

Russian-American Cooperation in the Middle East

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An Analysis of Moscow's Interests, Leverage, and Strategies of Linkage

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of DPhil in
International Relations in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the
University of Oxford

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December 2017

Word count: 99,376

Abstract

This study assesses the drivers of Russia's security cooperation with the United States in the Middle East since 11 September 2001. The four empirical case studies analyze Russian-US cooperation: (1) in stabilizing Iraq after *Operation Iraqi Freedom* in 2003; (2) in eliciting Syria's troop withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005; (3) in imposing UN sanctions against Iran in 2010, and (4) in demilitarizing Syria's chemical weapons in 2013-2014. Through these cases, I probe to what extent Russian cooperation is driven by *linkage diplomacy* and expectations of US *reciprocity*, as opposed to Russian interests in the Middle East itself. The analysis also unpacks Russia's pursuit of *leverage* vis-à-vis the US in the context of cooperation.

The study argues that Russia's security, non-proliferation, and economic interests in the Middle East are the principal drivers of its cooperation with the US in this region. This remains the case during moments of rapprochement and deteriorating diplomatic relations alike. Moreover, Moscow's co-operative strategy entails measures to counter-balance its support for US policy by building *leverage* for itself and its regional allies. However, there is sparse evidence of Moscow making its cooperation conditional upon gains on other issues in the Russian-US bilateral agenda.

The infrequency of explicit *linkage diplomacy* in Russian-US cooperation reflects principled policy on both sides, and American perceptions of the meaningfulness and costliness of Russia's cooperation. Unlike what is implied in the cooperation literature, the concrete institutional form of cooperation has little explanatory value for the infrequent evidence of linkage. That said, a Russian expectation of what is termed *diffuse reciprocity* is always a contextual driver of cooperation, especially when Russian-US relations are on an upward trajectory. Moscow routinely hopes that its cooperation will make an atmospheric contribution to its bilateral relationship with Washington, which can then be used to seek accommodation over other bilateral issues.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1) Introductory remarks

In the post-Cold War period, Russia has cooperated with the United States (US) in the Middle East on a broad range of security issues: to avert imminent military escalation in the region; to prevent the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), as well as in non-crisis diplomacy. Importantly, such cooperation has occurred during periods of both tension and rapprochement in the Russian-US bilateral relationship. This thesis studies the underlying drivers of Russia's cooperation, posing the question: Why does Russia cooperate with the United States in the Middle East? This will be undertaken by analysing Russian interests in the Middle East, as well as strategies of *leverage building* and *linkage diplomacy*, in four case studies of Russian cooperation with the US on Middle Eastern security issues since September 11, 2001 (9/11).

I argue that Russia's security, non-proliferation, and economic interests in the Middle East are the principal drivers of its cooperation with the US in this region. This remains the case during moments of rapprochement and deteriorating diplomatic relations alike. Moreover, Moscow's cooperative strategy entails measures to counter-balance its support for US policy by building *leverage* for itself and its regional allies. However, there is sparse evidence of Moscow seeking American quid pro quos or making its cooperation *explicitly conditional* upon gains on other issues in the Russian-US bilateral agenda.

The infrequency of explicit linkage in Russian-US cooperation reflects principled policy on both sides, and American perceptions of the meaning and cost of Russia's cooperation. Unlike what is usually implied in the cooperation literature, the concrete institutional form of cooperation has little explanatory value for the infrequent evidence of linkage. That said, a Russian expectation of what I term *diffuse reciprocity* is always a contextual driver of cooperation, especially when

Russian-US bilateral relations are on an upward trajectory. Moscow routinely hopes that its cooperation in the Middle East will make an atmospheric contribution to its bilateral relationship with Washington, generate some goodwill, or build up ‘credit’ which can then be used to seek accommodation over other bilateral issues.

This study adopts an interpretation of Russian interests in cooperation as socially constructed.¹ Rejecting the neorealist notion of the pre-given national interest of state survival, I take its specific content to be historically contingent. The national interest is not objectively given and self-evident, but its concrete essence is rather constructed, identified, and pursued by state officials. When Russia cooperates with the US in the Middle East, I assume that a range of different interests, which collectively amount to the national interest, could drive collaboration, from those related to Russia’s economic and security position in the region, to different bilateral interests with the US, to domestic objectives and concerns for status etc. In this study I analyse Russia’s national interests as contested amongst different constituencies of Russia’s post-1990 foreign policy elite. Drawing on Andrei Tsygankov’s work on Russian foreign policy, I take ‘Westernists’, ‘Statists’ and ‘Civilizationists’ / ‘Eurasianists’ to broadly represent elite and popular views of the desirable political course for Russia internationally.²

