in Section 3.2.4., and through the SCO China gave political cover or 'shelter' to the smaller powers whose instinctive position was non-recognition. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the Dushanbe summit in September 2008 did not give the unequivocal backing to Russia that President Dmitry Medvedev had hoped for. Russia had violated the 'Shanghai spirit' and, by tacitly reaffirming its core principles, the SCO allowed the smaller powers a forum for the articulation of agency. Once it was apparent that China was not going to publicly back Russia, the smaller powers had the capacity to act otherwise.

[52] *Uzbekistan National News Agency* (15 September 2014), President Karimov's Speech at the SCO summit

[53] *Jamestown Monitor* (26 September 2000), 'Karimov Lashes Out at Moscow's Policy in Central Asia' in *Monitor, 6:178* (no author)

6.1.2. The Caucasus and Moldova

Despite its ostensible ambitions to form a balancing coalition against Russia, it is telling that GUAM did not comment collectively on questions of sovereignty in 2008. Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova had long had troubles about separatist regions which involved Russia to some degree: Nagorno-Karabakh; Abkhazia, South Ossetia (plus some sensitivities around Adjara); and Transnistria in the three states respectively. Separatism issues would flare up in Ukraine subsequently. Consequently, it would be surprising if their intended actions did not follow from subjective understandings, but there is still the issue of whether they obtained intended outcomes. Again, I look at each smaller power in succession. Both Azerbaijan and Georgia were signatories of the CST until 1999, although they did not sign a renewal in that year. After the Rose Revolution Georgia sought to reorient away from Russia, and Azerbaijan saw opportunities in its energy resources and eschewed a formal alliance choice.

Map 2: Smaller powers in the Caucasus (Source: www.d-maps.com/carte*; adapted by author)*

Armenia's foreign policy on the sovereignty issue has been largely motivated by its seeking recognition for Nagorno-Karabakh.[54] The local government in the separatist province is fairly described as a puppet regime, given its excessive dependence on Armenia, although it operates its 'domestic' policy independently. Predictably, in respect of the sovereignties declared in 2008 Armenia rhetorically supported the fulfilment of a self-determination norm. This put it at odds with its ally Russia in the case of Kosovo, and the fact that it has not recognised Kosovo looks like a blatant failure to articulate agency. However, it then refused to recognise the two Georgian breakaway republics despite pressure from Russia and, possibly, also domestic interest groups motivated by the Nagorno-Karabakh claim.[55] An opposition newspaper described the position Armenia found itself in after Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia: '[Armenia] cannot welcome the decision of Russia, because it will mean spoiling relations with Georgia. [Yet…] Armenia cannot criticise the decision of the Kremlin and[,] in addition, it will be hard for Armenia not to welcome the recognition of these two unrecognised states as [Nagorno-Karabakh] is on the same level with South Ossetia and Abkhazia.'[56]

President Serzh Sargsyan later justified his state's position by saying that it was not possible to recognise other new sovereignties prior to the recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh.[57] It nonetheless reiterated its alliance loyalty by withdrawing from NATO's Cooperative Lancer/ Cooperative Longbow '09 exercises in Georgia mentioned above in respect of Kazakhstan. It therefore sought to separate out the issues, and engage in some hedging behaviour. Six years later it sided with Russia in voting against UN General Assembly resolution 68/262 on the territorial integrity of Ukraine. It may have seen this as a small act of revenge: Ukraine had irritated the Armenians by voting for a resolution on the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.[58]

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[54] Nagorno-Karabakh is called the Republic of Artsakh since a referendum in early 2017.

[55] US Embassy, Yerevan (28 August 2008), *Wikileaks cable, 08YEREVAN676_a*

[56] US Embassy, Yerevan (27 August 2008), *Wikileaks cable, 08YEREVAN674_a*

[57] Emil Danielyan (4 September 2008), 'Armenia Rules Out Abkhazia, South Ossetia Recognition' in Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty [azatutyun.am]

[58] UN General Assembly (14 March 2008), 'Vote on occupied territories of Azerbaijan A/62/L42'

Likewise, and similarly to Belarus, it also voted against the 2016 resolution that referred to Russia occupying Crimea.

In the case of Armenia, it looks like Russia's asymmetrical power prevailed. Although it did maintain a line independent of Moscow on Georgia, the sensitivities of the issue given Armenia's situation may have dissuaded Russia from pressing the issue too hard. Armenia relies on Russia's political and military support to maintain its position in the dispute with Azerbaijan, and depends on Georgian territory for both its import and export trade. A further consideration in respect of its positioning in Crimea is that, as with Kyrgyzstan, Armenia was bargaining with Moscow about its accession to the Eurasian Union. As already mentioned in Chapter 3, given the nature of its *volte face* on an Association Agreement with the EU, this is reasonably interpreted as the result of Russian pressure.

Azerbaijan's foreign policy was also motivated by Nagorno-Karabakh, though from the contrary position to Armenia. In respect of Kosovo, the US Embassy in Baku appears to have coaxed Washington away from issuing a demarche to the Azeri government. American officials were aware of the Azeris' perceived implications for its own disputed pocket of territory, which falls fully within its internationally-recognised borders.[59] President Ilham Aliyev would not countenance recognising Abkhazia or South Ossetia, again motivated by potential consequences for the local dispute; predictably he emphasised the importance of the territorial integrity norm.[60] The Crimea situation was also immediately viewed through the prism of Nagorno-Karabakh, with Aliyev saying that 'the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan is of the same value as the territorial

[59] US Embassy, Baku (4 May 2009), *Wikileaks cable 09BAKU367_a.* It is unclear why a demarche was being discussed in spring 2009, more than a year later than similar cables about US demarches. The cable, headed 'Azerbaijan: Kosovo demarche inadvisable at this time,' is plainly dated such though.

[60] US Embassy, Baku (12 September 2008), *Wikileaks cable 08BAKU865_a*

integrity of Ukraine that everyone is now talking about.'[61] He sought to use the issue as a way of attracting attention to Azerbaijan's dispute, claiming implausibly that if the international community had solved the Nagorno-Karabakh issue then it would have created an international context in which the Ukraine crisis could not arise. He said of Crimea: 'It's the same scenario, the same violation of territorial integrity, the same result, occupation, separatism. It's like a mirror.'[62] This was an effort to persuade other powers to devote attention to Nagorno-Karabakh, where no punitive measures had been applied despite several UN Security Council resolutions affirming the territory as Azeri. Whereas Russia's refusal to relinquish control over Crimea led to sanctions, Armenia has gone unpunished for its ostensible control over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Georgia unambiguously refused recognition to Kosovo. Foreign Minister David Bakradze told the Rustavi-2 television station, 'As a diplomat, I can tell you that we are not looking at the recognition of Kosovo's independence.'[63] Crimea was, unsurprisingly, viewed through the prism of its 2008 conflict. President Giorgi Margvelashvili reproached Russia for issuing passports to citizens of another sovereign territory, as Russia had also done in Abkhazia and South Ossetia previously, and spoke of Russia's 'rough intervention in domestic affairs' of Ukraine in violation of the 'fundamental documents' and 'basic principles' of international law.[64] The Georgian parliament adopted a resolution 'on the current military aggression by the Russian Federation against Ukraine and for the support to Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity.'[65] Curiously, even the president's website refers to domestic opposition criticism for the president's failure to take actions against Russia for its aggression, which shows how conscious

[61] President of Azerbaijan (7 February 2015), 'Ilham Aliyev attended "Beyond Ukraine: Unresolved Conflicts in Europe" session of the Munich Security Conference'

[62] President of Azerbaijan (7 February 2015)

[63] *Reuters* (18 February 2008), 'Georgia not planning to recognise Kosovo – minister' (no author)

[64] President of Georgia (1 March 2014), 'Special Statement of the President of Georgia on current developments in Ukraine'

[65] President of Georgia (1 March 2014)

the Georgian elite was about the limits of its agency.[66] Following the Crimean referendum Margvelashvili was 'exceedingly concerned.'[67]

Ultimately, Georgia is a smaller power that has successfully articulated agency, albeit with mixed consequences. On the one hand, given that Russia remains the hegemonic power in the Caucasus, it is noteworthy that Georgia stood up to Russia in respect of the latter's pressures on Abkhazia and South Ossetia up until the 2008 Russo-Georgia war. (Georgia withstood repeated encroachments of its airspace, and may have brought down a Russian fighter jet in September 2007.[68]) On the other hand, despite choosing to balance against Russia by striving for NATO membership after 2003, it did not follow key NATO member states in recognising Kosovo.

Moldova's own secessionist region of Transnistria largely dictated its unwillingness to recognise new sovereignties. This unwillingness was exacerbated by the Transnistrian *de facto* government buoyed by what it called 'a new model of conflict resolution.'[69] Its statement declared: 'There is no alternative but an early recognition of Transnistria as an independent state by the international community. The Kosovo model should be used in the resolution of all [*sic*] conflicts.' The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Chisinau issued its own statement, condemning 'a dangerous precedent … with no application to our region.'[70] The Moldovan-side's statement was not dissimilar to Russia's commentaries on the affair, although it began by conceding there might be something exceptional in the situation: '[H]owever unique the Kosovo problem might be, its "resolution" is not only a unilateral violation of the territorial integrity of Serbia, but a serious factor for the destabilisation of Europe and a dangerous stimulus for separatist movements in

[66] President of Georgia (3 March 2014), 'Statement by the Administration of the President of Georgia'

[67] President of Georgia (18 March 2014), 'President's conference on the developments in Crimea'

[68] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (25 August 2007), 'Tbilisi Investigating Reports of Plane Downed In Kodori'

[69] *Deutsche Presse-Agentur* (20 February 2008), 'Renegade Moldova province: "Kosovo is model for conflict resolution' (no author)

[70] *Deutsche Presse-Agentur* (20 February 2008)

other conflict zones.'[71] Its refusal was reiterated in August when Abkhazia and South Ossetia proclaimed independence, with the Moldovan government putting out a statement saying 'international recognition… would not lead to stabilising the situation.'[72] As US diplomats noted, there was an element of caution, given that Moldova needs to deal with Russia to resolve difficulties in Transnistria and would not want to ruin relations over the Caucasus.[73] A similar caution coloured Moldova's refusal to countenance Russia's annexation of Crimea, with President Nicolae Timofti promptly saying his country did not recognise the 'illegal so-called referendum.'[74]

	Kosovo	**Abkhazia/S Ossetia**	**Crimea**
Belarus	No	No	Closer to Russia
Kazakhstan	No	No	Closer to Russia
Kyrgyzstan	No	No	Yes
Tajikistan	No	No	No
Turkmenistan	No	No	Unknown
Uzbekistan	No	No	No position
Armenia	No	No	Yes
Azerbaijan	No	No	No
Georgia	No	No	No
Moldova	No	No	No

Table 6: Summary of policy positioning on recognitions. Presenting policy as a dichotomous variable masks variation brought out in the text.