¹ J. Weldes, ‘Constructing National Interests’, *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 2, issue 3, 1996, pp. 275-318. For alternative understandings of the national interest, see A. Moravcsik, ‘Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics’, *International Organization*, vol. 51, no. 4, 1997, pp. 513-553 and K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979). In contrast to other IR theories, Constructivism emphasizes the social and relational construction of what states are and what they want. As Hurd explains, what distinguishes a specifically Constructivist story on state interests is that the influences on interest formation are assumed to be social. The social constitution of interests encompasses all the ways that actors’ interests and identities might be influenced by their interactions with others and with their social environment. Constructivism in IR further assumes that there are multiple logics of anarchy and that structures and agents are mutually constituted. See I. Hurd, ‘Constructivism’, in C. Reus-Smit and D. Snidal (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

² A. Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, 4th edn. (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

In order to analyse the underlying drivers of Russian cooperation in the Middle East, I adopt a small-n qualitative research design, conducting Russian foreign policy analysis in four comparative case studies of security cooperation in the Middle East. The aim is to establish, via inference through the review of primary source materials and interviews with foreign policy elites, what causes Russia to cooperate with the US. The cases occurred during periods of improving and deteriorating Russian-US relations over the past 15 years, which makes the trajectory of bilateral ties a contextual variable in this study. Speaking to a substantial number of officials in Moscow and Washington, DC, I process-traced the diplomacy involved in the four cases, teasing out the principal drivers of Russian cooperation. A crucial objective was also to look for evidence of leverage building and linkage diplomacy and establish how these strategies are conveyed, interpreted, and responded to in Russian-US diplomacy.

It is hoped that this project will make important contributions to the literature on International Relations (IR) and Russian foreign policy analysis (FPA). First, the study speaks to Russian foreign policy analysts, since it focuses upon Russian objectives and strategies in cooperation with the US. Recent years have seen a flurry of pundit analysis suggesting that Russia is amenable to ‘deal-making’ in conducting its Middle East diplomacy. However, few accounts have provided granular insight into the underlying drivers of Russia’s Middle East policy, weighing the relative explanatory value of commercial versus security motives in that region, while simultaneously subjecting the notion of linkage to rigorous empirical verification. The need for such nuanced analysis seems all the more pressing, given escalating security challenges in the Middle East which, over 15 years into the ‘Global War on Terror’ (GWOt), do not appear to be abating, Russia’s growing influence in the Middle East in recent years, and enduring tensions in the broader Russian-US bilateral relationship.

Second, this study fills a gap in the scholarship on cooperation in IR by providing an empirical account of whether and how linkage diplomacy between great powers plays out in practice, how it varies with the state of their bilateral relationships, and how much it actually matters in explaining cooperation. Whilst there is a substantial body of literature addressing US-Soviet linkage diplomacy during *détente*, its relevance and drivers have not been rigorously studied in relation to Russia's contemporary diplomacy in the Middle East .

The introductory chapter will discuss the motivations for this study by initially assessing what drove the USSR's cooperation with the US in the Middle East. Exploring the foremost Soviet concern with crisis aversion and status in cooperation under bipolarity, the chapter will continue to discuss crucial changes after 1990 at the level of the international system and in Russia's foreign policy, asking how the sum total of these changes is likely to have shaped Moscow's diplomacy in the Middle East. The chapter will then introduce the research question, research variables, and plausible propositions as to what drives Russia's cooperation with the United States in this region today. These propositions have been derived inductively through extensive empirical research and are additionally informed by insights from the cooperation literature in IR. The chapter will close with an introduction to the research design used, as well as an outline of the four empirical case studies.

2) Historical background

2.1) Soviet-US cooperation in the Middle East and linkage diplomacy

Soviet and US interests in the Middle East

Any discussion of the conditions for Russian-US cooperation in the Middle East should start with a brief analysis of American and Soviet interests in this region.

US interests

During the Cold War, the United States was principally concerned with ensuring the free flow of oil from the Middle East to its European and Japanese allies. Domestic pressures also generated an obligation to defend Israel as the only Western-oriented, Western-style democracy in the region.³ A further strategic interest in the Middle East emerged with the perceived need to protect NATO's southern flank and contain Soviet forces, as well as the desire to deny the region to communist powers and extend Western influence. Overall, the Middle East was initially seen as important, but not vital to US security interests.⁴ US engagement in advancing these various objectives fluctuated over time, depending: on "how each administration judged its various commitments, juggled bureaucratic differences and viewed the superpower contest."⁵

Concrete US strategies in pursuit of its goals evolved, driven by changing domestic and international contexts, and were promulgated in successive doctrines. In the 1947 'Truman Doctrine', the US government accepted responsibility for preventing the spread of communist totalitarianism in parts of the region, assuming Britain's longstanding commitments in Greece and Turkey.⁶ As Egypt and Syria drew closer to the USSR after the 1956 Suez crisis, President Eisenhower declared Washington the senior member in the Anglo-American partnership in the Middle East. Encouraging a defensive alliance among the region's 'Northern Tier' states bordering the USSR, the US then signed individual agreements with member states of the

³ For a forceful argument, see J. Mearsheimer and S. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007).

⁴ Galia Golan, 'Superpower Cooperation in the Middle East', in R. E. Kanet and E. A. Kolodziej (eds.), *The Cold War As Cooperation: Superpower Cooperation in Regional Conflict Management* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 121.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁶ 'President Harry S. Truman's Address Before a Joint Session of Congress', 12 March 1947, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/trudoc.asp.

Baghdad Pact,⁷ who pledged a willingness to use armed force to assist each other against armed aggression from any country controlled by international communism.

Following the Six Day War of 1967, President Nixon recognized that the US had to assume primary responsibility for protecting Western interests in the Middle East, with Britain retreating and France terminating its weapons supplies to Israel. Cultivating regional proxies – the Iranian Shah and the Saudi Kingdom – the US hoped to contain the Kremlin’s growing regional clout. In a rapidly changing strategic environment in the 1980s – following the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war, all galvanizing an American realization that the US could no longer rely upon previous proxies – President Carter announced the US’ vital interests in the Middle East. He vowed that: “an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will [...] be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.”⁸ Implementing the so-called ‘Carter Doctrine’, the US set up US Central Command (CENTCOM, successor to the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force) in 1983⁹.

Soviet interests

The USSR remained a marginal player in the Middle East until the end of World War Two. Moscow’s commitment to fostering communist revolution in the area was lukewarm at best, with the Soviet leadership routinely turning a blind eye to the domestic policies of regional states, including the persecution of ‘brothers-in-class’, given the overarching aim of consolidating the

⁷ ‘Pact of Mutual Cooperation Between the Kingdom of Iraq, the Republic of Turkey, the United Kingdom, the Dominion of Pakistan, and the Kingdom of Iran (Baghdad Pact)’, 24 February 1955, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/baghdad.asp.

⁸ J. Carter, ‘State of the Union Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress’, 23 January 1990, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33079>.

⁹ For further discussion on US interests in the Middle East during the Cold War, see D. Lesch (ed.), *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment*, 4th edn. (New York: Perseus Books Group, 2006); D. Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003).

neutrality of these countries and, at best, securing their cooperation with the USSR.¹⁰ The Soviet entry into the Third World really began with the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953 and the USSR's abandonment of the "two-camp theory."¹¹

During the Cold War, the USSR's interests in the Middle East were of traditional, ideological, strategic, and economic character. A traditional interest in protecting the USSR's southern borders and ensuring access to the Mediterranean was complemented by an ideological interest in extending Soviet influence – communist revolution if possible – and undermine British and US objectives in the region. While strategic interests, such as facilitating forward deployment of the Soviet fleet, became more important as Soviet military doctrine and capabilities evolved, the USSR's economic interests in the Middle East remained secondary until the 1970s.¹² Overall, Moscow sought to develop "a bloc of 'anti-imperialist' states within the Arab world", which it hoped would lead them to: "join together [...] in a united front against what the USSR called the 'linchpin' of Western imperialism in the Middle East – Israel."¹³ As a result, according to Soviet calculations, the Arab states would use their collective pressure to weaken the American position in the region.

Seeking to enhance its influence in the Middle East, the USSR relied upon a variety of measures, including the supply of military assistance and economic aid, the adoption of long-term friendship and cooperation treaties, party-to-party relations with communists, the provision of military and diplomatic support to Israel's Arab enemies, as well as the deliberate exploitation of lingering

¹⁰ A. Vassiliev, *Russian Policy in the Middle East: From Messianism to Pragmatism* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 1993), p. 10.

¹¹ G. Golan, *Soviet Policies in the Middle East – From World War II to Gorbachev* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 9. The doctrine of the "two camps", which was promulgated by Central Committee Secretary Andrei Zhdanov in 1946, proposed that the world was divided into an 'imperialistic' camp, led by the US, and a 'democratic' camp, led by the USSR.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ R. O. Freedman, *Moscow and the Middle East – Soviet Foreign Policy Since the Invasion of Afghanistan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 11.

memories of Western colonialism.¹⁴ That said, Soviet foreign policy towards the region was often pragmatic, and the ideological interest in supporting communist revolution was subordinate to more sober strategic interests. Recognizing the value of non-aligned, less than socialist regimes in competition with the West, Moscow was ready to cooperate with the region's new, usually bourgeois, nationalist regimes. Given perceptions of the growing importance of military-strategic interests from the 1960s, the USSR began to seek bases and military alliances in the Middle East, which further threatened to harm Moscow's anti-imperialist image.¹⁵

Despite Soviet recognition that its various interests would be best served with the ascendance of communist regimes in the Middle East, Soviet elites "realised that such an eventuality was highly unlikely, primarily because of the strength of both nationalism and Islam in the region", but also because: "the pursuit of such an objective might jeopardize the more immediate military-strategic interests."¹⁶ Given this pragmatic outlook, Soviet foreign policy in the region has been characterized by maintaining good relations with "blatantly non-socialist governments,"¹⁷ or having "forsaken local communists"¹⁸.