[71] *Deutsche Presse-Agentur* (18 February 2008), 'Moldova calls Kosovo independence "worrying"' (no author)

[72] Reuters (29 August 2008), 'Moldova rejects recognition of Georgian regions'

[73] US Embassy, Chisinau (29 August 2008), *Wikileaks cable 08CHISINAU872_a*

[74] *Legal Monitor Worldwide* (19 March 2014), 'Moldovan president describes Russia's possible decision to annex Crimea as violation of international law'

6.2. Regime change

6.2.1. Central Asia

The overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic arguably gave some impetus to the Collective Security Treaty, although terrorism not regime security was the pressing item on several states' threat agenda. Describing the situation between the Treaty's signatories during this period, Lena Jonson writes of 'Russia's efforts to turn the treaty and its Collective Security Council into internationally recognised representative bodies and to encourage the parties to close ranks in respect of third countries, coordinate their positions and speak with one voice.'[75] As previously explained, the CST and Collective Security Council were institutionalised as the CSTO in 2002. At this stage, though, Russia's partners proved only moderately receptive to the more ambitious ideas coming from Moscow.

Kazakhstan may not have been overly interested in events in Serbia in 2000. However, the pattern of its policy positioning on regime change shows similarities to that of Belarus. It mimicked Russia's position on the colour revolutions, quickly following Russia in congratulating Yanukovych on his victory in 2004. President Nursultan Nazarbayev told Yanukovych that his victory reflected 'the people's choice of national unity.'[76] Nazarbaev had long advocated re-integration within the former Soviet Union, and events in Ukraine gave new impetus to this. Domestic policy reflected a pre-emptive approach with the National Security Law amended in mid-2005 to minimise the possibility of external interference in the electoral process; a move that surely had a particular interpretation of event in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan in mind.[77]

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[75] Lena Jonson (2004), *Vladimir Putin and Central Asia: The Shaping of Russian Foreign Policy* (London), p.69

[76] BBC Monitoring (25 November 2004), 'Central Asian presidents congratulate Ukrainian PM on election'

[77] Cark Gershman and Michael Allen (2006), 'The Assault on Democracy Assistance' in *Journal of Democracy, 17:2*, p.43

Interestingly, rhetorical support for Russia occurred despite the fact that Kazakhstan had been seeking financial support from Western partners for military modernisation, especially American finance and technical guidance for rebuilding its naval presence in the Caspian Sea.[78]

This could be well explained by neorealism. In early 2005, a Western analyst of Central Asia thought that '[t]he uncertain political situation in Ukraine… has raised fears among the governing elites in Central Asia considering pursuing close relations with the United States.'[79] In Kazakhstan, during the final days of 2004, the authorities moved to close down the oppositional Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan party, and brought a court case against the US-backed Soros Foundation office in Kazakhstan.[80] Members of the Kazakh opposition had sent a delegation to Kyiv to observe the run-off vote on 21 November, and returned to the republic heartened by the Ukrainian opposition's methods. Marzhan Aspandiyarova, one of Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan's leaders, praised the opposition for its refusal to be cowed by governmental pressure.[81] In a speech at the beginning of December Nazarbayev stressed the importance of political stability; a reference most commentators interpreted as inspired by events in Ukraine, but also perhaps a response to nascent opposition enthusiasm.[82]

There is evidence of some differentiation inside Kazakhstan. In line with my findings about Belarus, I would argue that this facilitated modification of state foreign policy positioning. The Director of the Kazakh Institute for Socio-Economic Analysis and Forecasting argued that Russia's overt interference and support for Viktor Yanukovych disclosed its geopolitical ambitions, which could be a reason for Russia's allies to take a position contrary to Moscow.[83] In fact, this

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[78] Roger McDermott (2 December 2004), 'Russia's Security Influence in Central Asia Increases as Ukraine Crisis Unfolds' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 1:138*

[79] Roger McDermott (2 December 2004)

[80] Marat Yermukanov (11 January 2005), 'Astana Works to Stave Off Ukraine's Advancing Orange Tide' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor 2:7*

[81] Marat Yermukanov (2 December 2004), 'Kazakhstan's Opposition Taking Notes on Yushchenko's Strategy' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor 1:138*

[82] Xinhua News Agency (7 December 2004), 'Kazakh president stresses stability in political reforms'

[83] Marat Yermukanov (2 December 2004)

presents no problem for the neorealist argument, since the notion of bandwagoning with a threat recognises that there *is* a threat to be appeased. As cited in Section 5.3, Gleb Pavlovsky, working as a consultant to the Kremlin during this period, made designs of Russian intervention fairly overt. Russia's foreign policy goal, he said, strived to restore great power status, and he indicated that subversive methods could be employed.

In addition, although Kazakhstan's official rhetoric was supportive of Russia, there is some evidence to suggest that there were divisions inside the military. The Deputy Defence Minister, Bolat Sembinov, seemed keen to continue cooperation with NATO officials, whereas the head of the military's Directorate for International Cooperation was firmly committed to tightening ties to Russia.[84] These individual positions appeared to persist in spite of the Orange Revolution. A small number of Kazakh peacekeeping forces had been deployed to Iraq in 2003 and were kept in the Middle East despite rumours of Astana's intention to withdraw them in late 2004.[85] A report produced for the NATO parliamentary assembly in 2005 concluded that Kazakhstan's domestic and international response to the Kyrgyz revolution and the Andijan revolt in Uzbekistan were 'ambiguous.'[86] As already mentioned, the parliament adopted changes to its electoral laws in mid-2005, which shows that there was some nervousness about regime security in keeping with omnibalancing theory. Under the amended law, protests ahead of an announcement about the outcome of a vote were criminalised, although an observer outside the country asserts that this was brought about by Ukrainian, and not Kyrgyz, events.[87] As evidence, the observer cites the pro-government *Liter* newspaper: 'The Kyrgyz pot is boiling, but it produces nothing more than a bubble' – which, the analyst explains, means it has no chance of success.

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[84] Roger McDermott (27 January 2005), 'Kazakhstan Inches Towards NATO' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 2:19*

[85] NATO Parliamentary Assembly (21 October 2005), 'NATO and Kazakhstan: General Report 165 CDS 05 E Rev 1,' p.18

[86] NATO Parliamentary Assembly (21 October 2005)

[87] Marat Yermukanov (16 March 2005), 'Kazakhstan Amends Electoral Law' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 2:52*

Kazakhstan's positioning on the second Kyrgyz regime change fell into line with Russia's expectations. Following the toppling of Kurmanbek Bakiyev, the ousted Kyrgyz leader initially fled to Kazakhstan before seeking refuge in Belarus. However, unlike Belarus, Kazakhstan did not continue to refer to Bakiyev as the legitimate president.[88] Like Russian officials, Nazarbayev referred to him by name and without a title, and spoke of the temporary government in his remarks on the matter. Unlike their Belarusian counterparts, there is nothing to suggest Kazakh officials saw Russia's hand behind events.

There is some tentative evidence that could suggest hedging behaviour. Astana's nervousness about a new wave of regime changes arguably explained its proposals during 2011 for a constitutional referendum, and its subsequent rejection of those proposals may indicate unwillingness to jeopardise relations with Western states. The referendum would have extended Nazarbayev's rule until 2020 without any pretence of an election around which opposition forces could rally; although the proposal would not quite have made Nazarbayev 'President for Life,' it would have taken him to his eightieth birthday. Although the idea of holding a referendum was rejected by the Constitutional Council, Nazarbayev pre-empted anti-regime mobilisation by bringing the election forward by a whole year to April 2011.[89] There was, according to Vladimir Socor of the Jamestown Foundation, 'unprecedented debate' about the referendum issue among Kazakh elites, and certainly there was some toing and froing about whether it would be held.[90] The decision not to proceed with the referendum coincided with issuing proposals to the EU

[88] President of the Republic of Kazakhstan (16 April 2010), 'Glava gosudarstva Nursultan Nazarbaev provel brifing, posvyshchennii voprosam uregulirovaniya situatsii v Kyrgyzstane' [The Head of State Nursultan Nazarbayev gave a briefing devoted to questions about the regulation of the situation in Kyrgyzstan]

[89] *BBC* (4 February 2011), 'Kazakhstan's Nursultan Nazarbayev Calls Early Election'; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (31 January 2011), 'Kazakh Constitutional Council Rejects Referendum to Extend Nazarbayev's Rule' (Perhaps the suggestion that the CC rejected the President's call is a little naïve; the BBC report cites the President himself saying that *he* decided to cancel the referendum, which is consistent with most analysts' understanding of how Kazakh decision-making works.

[90] Vladimir Socor (27 January 2011), 'Kazakhstan's Constitutional Referendum: Western Questions, Kazakh Answers (Part One)' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 8:19*; Vladimir Socor (28 January 2011), 'Kazakhstan's Constitutional Referendum: Western Questions, Kazakh Answers (Part Two)' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 8:20*

about increased energy cooperation.[91] Likely EU criticism may not have been welcomed as Kazakhstan sought to develop relations, and it is difficult to conceive of other reasons for the 'unprecedented debate.'