In sum, both the US and the USSR pursued interests in the Middle East that related directly to their superpower relationship in a bipolar confrontation. Both sought to reduce the other's influence in the region, for overlapping strategic, ideological, and economic reasons.¹⁹ Those scholars who argue that disruptive Soviet impulses have taken precedence in the Middle East, since Moscow was engaged in a zero-sum competition with the US, have attributed the offensive

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Golan, *Soviet Policies*, pp. 11-13.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁷ F. Halliday, *Cold War, Third World – An Essay on Soviet-American Relations* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), p. 123.

¹⁸ J. J. Byrne, 'The Middle Eastern Cold War: Unique Dynamics in a Questionable Regional Framework', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2011.

¹⁹ For discussion of the difficulty of disentangling these categories of interest, see Golan, *Soviet Policies*, p. 19.

thrust of its foreign policy to either the Tsarist legacy, or the Marxist-Leninist *Weltanschauung*.²⁰ Those, on the other hand, who emphasize the USSR's defensive posture in the Middle East, have argued that Moscow played a role in supporting its American counterpart in regional peacemaking.²¹ The fact that both superpowers were directly involved in the region also heightened the risk of confrontation, necessitating adroitness in joint conflict management, to which the next section will turn.

Soviet-US cooperation as crisis aversion

During the Cold War, the USSR collaborated with the US in the Middle East mainly to avert military escalation.²² Cooperation usually amounted to what Benjamin Miller terms "spontaneous crisis management", an attempt to prevent the superpowers from directly confronting each other in the region.²³ Especially in the 1956, 1967, and 1973 Middle East crises, concerns originating in US or Soviet domestic politics – which would have mandated conflict over cooperation with the other superpower – had to take a back seat. Soviet threats helped Washington to restrain allies who had become unruly, which facilitated successful joint crisis management.²⁴

Both superpowers had become involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the main theatre for cooperation in the Middle East during the Cold War, somewhat reluctantly. While Washington emerged as Israel's primary champion "sporadically and belatedly", it was only after Stalin's death and an overall change in Soviet policy towards the Third World under Khrushchev, that

²⁰ Freedman, *Moscow and the Middle East*, pp. 2-3.

²¹ Galia Golan and George Breslauer have emphasized the defensive thrust of the USSR's Middle East policy.

²² G. W. Breslauer, 'On Collaborative Competition', in G. W. Breslauer (ed.), *Soviet Strategy in the Middle East* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990); B. Miller, 'Perspectives on Superpower Crisis Management and Conflict Resolution in the Arab-Israeli Conflict', in Breslauer (ed.), *Soviet Strategy*.

²³ B. Miller, 'Explaining Great Power Cooperation in Conflict Management', *World Politics*, vol. 45, no. 1, 1992, pp. 1-46. As Miller notes, a crisis is characterized by a dangerously high probability of resort to military force, while conflict resolution refers to the settlement of the fundamental issues in a conflict.

²⁴ Miller, 'Explaining Great Power Cooperation', p. 36.

Moscow began to support the bourgeois nationalist Arab regimes, turning the Arab-Israeli conflict into an attractive vehicle for competition with the West.²⁵

Nevertheless, in backing different parties in the Arab-Israeli conflict, both sides remained principally interested in avoiding direct military confrontation. This shared desire nurtured what George Breslauer terms “competitive collaboration”. Especially after the 1967 war, Breslauer argues, Moscow perceived the region to be so volatile, the probability of superpower confrontation so high, and the likelihood that Soviet clients would prevail at low risk to the USSR so remote that it integrated a collaborative component into its regional strategy.²⁶ Reviewing instances of Soviet-US cooperation aimed at ‘containing’ the Arab-Israeli conflict, Galia Golan lists over 20 instances of tacit or explicit cooperation between 1947 and the beginning of the Gorbachev era.²⁷

Breslauer and Miller hold that bipolarity at the international system level best explains Soviet cooperativeness in crisis-prone situations in the Middle East. Since the risk of superpower confrontation in the Middle East was assessed as high, the perceived imperatives of state survival came to outweigh below-system level factors, such as Soviet ideology and disposition towards the US, which would have mandated competition over collaboration. Given their shared desire to avert regional confrontation, the US and the USSR developed a tacit system of mutual expectations and thresholds, which established behavioural norms and patterns of legitimate conduct amidst nascent crisis.²⁸

²⁵ Golan, ‘Superpower Cooperation in the Middle East’, p. 124.

²⁶ Breslauer, ‘On Collaborative Competition’, p. 16.

²⁷ Golan, ‘Superpower Cooperation in the Middle East’, pp. 125ff. According to Golan, US-Soviet ‘tacit’ cooperation in the Middle East entailed the fortuitous, non-explicit pursuit of a shared objective, while ‘explicit’ cooperation – more rare – entailed actual engagement to prevent escalation and restrain client states.

²⁸ A. Ben-Zvi, ‘The Management of Superpower Conflict in the Middle East’, in S. Spiegel (et al.) (eds.), *The Soviet-American Competition in the Middle East* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1988).

Beyond this systemic explanation, the USSR and US had several other reasons to cooperate in Middle Eastern crisis containment. There was a desire to pacify the Arab-Israeli front such that resources could be expended elsewhere. After 1967, the USSR sought stability in the Levant to build naval and air bases in Egypt. Moscow was also aware that another defeat of the Arabs would constitute a blow to Soviet prestige. The US, in turn, was keen to prevent further polarization between Israel and the Arabs, given concern over Israeli's ability to sustain long-term mobilization during war, as well as America's own interests vis-à-vis Arab states. Amidst *détente* in the 1970s, both sides were also anxious that escalation in the Middle East might threaten the pursuit of other shared interests at the global level. Finally, given growing concern over the nuclearization of the Arab-Israeli conflict,²⁹ a joint interest in WMD non-proliferation emerged.

Notwithstanding successful cooperation in crisis management, Soviet-US non-crisis diplomacy (what Miller labels 'peacemaking') was consistently hampered by the fact that the superpowers sought *relative gains* in the region at the adversary's expense.³⁰ The US routinely tried to exclude the USSR from Arab-Israeli mediation, either because the Kremlin was expected to obstruct any sincere efforts, or because the Americans felt they did not require Soviet support.³¹ Enjoying superior diplomatic and economic resources in the Middle East, Washington was confident that it could play the role of 'honest broker' alone. As a result, it excluded the USSR from many diplomatic initiatives in the Arab-Israeli conflict, including Secretary of State Kissinger's 'shuttle diplomacy' between Israel and Egypt in 1974-1975, the 1978 Camp David Accords, the 1979

²⁹ Whilst Israel has never officially admitted or denied possession of nuclear weapons, it is widely believed to have developed its first deliverable nuclear weapon by the mid to late 1960s.

³⁰ Miller, 'Perspectives on Superpower Crisis Management'. The importance of introducing the relative gains terminology will become clear in the theoretical section.

³¹ Breslauer, 'On Collaborative Competition', p. 7.

Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, Reagan's 'fresh start' initiative of September 1982, as well as the Shultz plan of March 1988.³²

Confronting such unilateralist US predilections, the USSR advocated multilateral approaches, professing a “great power yearning” to be involved in Arab-Israeli peacemaking.³³ As Miller notes, an inferior great power will prefer multilateralism in conflict mediation, eager to take part alongside the leading power. This is because such inclusion conveys status recognition, at least on the specific issues at stake.³⁴ Indeed, Soviet considerations of status appear to have strengthened Moscow’s cooperative impulse and generated a constant desire to signal that: “there is no problem anywhere that can be solved without the Soviet Union or in opposition to her.”³⁵

On multiple occasions, the USSR pushed to be involved in Arab-Israeli peacemaking, for instance in two-power talks following the Six Day War, or in seeking to play the role of co-chairman at the Geneva Peace Conference in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War in 1973.³⁶ Given Moscow’s desire to be recognized as Washington’s equal in the Middle East, its occasional adoption of a 'spoiler' role resulted from frustration with the American preference for an exclusionary approach.³⁷

Linkage diplomacy during the Cold War

The use of linkage in US foreign policy towards the USSR became a conscious strategy during *détente* in the early 1970s, when then-National Security Advisor Kissinger and Nixon believed

³² Miller, ‘Perspectives on Superpower Crisis Management’.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

³⁴ B. Miller, ‘Great Powers and Regional Peacemaking: Patterns in the Middle East and Beyond’, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1, 1997, pp. 103-142.

³⁵ Breslauer, ‘On Collaborative Competition’, p. 17.

³⁶ Miller, ‘Great Powers and Regional Peacemaking’.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

that making progress in one area with the Soviets dependent upon progress in another provided the best tactic for achieving several key foreign policy goals, including strategic arms control, ending the war in Vietnam, and reaching settlements in the Middle East. The American decision to use linkage diplomacy was prompted by what policymakers perceived as unwarranted Soviet assertiveness in the Third World and was sustained by the belief that the prospects for trade, technology transfers, and arms control negotiations could be utilized to elicit Moscow's cooperation in managing regional crises, including in the Middle East.³⁸

While linkage diplomacy was consciously pursued by the US vis-à-vis Soviet Russia as an integral pillar of *détente*, interpretations of the concept differed. The US hoped to discipline Moscow's behaviour in the Middle East by holding out carrots on other issues, but did not allow the Soviets to interfere with American diplomacy in that region.³⁹ The USSR, on the other hand, believed in the 'divisibility of *détente*', eager to pursue it at the superpower level, while revolutionary activity would continue in the Middle East.⁴⁰ Soviet leaders officially denounced linkage, arguing that every issue of international politics ought to be discussed and settled on its own merits, and not through "undignified horse trading. Nor was the USSR to be treated like an unruly child, with agreements conditioned by what the Americans arbitrarily assumed should be its proper behavior: no SALT unless you help us in Southeast Asia, no credits and trade unless you let Soviet Jews emigrate."⁴¹

Notwithstanding this official position, Miller argues that calculations over linkage played into the Politburo's amenability to cooperation in the Middle East. According to Miller, while an

³⁸ On *détente* and linkage diplomacy, see R. L. Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations From Nixon to Reagan* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1985).