As with Belarus, Kazakhstan was less critical than Russia of the regime change in Ukraine during 2014. Unlike Russia, which only sent its local ambassador, a senior Kazakh official, Prime Minister Karim Masimov, attended Petro Poroshenko's inauguration. There did then seem to be some adaptation of policy in response to the latest regime change, which is explicable in terms of differentiated opinions about unfolding events (and Russia's position) inside Kazakhstan. With a fifth of the population ethnically Russian, there was plenty of support for Russia's policy on Ukraine.[92] At the same time, with its own northern regions populated by ethnic Russians, the government could not support separatist voices in eastern Ukraine or Russia's calls for those regions to have autonomy. Denying the legitimacy of Poroshenko's government would have been interpreted as support for these groups. The Kazakh government also responded to its domestic situation and offered financial incentives to citizens in the south of the country, typically ethnically Kazakh, to relocate to the north.[93]

Kyrgyzstan had its own parliamentary elections imminent at the time of the Orange Revolution; the unfolding of which I have discussed in Chapter 5. According to an analyst of the region, the government of Askar Akayev was 'tirelessly proclaiming the threat of a *coup d'etat* … imported from outside by a "clandestine international".'[94] This immediately presents a case for omnibalancing. However, there were structural imperatives to heed Russia's policy expectations

[91] Vladimir Socor (1 February 2011), 'Kazakhstan's Presidential Referendum Scrapped, Pre-Term Election Initiated After Constitutional Verdict' in *Eurasia Daily Monitory, 8:22*

[92] Olzhas Auyezov (3 March 2016), 'After Ukraine, Kazakhstan wary of ethnic Russians broaching autonomy' for *Reuters*

[93] Olzhas Auyezov (3 March 2016)

[94] Stephen Blank (19 January 2005), 'Kyrgyzstan Teeters on Verge of a Nervous Brekdown' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 2:13*

that I argue prevailed. These can be seen in another policy choice from the period. When the United States approached Kyrgyzstan about the possibility of deploying NATO surveillance aircraft (AWACS) on its territory, CSTO consultations took place and Kyrgyzstan was apparently persuaded that the prospect of NATO surveillance aircraft being stationed on its soil must be refused.[95] Instead, it was agreed that Russia would double its numbers of personnel deployed at the Kant air force base.[96] While Kyrgyzstan's positioning conforms to the predictions of neorealism, it is apparent that regime security concerns were a secondary motivation for its alignment. However, the fact that it bowed to Russia's wishes in respect of troop deployments suggests a lack of agency and that the 'transmission belt' of neoclassical realism adds little explanatory power. I showed in the previous section how Kyrgyzstan supported Russia's position on Ukraine in 2014, although its position on the regime change was ambiguous. On the one hand, Kyrgyzstan did not send a representative to Poroshenko's inauguration. On the other hand, its president did reject the continued legitimacy of Yanukovych, remarking similarly to Lukashenka that fleeing Ukraine meant forfeiting rule.[97] If the idiom about actions speaking louder than words holds true, then the former is the more significant.

Tajikistan too had elections imminent at the time of the colour revolutions; namely its 2005 parliamentary elections, which were held on the same day as Kyrgyzstan's divisive election. Tajikistan's elections were uneventful, but there followed restrictions on media and NGOs; these were less marked than in neighbouring states and have been described as 'soft authoritarianism.'[98] President Emomali Rahmon subsequently expressed the view that the United

[95] Roger McDermott (17 February 2005), 'Security in Central Asia Moves Closer to Moscow's Orbit' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor 2:34*

[96] Roger McDermott (17 February 2005)

[97] Alexey Malashenko (19 April 2014), 'Kyrgyzstan: Where Change Confirms Continuity' for *Carnegie Russia*

[98] Lawrence P. Markowitz (2012), 'Tajikistan: authoritarian reaction in a postwar state' in *Democratization, 19:1,* pp.98-119

States' hands were behind recent events in the region and official Tajik newspapers reported that the US Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan had plotted Akayev's overthrow.[99] There was then a domestic response to the regime changes in the region, and suspicion about the role of external actors in those regime changes. Moreover, Tajikistan took measures to bolster its ties to Russia, and Rahmon used a parliamentary speech to praise Russia's role in the region.[100] Although regime security concerns were present, this looks like a clear-cut case that could be sufficiently predicted by neorealism. With a legacy of civil war, and the jostling of clans for power, domestic concerns may dominate policy, though as with Kyrgyzstan there seems to be too little power in Tajikistan to articulate any meaningful agency in international relations. I note, however, that another scholar has argued Tajikistan uses relations with Iran as part of an omnibalancing strategy in response to threats.[101] I also note that Rahmon did congratulate Poroshenko on his formal election to the presidency in June 2014.[102]

Turkmenistan resisted any EU agreement on partnership, though it had signed up to NATO's Partnership for Peace in March 2004. In respect of both the Rose and Orange revolutions, the official line from Ashgabat was that they were of no concern to Turkmenistan, which had already experienced its own top-down(!) colour revolution.[103] According to this rather idiosyncratic line of thinking, President Saparmurat Niyazov had realised all the ideals of the colour revolutions in Turkmenistan. An officially accredited author insisted that there was no ideological conflict between Ukraine and Turkmenistan because the states' leaders understand

[99] Robert Kevlihan and Amri Sherzamonov (2010), 'Tajikistan' in Donnacha Ó Beacháin and Abel Polese (eds.), *The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics: Successes and Failures* (Abingdon), p.188

[100] Kevlihan and Sherzamonov (2010), p.187

[101] Kirill Nourzhanov (2012), 'Omnibalancing in Tajikistan's Foreign Policy: Security-Drive Discourses of Alignment with Iran' in *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies, 14:3,* pp.363-381

[102] President of Tajikistan (2 June 2016), 'Congratulatory telegram to President-elect of Ukraine Pyotr Poroshenko'

[103] Donnacha Ó Beacháin and Abel Polese (eds.) (2010), *The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics: Successes and Failures* (Abingdon), p.225

the 'external geopolitical realities of their countries.'[104] Friendship was therefore nothing to do with the internal structure of the states concerned, and, importantly, colour revolutions were of limited geopolitical threat.

Regime security concerns do seem to be present, although the policy response was domestic. In 2006, during a televised meeting between Niyazov and law-enforcement officials, the Minister for National Security alleged that there was a conspiracy involving all opposition movements both inside and outside the country. A French TV employee, Annakurban Amanklychev, was said to have received 'training in Ukraine in intelligence gathering and sabotage … and also in the methods used in Ukraine's Orange Revolution.'[105] The government took further prophylactic measures. On 14 January 2005, well in advance of parliamentary elections, Niyazov warned that candidates receiving foreign finance would be barred from standing, and several opposition leaders were imprisoned.[106] In December 2004, the Democratic Party leader, Mahmadruzi Iskandrov, was arrested in Moscow under threat of extradition for trial.[107] Generally, though, there is insufficient evidence of a foreign policy response, such as external alignment, to speak of omnibalancing in this case. Turkmenistan remained committed to its supposed 'permanent neutrality.'

The situation in the neighbouring states of Afghanistan and Iran is likely to be watched closely, although I cannot find any public statement even about the regime change in Afghanistan in 2001. Turkmenistan signed various agreements about construction of a gas pipeline with Afghan interim president, Hamid Karzai, soon after his appointment, and so there were no doubts about his legitimacy.[108] Islamic fundamentalist concerns may exist about the Taliban. I did not

[104] Ó Beacháin and Polese (eds.) (2010), p.225
[105] Ó Beacháin and Polese (eds.) (2010), p.226-7
[106] Kevlihan and Sherzamonov (2010), p.186
[107] Kevlihan and Sherzamonov (2010), p.185
[108] *Dawn* (30 May 2000), 'Niyazov and Karzai arrive' (no author). Dawn is an English-language newspaper published in Pakistan.

include Afghanistan's regime change in my analysis, however, since it little affected several of the states studied.

Uzbekistan long criticised Russia's policy in the CIS region. In 2000, President Islam Karimov accused Russian officials of exaggerating the terrorist threat in Central Asia for the purpose of reasserting Russian hegemony over former Soviet republics.[109] Karimov claimed that Russia's security services employed 'active measures' to breed insecurity and panic. In the years after 9/11, Uzbekistan cooperated with the United States fairly closely in the war on terror. Although it would be an exaggeration to say that Uzbekistan was allied to the United States, it was during this period no ally of Russia, preferring to balance against its erstwhile overlord. A reasonable neorealist expectation therefore is that Uzbekistan, using its relationship to balance the threat from Russia, would support US views on the colour revolutions.

When it came to Ukraine's Orange Revolution, Karimov indeed initially portrayed events as a matter of Ukraine's domestic politics. He went further, suggesting that Russia's foreign policy was 'one of the reasons' for the revolution.[110] His emphasis though echoed US and Western opinion that events stemmed from domestic political affairs: 'I think that – in addition to these instances of [external] interference which are of secondary importance – the main reason is people's discontent. … The second reason is mistakes committed by Leonid Kuchma.'[111] Karimov expressed a similar view in an interview with a Russian newspaper several weeks later: 'Neither America nor Europe is in a position to control events if the population of the country itself

[109] Jamestown Foundation (26 September 2000), 'Karimov lashes out at Moscow's policy in Central Asia' (no author) in *Monitor 6:178*

[110] Igor Torbakov (13 December 2004), 'Russian analysts ponder orange revolution's implications for Kremlin dominance in the CIS' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 1:145*

[111] Roger McDermott (9 December 2004), 'Karimov plays security card in advance of parliamentary elections' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 1:143*

[Ukraine] has not exhausted its patience [*sic*] and is thirsting for change.'[112] By this time, however, the Kyrgyz elections were looming and Karimov remarked that the Kyrgyz opposition acknowledged that they were partly funded by Western organisations.[113] I will return to the change in Karimov's rhetoric below, because it does change significantly (the Andijan events of May 2005 will be touched on below), but for the moment I observe that Uzbekistan's initial, official response to Ukraine appeared closer to Western positions than Russian ones.