³⁹ R. Legvold, *Return to Cold War* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2016), p. 70.

⁴⁰ Golan, *Soviet Policies*, p. 21.

⁴¹ A. V. Ulam, *Dangerous Relations: The Soviet Union in World Politics, 1970-1982* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 59.

inclination to pursue joint Middle Eastern peacemaking with Washington was mainly driven by status, it was reinforced by the USSR's relative economic weakness. Cooperation in resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Soviet leadership calculated, could enhance Washington's readiness to provide Moscow with much-desired trade benefits and technology transfers, as well as strengthen US domestic support for arms control, in which the Soviets had an economic interest.⁴²

Opposing such impulses, however, anti-*détentists* constituted a powerful lobby inside the USSR that questioned all cooperation with the US. Those elite constituencies least likely to benefit from rapprochement with the West, such as the military, argued that if *détente* was pursued at the *global* level, confrontation needed to continue in the Middle East. Such infighting in the Kremlin, Miller argues, likely precipitated instances of increased Soviet assistance to the Arabs, which mitigated against the possibility of cooperation with Washington.⁴³ Thus the true extent of Soviet amenability to linkage during *détente* is inconclusive, since conflicting views within the Kremlin lay behind the apparent contradictions and dualism in Soviet Middle East policy.⁴⁴

Such ambiguity notwithstanding, the USSR was certainly viewed as amenable to US *quid pro quo*s from within the Middle East and accused of prioritizing its pursuit of *détente* over its regional relationships. Until the mid 1970s, as Dawisha shows: "many Arab leaders complained that the Soviet interest in *détente* took precedence over Soviet support for the Arab cause against Israel."⁴⁵

⁴² Miller, 'Great Powers and Regional Peacemaking', p. 123.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 134.

⁴⁴ Golan, *Soviet Policies*, p. 27.

⁴⁵ K. Dawisha, 'The Correlation of Forces and Soviet Policy in the Middle East', in A. Dawisha and K. Dawisha (eds.), *The Soviet Union in the Middle East* (London: Heinemann, 1982), p. 158. For further analysis on Soviet-US linkage diplomacy during the Cold War, see A. L. George, 'Strategies for Facilitating Cooperation', in A. L. George, P. J. Farley, and A. Dallin, *US-Soviet Security Cooperation: Achievements, Failures, Lessons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). For a Soviet perspective, see C. D. Blacker, 'The Kremlin and Détente: Soviet Conceptions, Hopes, and Expectations', in A. L. George, *Managing US-Soviet Rivalry: Problems of Crisis Prevention* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1983); V. A. Kremenyuk, 'The Cold War as Cooperation: A Soviet Perspective', in R. E. Kanet and E. A.

2.2) Setting the stage: prospects for Russian-US cooperation in the Middle East following the Cold War

Russian foreign policy during the 1990s

After the end of the Cold War, President Yeltsin and his Foreign Minister Kozyrev pursued a policy of strategic partnership and integration with the West.⁴⁶ Yeltsin and Kozyrev believed in the promise of a new liberal era and were domestically supported by a new Westernist coalition that included intellectuals, human rights activists, and the pro-capitalist elites. In the context of the new foreign policy course in the early 1990s, Russia's historical ties with traditional partners in the Middle East receded into the background.

However, the liberal momentum did not last and a new Statist coalition – acknowledging the necessity to build a market economy and democratic institutions, but subordinating these goals to strengthening the state – played a key role in mounting opposition to the Westernist cause.⁴⁷ The new Statist camp included military industrialists, the army and the security services, representing elite constituencies least likely to benefit from rapprochement with the West. When Evgeny Primakov was named Foreign Minister in 1996, he argued for a more restrained relationship with the West and diversified foreign policy. The Primakovians stressed the need for Russia to maintain the status of a distinct Eurasian great power and advocated for a strategic alliance with China and India in particular, while also revisiting Russia's ties with its traditional allies in the Middle East.

Kolodziej (eds.), *The Cold War As Cooperation: Superpower Cooperation in Regional Conflict Management* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

⁴⁶ The discussion below on Russia's foreign policy in the 1990s is informed by Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*. For further analysis of Russian foreign policy during the 1990s, see B. Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era - Reality, Illusion and Mythmaking* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). For a US perspective, see J. M. Goldgeier and M. McFaul, *Power and Purpose: US Policy Toward Russia After the Cold War* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003).

⁴⁷ While Tsygankov categorizes the major Russian foreign policy traditions as 'Westernist', 'Statist', and 'Civilizationist'/'Eurasianist', other scholars use different characterizations. Mankoff, for instance, distinguishes between Russian 'Nationalists', 'Eurasianists', 'Centrists', and 'Atlanticists' in J. Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), pp. 85ff.

Over time, Statist reasons to strengthen the state won the support of the elites and masses. A Statist concept of the national interest, which prioritized Russia's power, independence, and sovereignty in a pluralist international order, crystallized. The Statists successfully exploited the weaknesses of the new liberal post-Cold War state and the failure of Westernist radical economic reform. Perceived threats in the 1990s – the First Chechen War, NATO's decision to expand eastward – further strengthened the Statist narrative of a Russian Federation in peril, which was then kindled by the West's unilateralism amid the 1999 Kosovo crisis.

In this context, considerations of status regained importance, and most elites, including some Westernists, were invoking 'Russian greatness' by the mid 1990s.⁴⁸ Amid the progressive adoption of a Statist national interest, anti-American attitudes resonated more widely. Given the failure of economic reform, a growing number of elites claimed that the US threatened Russia's prosperity, with select voices even contending Russia's liberal reforms had been deliberately supported by the West in order to destroy the Russian economy.⁴⁹ During the period investigated by this study, starting from the early 2000s, Russia's national interest has been Statist throughout, while Westernist, Civilizationist, and Eurasianist influences have mattered by degrees over time, as will be shown in the empirical chapters.⁵⁰

In the context of the pro-Statist turn in the mid 1990s, Russian interests in the Middle East gradually expanded. Yet Russia's policy towards the region was pragmatic and had a different regional focus compared to Soviet times.⁵¹ Since the newly independent states of Central Asia

⁴⁸ D. Shlapentokh, 'Is the "Greatness Syndrome" Eroding?', *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 25, issue 1, 2002.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Whilst Eurasianism is often invoked to describe Evgeny Primakov's foreign policy, since he actively sought to build Russia's relations with Asian countries, his policy is inaccurately characterized as purely 'Eurasianist': M. Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2008); Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*.

⁵¹ R. O. Freedman, 'Russian Foreign Policy Under Yeltsin, Part I', *Domes*, vol. 6, issue 2, 1997.

and the Transcaucasus became of central concern to Russian policy after the breakup of the USSR, Russia's new relations with Iran and Turkey were of paramount importance to Moscow. Russia's ties with the oil-rich Persian Gulf followed, while the central Arab-Israeli zone composed of Israel, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and the Palestinian entity lost the central relevance it had for much of the Cold War. Furthermore, in a major change to Russia's Cold War stance, Israel became an important ally in the region, emerging as a major trading partner, while the ca. 800,000 Israeli citizens originating from the former USSR created a cultural bond between Russia and Israel.⁵²

Whereas Moscow had actively cooperated with the US on Middle Eastern issues at the end of the Cold War, for instance in supporting Washington during the First Gulf War, it asserted its independence from US policy more actively from the mid 1990s. As will be seen in the empirical chapters, the Kremlin called for the lifting of sanctions on Iraq and sold more sophisticated arms to Iran. Since such greater assertiveness was a direct product of the Primakovian-Statist turn, one might argue that Russian domestic politics, rather than a changing landscape in the Middle East itself, had a key impact on the formation of Russia's policy towards the Middle East. Yet, amid the proliferation of security challenges emanating from the region – ranging from instability and terrorism to WMD proliferation – Russia's renewed interest in the Middle East would soon be sustained by developments beyond Russia, especially after 9/11.

Setting the stage for this analysis of Russian-US cooperation in the Middle East after 2001, it is finally worth revisiting what the end of bipolarity at the international system level suggests about the drivers of such cooperation. With the end of the Cold War, the US became the dominant player in the international system, although the degree and implications of *unipolarity* remained

⁵² Ibid.

the subject of intense scholarly debate.⁵³ Beginning especially in the 2000s, Russian officials progressively argued that the world was becoming more ‘multipolar’, that the ‘unipolar moment’ had passed or been an illusion. President Putin’s early statements on world order were still cautious. Commenting on joint Russian-French resistance to the 2003 Iraq invasion, he merely noted that: “we aren't creating any axes. I consider that this is but the first little building block in the construction of a truly multipolar world.”⁵⁴ By the Munich Security Conference in 2007, the Russian leader was more determined to argue that: “the unipolar model is not only unacceptable but also impossible in today’s world.”⁵⁵ Speaking at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum in 2014, President Putin concluded that: “a unipolar world did not materialize, this is today obvious to everyone.”⁵⁶

The preceding discussion of the Cold War notes that bipolarity could account for the empirically observed Soviet and US interest in joint crisis management in the Middle East. As far as the precise implications of post-Cold War unipolarity or multipolarity for the prospects of Russian-US cooperation are concerned, there is no consensus in the IR literature. On the one hand, balance-of-power theory holds that states will respond to concentrated power by counterbalancing.⁵⁷ As a result, we should observe a structurally induced tendency of middle-ranked great powers, such as Russia, to *withhold* cooperation with the US since the Cold War.