Moreover, this system-level balancing against Russia appeared to overcome domestic pressures to stand against regime change. In Belarus, the opposition's overt support for Viktor Yushchenko troubled President Aliaksandr Lukashenka and persuaded him to condemn the colour revolutions.[114] With the arguable exception of geographical proximity, there is no obvious reason as to why this would not equally apply in authoritarian Uzbekistan, whose leaders had their own opposition to deal with. The nationalist opposition movement in Uzbekistan, Birlik, was arguably gaining strength as a result of improved US-Uzbekistan ties. Whereas Birlik had not been able to hold political meetings in Uzbekistan for much of the 1990s, in 2003 it held its congress in Tashkent for the first time in a decade, and slackened repression emboldened the party to challenge the authorities through the Uzbek judicial system during 2004.[115] The renewed presence of Birlik combined with the fact that Uzbekistan's parliamentary election was scheduled for the end of December 2004.

However, as the 2005 events in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan unfolded there were signs of rapprochement between the governments in Tashkent and Moscow. Joint military exercises arranged by the two sides practiced operations against terrorists and, significantly, insurgents.[116]

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[112] Gregory Gleason (19 January 2005), 'Karimov Vows to Head Off Colour Revolution in Uzbekistan,' *Eurasian Daily Monitor 2:13*

[113] Gregory Gleason (19 January 2005)

[114] David Marples (8 December 2004), 'Belarus: The return of Sheiman' in *Eurasian Daily Monitor, 1:142*

[115] *Harakat* (25 May 2010) 'About "Birlik" Party of Uzbekistan and its Struggle for Official Registration'

[116] Roger McDermott (24 February 2005), 'Uzbekistan to Hold Military Exercises with Russian Paratroopers' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 2:38*

The exercises raised the possibility that Karimov could call on Russian military backing during a domestic political crisis. Early signs of a domestic crisis appeared in the spring of that year, when more than 10,000 protesters took to the streets of Andijan, a town in the Ferghana Valley. The Uzbek authorities violently suppressed the protests and killed several hundred protesters.[117] Uzbekistan's decision to re-sign the Collective Security Treaty in 2006, now institutionalised as the CSTO, was arguably prompted by the domestic situation. The fact it was soon after the colour revolutions that Uzbekistan re-signed the Collective Security Treaty (coinciding with its withdrawal from the GUUAM arrangement) indicates that the 'transmission belt' of neoclassical realist explanations offers explanatory power that neorealism lacks.

Uzbek-Western relations declined fairly rapidly after Andijan. Those events led to the imposition of EU sanctions against Karimov's regime and the US military base at Kharshi-Khanabad (colloquially known as 'K2') was closed. At the same time, Uzbekistan remained part of the Northern Distribution Network used by the United States and its NATO allies to supply operations in Afghanistan. An indication that hard security and energy concerns dominated Western thinking came with the lifting of sanctions in 2008, and a visit by Karimov to Brussels in early 2011 proved contentious.[118] There was no sympathy for Western positions on the Arab Spring though. Speaking alongside Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in 2011, Karimov said that 'what is occurring in North Africa and the Middle East cannot fail to concern Russia and Uzbekistan.'[119] At the same time, after Uzbekistan had withdrawn from the CSTO in 2012 and declared in its Foreign Policy Concept that it would not join any military blocs, Karimov also had no qualms in dealing with Poroshenko, even criticising his absence at a CIS summit in October

[117] The OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) described a figure of 300-500 killed by security forces as 'realistic'. See: OSCE/ODIHR (2005), *Preliminary Findings on the Events in Andijan, Uzbekistan – 13 May 2005*, p.8

[118] Erica Marat (28 January 2011), 'Karimov's Brussles Visit Full of Controversy' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 8:20*

[119] Reuters (14 June 2011), 'Russian, Uzbek leaders concerned by Arab Spring' (no author)

2014.[120] According to Karimov, despite Ukraine's desire to withdraw from the CIS, its president's presence was necessary to afford the CIS members greater clarity, and he called on Poroshenko to meet CIS heads more frequently. This was different from Russia's position of begrudgingly meeting Poroshenko.

Uzbekistan's domestic politics are often portrayed in terms of clan rivalries. David Stevens writes of competition between the Tashkent elite, a Samarkand-Bukhara elite, a Ferghana-Andijan-Namangan group, and a final group based in or around Surkhandaryo and Qashqadaryo. In principle, the vying for position of different interest groups should create some differentiation of opinion and the flexibility to grant Uzbekistan agency. However, the regional elite groupings remain firmly delineated and defection from Karimov's position could have proven costly; certainly there is limited public record to consult. The problem with clan-groupings is that they do not really leave their mark on the public record. It is generally said that Karimov, and also his successor Shaykat Mirziyoyev, belong to the Samarkand-Bukhara clan, whereas the National Security Service (SNB) is in the control of the Tashkent clan.[121] While there is insufficient evidence to make any strong claims about consensus within the elite, I note that, according to Stevens, events in Georgia and Ukraine 'raised eyebrows,' and a visit to Tashkent by former Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze allowed for discussions about events in Tbilisi.[122]

The Uzbek elite appeared to respond to the ousting of Bakiyev similarly to their counterparts in Belarus. It is clear that political stability was a crucial factor during Uzbekistan's

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[120] Umida Hashimova (17 October 2014), 'Defending Uzbekistan's Sovereignty in Face of the Ukraine Crisis – A Net Assessment of Developments in Uzbekistan Since the Start of 2014' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 11:184*

[121] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (31 August 2006), 'Uzbekistan: Karimov Appears To Have Political Clans Firmly In Hand.' There may be some nuance missed in this neat division. N. I. Petrov considers that Karimov came to power from outside traditional clan ties, and used political appointments to consolidate his position. See: N. I. Petrov (2001), 'Political Stability in Conditions of the Command-Administrative Regime' in Alexei Vassiliev (ed.), *Central Asia: Political and Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era* (London), p.82

[122] David Stevens (2010), 'Uzbekistan' in Donnacha Ó Beacháin and Abel Polese (eds.), *The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics: Successes and Failures* (Abingdon), p.170

response to the 2010 ouster of Bakiyev. Although publicly the Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Affairs described the matter as a Kyrgyz internal matter, in private they – like their colleagues in Minsk – were viewing events as the consequences of Russian machinations to punish Bakiyev for disloyalty to Moscow.[123] It is consistent with other scholars' views to focus on the importance of political stability on the policy-making process.[124] Alisher Khamidov claims that Russia's swift recognition of the government that supplanted Bakiyev affirmed the belief Russia had involvement, although the fact that Khamidov lists his interview sources on this point as Kyrgyz and US analysts rather than Uzbek officials urges caution.[125]

I demonstrated how Lukashenka attributed the non-use of CSTO peacekeeping forces to Russia's involvement in the coup that ousted Bakiyev; Lukashenka thought Russia *did not want* to deploy troops. Karimov reportedly argued against the deployment of CSTO forces for the opposite reason; he was suspicious that Russia *wanted* to deploy a predominantly Russian force that would further destabilise the region.[126] Significantly, it is generally agreed that Uzbekistan's anxieties were that the CSTO's Rapid Reaction Force could be used by Russia for military operations in another CSTO member state against the incumbent regime, or to alter the balance power in favour of its preferred candidate during crises, whereas its original purpose was to deal with external threats.[127] This went against the wishes of many Uzbek officials who wanted to be part of a (presumably CSTO) military intervention, primarily exercised by the knowledge many ethnic Uzbeks were in Kyrgyzstan.[128] There were therefore clearly different opinions among the Uzbek elite. Uzbekistan managed to use its foreign policy positioning to repair relations with the West, which had rapidly declined after Andijan events. Jose Manuel Barroso, the European

[123] Alisher Khamidov (2015), 'What it takes to avoid a regional crisis: Understanding the Uzbek government's responses to the June 2010 violence in South Kyrgyzstan' in *Central Asian Affairs, 2:2*, p.181

[124] Leila Kazemi (2003), 'Domestic sources of Uzbekistan's foreign policy' in *Journal of International Affairs, 56:2, 205-216*

[125] Khamidov (2015), p.181

[126] Khamidov (2015), p.183

[127] Roy Allison (2013), *Russia, the West and Military Intervention* (Oxford), pp.144-145

[128] Khamidov (2015), p.183

Commission president, praised Karimov's 'constructive' efforts to resolve the crisis when the Uzbek leader visited Brussels in early 2011.[129] Uzbekistan withdrew from the CSTO in 2012, dissatisfied with amendments to the CST that expanded its scope.

I argued that the motivating role of questions of legitimacy were best addressed by social constructivist theoretical ideas. In the foregoing analysis there is some suggestion of normative understanding discernible in Karimov's remarks. While he refused to attribute blame to Western actors for events in Georgia and Ukraine, he did nonetheless imply that certain domestic conditions were appropriate to maintain stability inside a country. When he said that '[f]oreign interference is only effective when the country has allowed the conditions to be created for it,'[130] he attributed blame in effect to the leaders of the affected states. The role of normative ideas about political change and legitimate leadership come to the fore during the Arab Spring risings beginning in December 2010.

6.2.2. The Caucasus and Moldova

Armenia allied itself to Russia consistently after 1991, and neorealism would expect it to have stood with Russia against the colour revolutions. This is more or less what happened. There is sufficient evidence, mind, to argue that this was motivated by domestic concerns rather than geopolitical ones. The opposition was well-positioned to mount a challenge to incumbent authorities and there was a history of protests in Armenia. In 1988 mass protests had challenged Soviet rule, and in the early 2000s the Armenian opposition was better organised than in other CIS states.[131] The domestic elections of 2003 were disputed by the opposition and, although they

[129] Kazemi, p.186

[130] Gregory Gleason (19 January 2005), 'Karimov Vows to Head Off Colour Revolution in Uzbekistan' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 2:13*

[131] Mikayel Zolyan (2010), 'Armenia' in Donnacha Ó Beacháin and Abel Polese (eds.), *The Colour Revolutions in the Former Soviet Republics: Successes and Failures* (Abingdon), pp.83-100

did not bring about regime change, they have been labelled an 'attempted colour revolution.'[132] The disputed election in Ukraine in 2004 encouraged the Armenian opposition to call for the results of the 2003 Armenian election to be reconsidered, and so it was perhaps inevitable that Robert Kocharyan's government put its weight behind Viktor Yanukovych.[133] Russia was Kocharyan's bulwark against challenge, and so domestic concerns rather than international pressures best explain the Armenian government's policy positioning on the colour revolutions. This was despite the fact Western actors showed little interest involving themselves in Armenia's domestic politics. Although the outcomes were consistent with the neorealist predictions, Armenia's policy – like that of Belarus – appears to fit best with omnibalancing theory.

Azerbaijan had sought to balance against Russia in the early 2000s and, accordingly, neorealists might have expected it to fall into line with the position of Western states on regime changes. This was only weakly the case though, and in the later stages of the Arab Spring especially the rhetoric was highly critical of Western actors. The increasingly cynical rhetoric about regime change can be explained by reference to regime security concerns, and the discourse surrounding the succession from Heydar Aliyev to Ilham Aliyev in 2004 revealed the centrality of such concerns. In fact, following the elder Aliyev's death, both Russia and the United States had expressed a clear preference for a 'dynastic' succession, although suspicions in Baku about how free its hand would be led to its foreign policy tilting temporarily towards Russia.[134] An opposition newspaper reported that the 'ruling clan in Azerbaijan wants Russia to support falsification of the election outcome and render support to Ilham Aliyev in the tense situation that

[132] Zolyan (2010), *passim*

[133] David Petrosyan (10 December 2004), 'Sobitie nedeli. Na ocheredi – Armeniya?' [Events of the week. Is Armenia next in line?] in *Moskovskie novosti.* In November 2003 Armenia's Constitutional Court had rejected the opposition's appeals for a re-run, but had suggested to both president and parliament that a referendum should be held as a vote of confidence in the acting head of state; the opposition demanded the government provide the referendum.

[134] Igor Torbakov (14 October 2003), 'The Geopolitical Stakes are High As Azerbaijan Holds Presidential Election' for *Eurasianet.org*

will arise in the aftermath of the October 15 election.'[135] While the United States was equally supportive of the younger Aliyev, there were no indications it would support a falsified election. The Azeri ruling clan therefore feared that the United States could withdraw its support if a viable alternative presented itself at the ballot box, and arguably interpreted this as being what had happened to Milosevic.[136] In line with omnibalancing theory, Russia was the external actor that was deemed the one most likely to do what was necessary to keep the incumbent regime in power.

With the succession completed, Azerbaijan's leadership does not initially appear to have feared becoming a victim of a colour revolution. Azerbaijan's president kept distance from the government in Moscow and continued to strengthen engagement with Washington. A leaked US diplomatic cable records Aliyev expressing concern that Russia was using US democracy promotion to increase its influence across Eurasia.[137] This could be interpreted as a petition to the United States to involve itself less, but was in any event a far cry from officials in other states levelling accusations of interference at the US. This does not mean that there were not internal threats, since under Aliyev senior's rule a Yeraz elite resented marginalisation to Nakhichevians, who may have seen an opportunity for redress.[138] Nor does it mean the younger Aliyev would echo Western actors' support the regime changes, and Azeri diplomats were instructed to condemn the revolutions.[139] At the same time, in the wake of the Orange Revolution, Western officials expressed their confidence in Aliyev's domestic and foreign policy goals.[140] Thus, when Azerbaijan held parliamentary elections in 2005, the first vote after the colour revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, there were clear signals of support for Aliyev from Western

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[135] Torbakov (14 October 2003)

[136] Torbakov (14 October 2003)

[137] US Embassy, Baku (15 January 2008), *Wikileaks cable 08BAKU38_a*

[138] Scott Radnitz (2012), 'Oil in the family: managing presidential succession in Azerbaijan' in Evgeny Finkel and Yitzhak M. Brudy (eds.), *Coloured Revolutions and Authoritarian Reactions* (Abingdon), p.66

[139] Radnitz (2012), p.68

[140] Vladimir Socor (1 November 2005), 'Rose, Orange Revolutions' Protagonists Against "Color Revolution" in Azerbaijan' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 2:203*

actors.[141] It seems reasonable to conclude that oil and gas interests motivated Western interest in stability, although the failure of local oligarchs to offer any support to the opposition also stymied domestic ambitions for regime change.

The Azeri President offered an interpretation of the first Arab Spring revolution during a ceremony to open a cultural forum in Baku. 'I think the reason for the revolution [in Tunisia] was more to do with issues of social justice than jobs. I think young people wanted to have a bigger share in the national wealth. There was a revolution because they could not get this share.'[142] What is interesting here is that there is no suggestion of any connection to international factors. It is hard to imagine Russian officials describing the Tunisian revolution in these terms. However, a couple of years later – with the situation in Ukraine ongoing – he employed a very different rhetoric. Saying that it was clear 'foreign intervention' plays a role, he continued:

> *'[T]he dirty scenarios being put into practice in the Middle East today were also prepared for Azerbaijan. In 2011 and 2012, some foreign circles talked about an "Arab Spring" in Azerbaijan and the inevitability of it. They bent over backwards to aggravate the situation and disrupt stability here. […] They attempted to create a Maydan movement in Azerbaijan. A lot of money was spent to deteriorate the situation in Azerbaijan. Tens of millions of dollars that were supposed to reach Azerbaijan illegally by means of the "fifth column," under the cover of non-governmental organizations[…] Since the beginning of 2013, these processes became even more serious. […] I am saying this openly. This is how I see it.'*[143]

Overall Azerbaijan gives quite strong confirmation to the Belarusian findings. Unlike Belarus, Azerbaijan was not aligned to Russia, and yet its actions contradict the conventional neorealist prediction. While it might be a stretch to call Western states and Azerbaijan 'allies,' Azerbaijan was strengthening cooperation with these states as a mechanism for balancing against Russia's influence. In general, Azerbaijan's foreign policy looks like a solid case of hedging, since

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[141] Socor (1 December 2005)

[142] President of Azerbaijan (29 June 2012), 'Ilham Aliyev attended the official opening ceremony of the Crans Montana forum'

[143] President of Azerbaijan (8 September 2015), 'Ilham Aliyev chaired a meeting on economic issues and preparation of the state budget for 2016'

Azerbaijan did not support its balancing coalition in backing the regime changes. Relations to the EU were primarily economic in nature, with Azerbaijan and the EU signing a significant agreement about developing a new Southern gas corridor to Europe during the Arab Spring.[144] In respect of regime security, it bandwagoned with Russia, and its position can be explained with reference to domestic concerns. Like Belarus, omnibalancing looks like a sound explanation for the government's policy positioning: Russia was deemed most likely to support the incumbent regime.

It is also clear that the violation of norms by a 'friendly' state, in this case the United States, provoked criticism. For example, the younger Aliyev questioned President George W. Bush's reference to Kyrgyzstan's 2005 regime change as 'a democratic revolution,' given that in his view the Bakiyev government was anything but democratic.[145] In the 2015 speech quoted from above, Aliyev also argued for the illegitimacy of foreign interference. In his words, 'the point is that everything is decided by the Azerbaijani people, not on the incitement of foreign circles.'[146] That is: the political regime is legitimate. In contrast, he continued, '[L]ook at what is happening in Ukraine, in the Middle East, in Syria, in Iraq, in Libya and other countries. The territorial integrity of these countries has practically been violated. These countries are uncontrollable.'[147] Whether he really means 'uncontrollable' here or 'not controlled' is a moot point, but it is a plain call for maintaining the status quo. Maintaining this rhetoric granted Azerbaijan some flexibility to position itself differently from external actors.

Georgia was an integral part of the colour revolutions, and its support for regime changes in Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan was unsurprising. It was also intimately connected to events leading

[144] Vladimir Socor (19 January 2011), 'Azerbaijan Signs Up Officially to EU's Southern Gas Corridor' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 8:13*

[145] US Embassy, Baku (15 January 2008)

[146] President of Azerbaijan (8 September 2015)

[147] President of Azerbaijan (8 September 2015)

up to the 2014 regime change in Ukraine, since Georgia signed an Association Agreement at the 2013 Vilnius summit of the Eastern Partnership. Speaking after the summit, President Giorgi Margvelashvili commented: 'Georgia is historically part of Europe. […] I hope in the near future we will really become part of this family. Not only culturally, but also politically.'[148] As expected by the neorealist discussion, he fully backed 'European leaders' when violence was used against protestors.[149] In his State of the Nation address, on 21 February, he criticised the Yanukovych government and saw European leaders' engagement as an opportunity, whereas Russia was not mentioned in the context of Ukraine.[150] Thus everything affirmed Georgia's political alignment and aspirations towards NATO membership. With the fall of Yanukovych, Margvelashvili met with Ukraine's post-Yanukovych foreign minister, Andrey Deshchytsia, and spoke of signing agreements with him, so it is clear that Georgia recognised the legitimacy of the interim government.[151] He subsequently attended the inauguration ceremony of Petro Poroshenko, and there is nothing to indicate doubts about the legitimacy of the new regime. And there is nothing in this case to indicate deficiencies in neorealism's explanatory power.

Moldova also sought some form of balancing against a Russian threat, which is explicable given the presence of Russian troops in the separatist Transnistria. Moldova signed an Individual Partnership Action Plan with NATO in 2006, and there is some evidence of it supporting Western interpretations of events during the colour revolutions. A pro-government newspaper, criticising Russia's premature recognition of a Yanukovych victory, opined that Putin and Yanukovych were allies against the West, which included in their understanding Moldova.[152] In contrast, a Tiraspol

[148] President of Georgia (29 November 2013), 'Euronews speaks to Georgia President following Association Agreement with the EU'

[149] President of Georgia (19 February 2014), 'Special statement of the President of Georgia regarding the recent developments in Ukraine'

[150] President of Georgia (21 February 2014), 'The State of the Nation Address'

[151] President of Georgia (25 April 2014), 'Giorgi Margvelashvili meets with Andrii Deshchytsia'

[152] Vladimir Socor (29 November 2004), 'Moldova: The Kremlin's Next Target After Ukraine?' in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, 1:135*

newspaper optimistically raised the prospect that Russia would turn next to resolve Moldova's internal political problems.[153] Moldova's position in respect of the later revolution in Ukraine is determined first and foremost by Russia's annexation of Crimea, and its recognition of the legitimacy of post-Yanukovych governments is predictable. President Timofti congratulated Petro Poroshenko, and emphasised that his election win attested to his 'political authority.'[154] He also attended Petro Poroshenko's inauguration.[155] Unlike Belarus, the case of Moldova can therefore be explained by the conventional neorealist account.

6.3. Summing up

The preceding discussion sought to generalise the findings from Chapters 4 and 5. In the case of sovereignty recognition, where Russia routinely sought support for its position, I showed that even its closest allies maintained nominally independent policy positions. The allied smaller powers risked providing 'political cover' for Russia or other states to undertake similar and undesirable actions in the future if they yielded to pressure, and this contradicted their national interest in maintaining the status quo. They have acted variously in respect of Russia's annexation of Crimea, as their UN voting record (Table 7) shows. The benefits of having agency on the issue of sovereignty recognition are significant. It signals autonomy to other states. This is beneficial both to the smaller power and the external states. If it were not beneficial to the latter, then the issue would not interest outside diplomats, whereas it is clear that outside states do seek to influence smaller powers on such questions. Moreover, it is beneficial to the smaller powers themselves since their agency restrains the regional power's ability to reshape the region at will. This agency therefore contributes to the maintenance of the status quo and the smaller power's survival.

[153] Socor (29 November 2004)

[154] Presidency of the Republic of Moldova (26 May 2014), 'Moldovan president conveys congratulatory message to Ukrainian president-elect'

[155] Presidency of the Republic of Moldova (7 June 2014), 'Moldovan president attends investiture ceremony of newly-elected Ukrainian president'

Being recognised as an independent actor affords the smaller power rights and responsibilities it might not otherwise possess. It would instead risk lapsing to the status of a non-self-governing territory, as for example Greenland or Puerto Rico once were designated, and neither of which to this day is a full member of the United Nations despite, in the case of Greenland, enhanced autonomy. In respect of Crimea, both Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan backed Russia, which might be taken as evidence that structural pressures constrained smaller powers. However, Belarus's different position suggests otherwise. I argued that what was absent in the case of Kazakhstan was internal differentiation.

	27 March 2014 vote: *Territorial integrity of Ukraine*	19 December 2016 vote: *Human rights in Crimea*
Armenia	Against	Against
Azerbaijan	For	Not present
Belarus	Against	Against
Georgia	For	For
Kazakhstan	Abstain	Against
Kyrgyzstan	Not present	Abstain
Moldova	For	For
Russia	Against	Against
Tajikistan	Not present	Abstain
Turkmenistan	Not present	Not present
Uzbekistan	Against	Against

Table 7: UN General Assembly voting record. The 2016 vote describes Russia as an 'occupying power.' (Source: United Nations Bibliographic Information System)

In respect of regime change, the findings are mixed. Domestic regime security concerns were apparent in many of the states discussed, although in the cases of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan the domestic 'transmission belt' does not appear to be a necessary variable. Turkmenistan's response appears limited to domestic policy. Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, the latter of which underwent some reorientation during the period of the various regime changes, give stronger support for the neoclassical realist reading of international relations. Uzbekistan is also the most powerful of the smaller powers evaluated, and so it is unsurprising from a realist perspective that it might be most likely to successfully articulate agency. In contrast, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were the least powerful systemic units under consideration.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

My research set out to explore the following question: *in which situations do smaller powers wield agency?* I argued that agency emerges from the subjectivity of a smaller power, and sought to show how smaller powers in the post-Soviet space articulated agency in respect of two broad normative issue areas: sovereignty recognition and the legitimacy of regime change in other states. Achieving intended foreign policy outcomes was taken as a proxy for smaller power agency. Thus, I analysed the foreign policies of the smaller powers in the post-Soviet space in respect of these two broad issue areas. First, through a detailed case study of Belarus, and secondly through auxiliary studies of other smaller powers.

Noting deficiencies in broad realist and liberal readings of international relations, I used a three-pronged analytical framework, encompassing theoretical ideas from neorealism, neoclassical realism, and social constructivism. A series of expectations derived from each of these three schools of scholarship was outlined in Chapter 2. I bracketed individual-level explanations, although I will revive the possibility that leaders determine outcomes in this conclusion. In respect of Belarus, one unavoidable fact is that Aliaksandr Lukashenka's near-total grip on power means he is, at the very least, a lone 'veto player'; he can halt any foreign policy initiative even at a very late stage. Leaders of smaller powers can deploy such a 'veto' with good effect. A good illustration of this is the case of Kyrgyzstan during 2009-2010. As I described in Chapter 5, Kyrgyzstan and Russia bargained over the closure of the Manas air base, situated near Bishkek and used by the US Air Force since 2001. The Kyrgyz negotiators promised Russia that they would close the base as one of the conditions for an emergency loan, only for Kurmanbek Bakiyev to 'veto' the policy soon after Russia had paid the first instalment of the loan. Instead, Bakiyev negotiated a higher rent with the United States, and renamed the facility 'Manas Transit

Centre' as a sop to Russia's demands for closure.[1] As I reiterate below, Belarus was similarly able to engage Russia and renege on its commitments once it derived benefits.

I also left aside explanations based on inter-dependence and a bottom-up reading of international relations based on interest group contestation. These were problematic for my explication of what being an agent in world politics is because such explanations fail to apprehend the manner through which the international system inflects positioned-practice actors. Nonetheless, by exploring the domestic differentiation of views, I have incidentally presented evidence of factional contestation in the Belarus case. Earlier I cited an influential rendition of liberal IR, according to which: 'states represent some subset of domestic society, on the basis of whose interests state officials define state preferences and act purposefully in world politics.'[2] A more explicitly liberal reading of international relations would therefore seek to explain agency from this basis and downplay the contribution of structural forces.

While it is undoubtedly a gross simplification to divide an elite into discrete factions, there is a discernible division among the elites in Belarus. This came out more clearly in interviews and background discussions than it will have done in the foregoing analysis. Those working in the security services (the *siloviki*) define the foreign policy agenda by prioritising security and autonomy, whereas there is a faction, presently centred around the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and including parts of the elite tasked on economic matters, that prioritises foreign policy diversification and wealth generation.[3] Neither of these groups is particularly 'pro-Western,' at least not openly, but since even the bulk of the opposition also prioritise ties to Russia this is unsurprising. It is also significant, since it suggests that Belarus's agency, in so far as

[1] Alexander Cooley (2012), *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia* (Oxford), pp.123-129

[2] Andrew Moravcsik (1997), 'Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics' in *International Organization, 51:4,* p.518

[3] Interviews, Minsk, 2016

it involves developing ties to the EU, is an intentional decision and not the product of habitual action.

7.1. Evaluation of the three readings of international relations

7.1.1. Neorealism

The core prediction I derived from neorealism was that alignment would determine policy positioning in other areas. It also predicted that smaller powers would bandwagon with the greatest threat, which would be Russia according to Stephen Walt's four criteria of geographical proximity, aggregate power, offensive capabilities, and offensive intentions. Although several smaller powers did bandwagon with Russia, others such as Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan adopted more nuanced positions, and Georgia pluckily sought to balance against Russia after 2003. A smaller power aligned to Russia through membership of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation could be expected to be coerced to back Russia's position in issue areas deemed vital to the larger power. I argued that sovereignty recognitions and regime changes were both such issue areas because these were tools for Russia's maintenance of the regional order. As well, the regional clustering of the examined events ensured that they were salient for the smaller powers; they were events where the smaller power would want the capacity to act differently.

At first blush, there was though a tendency for smaller powers to support bloc positions both in respect of sovereignty recognitions and responses to regime change. On the one hand, those states that joined arrangements balancing against Russia, such as Georgia after 2003 and Uzbekistan in the period up to 2006, were more likely to echo the positions of NATO member states. I showed how Uzbek president Islam Karimov responded to the initial colour revolutions by referring to domestic causes. On the other hand, smaller powers aligned to Russia tended to fall into line: Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan proved more amenable to Russia's annexation

of Crimea. It is surely significant that these states were either members or candidate members of the Eurasian Economic Union. It is particularly interesting to note that events at Andijan prompted Uzbekistan's reorientation, and that this correlates with a shift in regime rhetoric. After 2005, Karimov focused on international factors in respect of regime change.

The neorealist reading misses much detail though, and fails to explain crucial cases of both smaller power positioning on sovereignty recognition and regime change. First, it cannot explain the situation surrounding the sovereignty of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Given the issue salience to Russia of the sovereignty of the two republics, it is striking that none of the smaller powers discussed in this thesis followed its formal recognition and established diplomatic relations with the two self-proclaimed 'sovereignties.' The alliance literature would suggest that this would be an opportunity for the smaller powers to assert their loyalty, and thereby reduce the risk of abandonment by the larger power. Secondly, neorealism cannot explain the reluctance of Belarus and some other smaller powers to confer legitimacy on the interim government under Rosa Otunbayeva in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, or their relative willingness to confer legitimacy on the post-Maidan government in Ukraine in 2014. These manifestations of smaller power agency are surprising and demonstrate the limits of interpreting world politics in strictly structural terms. Neorealism therefore remains a problematic reading in respect of these issue areas. Neoclassical realism and social constructivism provide two alternative paradigms for exploring the problem.

7.1.2. Neoclassical realism

Neoclassical realists, while accepting the basic determinant effects of the international system, argue that domestic variables act as a 'filter' or 'transmission belt.' This promises much in terms of explaining the anomalies that clearly present themselves for the neorealist analyst. One prediction I derived from neoclassical realist premises was that agency consists of pursuing

contradictory actions: smaller powers will typically display elements of both balancing and bandwagoning. This can be tied to the notion of 'hedging' that has been used by IR scholars. As Evelyn Goh wrote about smaller powers in South-East Asia, they pursue a dual policy of 'deep engagement' with China and 'soft balancing' against China.[4] In other words, they bandwagon and balance. I emphasised that none of the cases of 'hedging' described in the earlier literature occupy any midway position; they are militarily balancing against China in broad alliance terms (this does suggest a conceptual problem which I shall address in Section 7.4). In fact, the balancing behaviour is a survival mechanism that seeks to prevent a regional power such as China or Russia from gaining a free hand to revise the local order.

I have argued that differentiated elite opinions facilitate the articulation of agency for a smaller power. It affords a smaller power the flexibility necessary to monitor and modify its actions, and importantly it keeps external powers engaged irrespective of *their* policy position. There was clear evidence of this in respect of sovereignty recognitions. In 2008-2009, Belarus's non-recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia kept *both* Russia and the EU engaged. Although I have argued that Belarus's position on the issue of the breakaway republics was not crucial for EU relations, it nonetheless coincided with the first 'thaw' in Belarus-EU relations (on the second thaw see below). Belarus called time on improving EU ties when it felt threatened in 2010 following EU criticism of repression of electoral protests. However, Belarus had already secured the ostensible benefit of its formal participation in the EU's Eastern Partnership programme, which shows that its foreign policy had obtained an intended outcome.

The studies of other smaller powers' position on sovereignty recognitions in Chapter 6 supported this to some extent. My treatment of these cases was by necessity cursory. However, there were plenty of signs that the case population is not homogenous. In Kyrgyzstan, which

[4] Evelyn Goh (2007), 'Southeast Asian Perspectives on the China Challenge' in *The Journal of Strategic Studies, 30: 4-5*, pp.809-832

articulated less agency than other states, I did not find any significant public record of debate on the matter of recognition of any of the claims. In Tajikistan, by contrast, there was some indication of deliberation, which appears to have resulted in a 'hiding' policy. In Uzbekistan, there is evidence of reflection on the issues concerned.

A similar story could be told about smaller powers' policy responses to regime change. However, Belarus's response to regime changes studied in Chapter 5, suggested that the theory of omnibalancing was analytically more helpful. This received reasonably strong support from the ancillary studies in Chapter 6. Following the Rose and Orange revolutions, the leaders of smaller powers introduced domestic policy measures, however there was an increasing resort to international measures with time. Most obviously, the endorsement of an amendment to the CSTO in respect of its Rapid Reaction Force by member states (except Uzbekistan). In some respects this is to be expected: Steven David's argument is that the preponderance of domestic threats over external ones spurs omnibalancing.

7.1.3. Social constructivism

The social constructivist contribution comes from very different starting points. Key variables in International Relations scholarship are broken down into socially constituted ideas. Even anarchy, a mainstay of realist scholarship, is revealed as a social construct. Alexander Wendt distinguished between a Hobbesian anarchy as an articulation of enmity, a Lockean anarchy as an articulation of rivalry, and a Kantian anarchy as an articulation of friendship.[5] In the foregoing thesis I used a very light social constructivism, according to which norms were treated as independent variables constituent of regional order.

[5] Alexander Wendt (1999), *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge), pp.259-308

In explaining where smaller powers articulated agency, I argue that Russia's violation of internalised norms provoked their policy positioning. As a prospective norm-maker, Russia's actions and violation of the territorial integrity norm was fiercely resisted. The fact that none of the smaller powers recognised sovereignty claims in 2008, and that most have resisted recognition of Russia's annexation of Crimea, shows how significant maintenance of the *status quo* is for these states. The tension between self-determination and territorial integrity norms accounts for some variation, for example between Armenia and Azerbaijan which each has an interest in prioritising a different norm, although anxieties about a proliferation of secessionist claims across the post-Soviet space is an overriding concern that motivates the hedging behaviour described by neoclassical realism.

7.2. Findings

7.2.1. Belarus's agency

Belarus's agency is variable across time. So too is the subjectivity of the positioned-practice actors responsible for Belarusian foreign policy. In general, the trend during the period studied (the 2000s) has been one of increasing subjective awareness. It would be a mistake though to think that the path is a strictly linear one. A quotation from an official in the brief pre-Lukashenka era is illustrative. Although not typical of the elite at the time, the foreign minister in 1993, Piotra Krawchanka, demonstrated clear recognition of the building blocks of agency given by Guyatri Spivak (see Chapter 2): intentionality, accountability, and subjectivity. Describing Belarus's bid for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council, the foreign minister said: 'It would have tremendous meaning. I view it as a chance for a breakthrough, for entering the international community, and for a revolutionary consolidation of our position in the world. … Membership of the Security Council, even if only for two years, would mean entering the category of moguls in world politics. *Our vote and stance would influence international developments*. … We would have a chance to acquaint billions and billions of people with our new

sovereign state analysing complex political events around the world [emphasis mine].'[6] The ambition was described in very positive language, verging on bombast, but the potential for agency was all there.

Under Lukashenka there was far less awareness of Belarus as a subject in international relations. As late as 2005, after fourteen years of independence, he could say: 'There was the Soviet Union, one country, and that country had a defined place in international relations. […] you cannot share out the place of the Soviet Union in international politics and secure it for all. There were new states and in this small world, if one can so put it, all the places were occupied. For Russia, of course, it's simpler, she was the legal successor of the Union and she occupied the place of the USSR.'[7] The elision from the past to the present tense is telling. This is a leader unsure of his country's place in the world.

Foreign policy was little more than a bilateral relationship after Lukashenka came to power in 1994 and until the mid-2000s. As should be clear from the preceding chapters, Belarus consented to Russia's hegemonic role and was not compelled to question it. The smaller power understood its vulnerability and the unwillingness of the larger power to accept the smaller power's autonomy. Belarus's leaders recognise the bind they are in given the strategic importance of the territory for Russia, with Belarus serving as the largest part of the land-link to Kaliningrad, and seeking to preserve only nominal independence has been seen by much of the elite as endurable. With time, as Belarus has become more aware of the downside of Russian hegemony, it sought opportunities to wield agency and carve out a role for itself in the international system as an independent power.

[6] Foreign Broadcast Information Service (9 September 1993), 'Daily Reports, FBIS-SOV-93-173'

[7] President of Belarus (26 December 2005), 'Interv'yu prezidenta Belarusi A. Lukashenko glavnomu redaktoru Rossiiskoi gazety' [President of Belarus gives an interview to the chief editor of Rossiiskaya gazeta]

During the second term of Lukashenka's rule (2001-2006) there were significant changes in Belarus's situation. First, both the European Union and NATO enlarged up to Belarus's borders. Secondly, during Vladimir Putin's second term as president, Russia attempted to switch to a pragmatic foreign policy whereby allied states would pay market prices for energy supplies rather than the subsidised ones they had been gifted until that point. This strained the model of rent extraction Belarus had worked out for itself, although somehow Lukashenka managed to keep squeezing Russia into concessions. This was, of course, in an everyday sense a sign of Belarusian agential powers. However, I defined agency as the possibility of acting otherwise, and Belarus's dependency on Russia during this period constrained rather than enabled agency: Belarus may have been able to spike Russia's guns, but this was of little significance in respect of the regional order. The enlarged EU meant its member states had a renewed interest in engaging with Belarus, and the latter was able to reflect more substantially on its position in the international system. It was during Lukashenka's third term (2006-2010) that the EU became a significant part of Belarus's subjective understanding.

There were both positive and negative implications for Belarus's agency. Initially, with the EU expanded into central and eastern Europe, the effect was negative: it soon imposed sanctions on Belarus. This served to exaggerate dependence on Russia, depriving Belarus of the more obvious balancing opportunities. However, the launch of the Eastern Partnership signalled a reset in Belarus-EU relations and enabled the former to articulate some agency. It stood its ground on Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The fact that Russia, in principle looked upon by Belarus as a norm-maker, violated a norm Belarus thought it would abide by contributed to Belarus's articulation of agency in this case. This tendency would recur in cases where Russia's actions were deemed hypocritical by a section of Belarusian officials.

Belarus adopted policy positions independent of and different from Russia in three regional situations. First, following Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia and its recognition of the

sovereignty of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Belarus withstood pressure from Moscow. This partly reflected its desire to keep the EU engaged in Belarus, but the fact that the EU had a new policy initiative, the Eastern Partnership, really enabled Belarus to see options. Secondly, Belarus saw Russia's recognition of a new government in Kyrgyzstan in 2010 as a violation of norms of non-interference that Russia had otherwise strongly defended. I argued that Belarusian officials projected the situation in Bishkek onto themselves and therefore refused to support their Russian allies. Instead Belarus granted Bakiyev asylum. Thirdly, Belarus took a subtly different position from Russia on the situation in Ukraine after 2013. There are other instances of Belarus not following Russia: its position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is one of support for Azerbaijan, whereas Russia primarily supports Armenia. When Russia suspended its participation in the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty in 2007, Belarus remained in, as too it did when Russia formally withdrew in 2015. Without Russia the treaty is of limited meaning, and I expect many analysts would say that *de facto* it is no longer in force. However, maintaining independent positions means that a smaller power such as Belarus thinks about its own interests in a manner differentiated from Russia; this gives the smaller power scope to leverage concessions from Russia.

7.2.2. Generalisability

I found sufficient support in other cases across the post-Soviet space not to reject these findings out of hand. However, any claims of generalisability must be tentative. The deep engagement with source materials in the primary case could not be completed in respect of the auxiliary cases. I have therefore relied on a more limited range of materials, and ones which are selective in their content (I could not systematically read through press coverage of the issues, which would have given vital contextual information). The evidence is indicative but not in itself conclusive. In keeping with the interpretivist epistemology outlined in Chapter 2, I would be

prepared to revise my findings if a larger body of evidence became accessible to me. It is apparent that the case population is far more heterogenous than would be expected given the common legacy and heritage of their Soviet past, and this opens pathways for future research into smaller power agency in the region. Likewise, I have not ventured to generalise beyond the region. I see no reason why the theoretical framework and arguments might not be expanded to other locations, but I make no such claims on the basis of this research. Further research might consider the normative pull on states in South East Asia, in many cases tugged between military ties to the United States and the economic primacy of China. In respect of regime change, having argued that omnibalancing is a pertinent theory, I am conscious that the cases analysed are all relatively young states. Although Chapter 3 showed different historical experiences of statehood, most of these states were engaged in processes of state- and nation-building after 1991. While the same could be said of post-colonial states, this relative youth is a relevant consideration with regard to the generalisability of findings beyond the former Soviet Union.

7.4. Further limitations

In the case of the authoritarian smaller powers in the post-Soviet space, the role of the leader cannot be ignored. While I attribute causal effect to differentiation of elite opinions inside the Belarusian state in respect of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, I recognise two concerns with this. The first point is that the independence of public statements of lower-ranking officials is unclear. I quoted a few public officials criticising Russia's imperialism in Chapter 4. Given the sensitivity of the claim in Russia's eyes, it remains possible that such statements are given on presidential instructions. While, in the Belarusian case, Lukashenka has never seemed shy to publicly criticise Russia, he may prefer to use others to convey official messages.

The other point is that I cannot fully account for the role of presidents as 'veto players' in respect of smaller power agency. Consider the situation in Belarus during 2016-2017. Belarus-EU

relations were in a second phase of thawed relations. In early 2017, protests against an 'anti-parasitism' tax spread across Belarus and a repeat of the 2010 repression of protests could have jeopardised relations. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs worked hard to dissuade the president from a crackdown, and kept EU actors engaged, although the moment came when Lukashenka had enough and the perception of internal threat became too great. Multiple sources in Minsk claim that the foreign minister, Uladzimir Makei, warned EU officials ahead of the 20 March crackdown, and generally began pre-emptively repairing the damage.[8] The relevant point in terms of smaller power agency is that Belarus had taken sufficient steps to bring about the lifting of most EU sanctions in early 2016.[9] In other words, it had once again brought about an intended outcome. However, was the more significant variable here elite differentiation, which encouraged Belarus to engage with the EU in the first instance, or the president's ability to prospectively curtail that engagement? The president's role is difficult to conceptualise. I argued initially that states such as Armenia pursued similar foreign policies despite changes of leader, but the impact of the leader therefore remains problematic: on the one hand, there are continuities despite the leader; on the other hand, in certain cases the leader becomes *sine qua non* of the smaller power, and by extension its articulation of agency, for the time s/he is in office. In the case of Armenia, President Serge Sargsyan contends with oppositional forces that Lukashenka is free from and this may minimise his ability to act as a veto player. This brings me back to other domestic political variables. I justified the exclusion of much of the ground of liberal IR from my analysis in Chapter 1, noting that they rely on a different conceptualisation of agency, although I do acknowledge that the cases discussed vary significantly on their scores in democracy rankings, and a range of other prospective unit-level variables.

[8] Private discussions, Minsk, March-April 2017.

[9] I would submit that geopolitical motives lay behind the EU's lifting of sanctions in March 2016, although their reintroduction would have been inevitable had Belarus not made some concessions. In truth, the concessions made by Belarus were relatively minor: political prisoners were released, and the use of the death penalty was arguably more restrained for much of 2016.

A theoretical limitation also needs to be acknowledged. First, scholarly use of the term 'hedging' is vague. Its proponents describe it as an alternative to balancing and bandwagoning, but in fact it involves elements of both. At the same time, balancing and bandwagoning, at least in the Waltzian tradition, are systemic outcomes and even their usage in the FPA literature emphasises the determinant role of the system-level. To place hedging alongside balancing and bandwagoning appears to be something of a category mistake. It does not make sense to describe hedging in terms of systemic variables alone. If one accepts the premise that the distribution of power causes states to balance or bandwagon, then trying to describe hedging in systemic terms only muddies the waters. To my mind, hedging is really a foreign policy description, one dependent on intervening state-level variables. Several of the states described in this thesis describe themselves as having a 'multi-vector' foreign policy; hedging may as well be a synonym for this. Moreover, hedging is not only a vague term, but its explanations are ambiguous. What causes the smaller power to hedge? In the thesis I have given one answer to that question derived from social constructivism, but many others are possible: fears of a proliferation of secessionism would not motivate hedging in other issue areas. Indeed, while hedging could be applied to a wide range of issues, I think other theoretical concepts such as entrapment or omnibalancing are analytically more valuable. They supply clear reasons for the smaller power to pursue a certain policy. This is well illustrated by Chapter 5: the positions taken on regime change could be described as hedging, but this does not offer much by way of a concrete explanation. Once the issue was understood in terms of regime security, it made far more sense to describe the policy in terms of omnibalancing.

7.5. Implications

I end with four implications for further research and policy. First. An important observation about smaller powers was made during the first wave of small state studies. Maurice

East remarked that 'small states [or smaller powers] engage much more in conflictual non-verbal behaviour' than large states, which led him to conclude that the former were not merely 'large states writ small.'[10] The foregoing thesis lends support to the last clause. Crucially, I have argued that low consensus can benefit smaller power agency, in a way that it would not be expected to do so for larger powers. However, it is necessary to qualify this with a recognition of the difficulty of measuring consensus in authoritarian states that make up the bulk of the case studies in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. It does though imply that there is value and scope in the study of smaller powers that is yet to be articulated as a coherent agenda in scholarship. Work that has been undertaken within the framework of neoclassical realism, as introduced in Section 2.2.2., may be given extra nuance by factoring in the relative power of states.

Another implication follows from this realisation that smaller powers are not merely larger ones 'writ small' and applies to other states' foreign policies. By having shown that smaller powers have a greater capacity to act otherwise than neorealism predicts, a strong case can be made for engaging with these states as systemic units in their own right. This might sound obvious, but smaller powers such as Belarus are routinely assumed to be under the wing of a larger power such as Russia, and not to warrant independent attention. Where the goals of outside states' policies could potentially be met by engagement with smaller powers, this may provide outside powers with greater agency of their own.

The third implication relates directly to subjectivity. I accepted the social constructivist claim that agents and structures are mutually constituted. One clear example of structures shaping agential subjectivity that was not covered in the preceding chapters was the invocation by Russia during the Ukraine war of 'a Russian world'; an idea that, while not new, was now being articulated more forcefully by parts of the Russian elite. This unsettled elites in neighbouring

[10] Maurice A. East (1973), 'Size and Foreign Policy Behaviour: A Test of Two Models' in *World Politics, 25:4,* p.558

sovereign states who feared Russia saw them as part of this world. Lukashenka made several barbed remarks germane to its invocation, saying: 'Agree with me. It sound[s] weird, people didn't understand it. … I don't understand what is this thing "Russian world." You [the press], and what's more our people generally don't understand what is this "Russian world." Then we may as well talk about the Belarusian or Ukrainian world. What is this [for]? Some kind of confrontation between worlds? So it's just a contrived, somewhat stupid thesis. I don't think it found any support among Belarusians. But it put many on guard.'[11] The rhetoric emanating from Russia helped foster subjective understanding in other states.

The implication of such subjective responses is that they are inseparable from identities. I excluded analysis of identities from the empirical chapters, but there is clearly overlap between subjectivity and identity. While I distinguished between actors, agents, and subjects, one might contemplate how identity fits into this division. Subjectivity is experiential in a way identity need not be; identity has overwhelming ideational qualities. But, having developed an argument whereby subjectivity allows for the articulation of agency, I recognise that a competing or complementary argument whereby identity allows for the articulation of agency cannot be overlooked. Identities have been an important component of both neoclassical realist and social constructivist research agendas.

Finally, one of the problems identified with realist readings of international relations was the failure to properly account for the hierarchical nature of international relations. The case of Belarus's asymmetrical relations with Russia suggests that the smaller power consented to Russian hegemony all the while Russia abided by a set of norms about inter-state politics concerning territorial integrity and non-interference. That consent was partially withdrawn when Russia violated these norms it had previously defended in international fora, and the smaller

[11] President of Belarus (4 August 2015), 'Interv'yu negosudarstvenniym sredstvam massovoi informatsii' [Interview with the non-state media]

power engaged in agential efforts to renegotiate the regional hierarchy. This was in line with an expectation derived from social constructivism and outlined in Section 2.2.3. This is consistent with findings of recent research that has suggested that status is negotiated rather than strictly being determined by power: when states at the top of a hierarchy (i.e. with high status) fail to meet the expectations of states lower down the hierarchy, the latter become restive and conflict results.[12] This, patently, is a matter within the control of the great powers, who have the agency to adapt policies to reasonable demands. As well, the observation recapitulates the importance of smaller power studies.

Today many journalists and scholars speak about the 'return' of great power politics, and dyed-in-the-wool realists gladly retort that it was always such. While it may be true that great power politics never went away, it is also true that smaller powers always wielded more agency that realists' theories cared to admit. The foregoing study has given insights into the workings of smaller power agency, and suggests that there are occasions where the weak can hold their own against the strong.

[12] Janice Bially Mattern and Ayse Zarakol (2016), 'Hierarchies in World Politics' in *International Organization, 70:3*, pp.623-654

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