Then there is the competing suggestion that states tend to bandwagon with a dominant power,

⁵³ W. C. Wohlforth, ‘The Stability of a Unipolar World’, *International Security*, vol. 24, no. 1, 1999, pp. 5-41. Others question whether the system is strictly unipolar. See S. P. Huntington, ‘The Lonely Superpower’, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 78, no. 2, 1999.

⁵⁴ V. Putin, ‘Replies to Russian Journalists’ Questions’, 11 February 2003, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21872>.

⁵⁵ V. Putin, ‘Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy’, 10 February 2007, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>.

⁵⁶ ‘Vladimir Putin: “Odnopolyarnyi mir ne sostoyalsya”’ (“A Unipolar World Did Not Materialize”), 23 May 2014, <https://www.business-gazeta.ru/article/105024>.

⁵⁷ G. J. Ikenberry, M. Mastanduno, and W. C. Wohlforth, ‘Introduction: Unipolarity, State Behavior, and Systemic Consequences’, *World Politics*, vol. 61, no. 1, 2009, p 16.

either to shield themselves from its capabilities or to influence its policies. They might also seek to bind the dominant power in institutions in order to engage it or tie it down. Therefore, unlike in the past, the distribution of capabilities after the Cold War should incentivize cooperation. Furthermore, while realists argue that an international system moving towards multipolarity does not enhance the prospects of cooperation, since relative gain concerns and states' fears of 'cheating' in cooperation persist under anarchy, liberal-institutionalists contend that these apprehensions can be mitigated through the construction of institutions and international regimes.⁵⁸

Given these inconclusive theoretical predictions, rather than seeking to extrapolate the drivers of Russia's post-Cold War cooperation with the US in the Middle East from a system-level analysis, which assumes a fixed and pre-given national interest in state survival, this study argues that we should take into account the complex changes that have occurred both at the regional level (the Middle East), the bilateral level (the Russian-US relationship), and in Russia domestically, in order to provide a nuanced picture of the motives for Russian cooperation. The following section will argue that the post-Cold War Middle East has presented distinct challenges and opportunities to Russia and the US respectively, which constitute the basis for understanding Russia's post-9/11 cooperation in the region.

A new Middle Eastern landscape after 9/11

The post-1990 period witnessed the crystallization of a more complicated security landscape in the Middle East in comparison to the Cold War, when the major rift polarizing the region was the Arab-Israeli conflict. This was especially true following the terrorist attacks of 9/11. According to a senior US official: "the further we got away from 9/11, the less we heard about the Israeli-

⁵⁸ R. Keohane and L. Martin, 'The Promise of Institutional Theory', *International Security*, vol. 20, no. 1, Summer 1995, pp. 39-51.

Palestinian question. Now, nobody says that is the key to peace in the Middle East, nobody, because you are seeing sectarian strife, civil war, Shia-Sunni battles, having very little to do with the Israeli-Palestinian question.”⁵⁹

Russia returned to the region as a serious player from the mid-1990s under greatly altered circumstances. The Middle Eastern system that had emerged in the decades following the end of World War II had been characterized by the lack of a hegemon with the capacity to create stability or even integration, but instead comprised several middle powers competing for leadership, including Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East, and Algeria, Morocco, and Libya in North Africa.⁶⁰ This system fragmented, especially from the 1980s, when sub-regional bodies such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) began to form, the Iran-Iraq war and Lebanon’s civil war rattled the region, and pan-Islamism emerged as a serious contender to pan-Arabism following Iran’s Islamic Revolution in 1979. Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent US-led coalition’s restoration of Kuwaiti sovereignty further split the Arab ranks. This development was somewhat repeated amid the 2003 invasion of Iraq, since: “although the Arab League condemned the war (with the exception of Kuwait), several Arab states lent it overt or tacit support.”⁶¹

Russia’s engagement with the Middle East in the period under investigation therefore occurred against a greatly altered regional backdrop. The USSR’s traditional Cold War partners Syria, Iraq, and Egypt had been weakened, the GCC member states progressively grew more assertive, fearing Iran’s nuclear ambitions, and from 2003 the region’s Arab states settled into a what Florence Gaub terms a “balance of weakness.”⁶² The new regional fault lines and relative

⁵⁹ Phone interview with Richard Armitage, 18 March 2014.

⁶⁰ F. Gaub, ‘The Gulf Moment: Arab Relations Since 2011’, *The US Army War College*, May 2015.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

⁶² *Ibid.*

vulnerability of its traditional partners have provided an important backdrop for the Russian government's engagement with the Middle East in the post-9/11 period.

In this context, new security challenges came to dominate Moscow's agenda. The twin threats of, on the one hand, regional WMD proliferation and, on the other, instability fostering the rise of extremism, have especially worried the Kremlin. Regional developments long before 9/11, starting with the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, generated a sense that the region was becoming 'globalized' and that security threats were moving closer to the USSR's own borders.⁶³ After 1990, imperatives to ensure stability in the Middle East and preserve Russia's own territorial integrity became inextricably linked, given a potentially dangerous source of internal destabilization emerging through the transnational dynamics of Muslim solidarity.⁶⁴ During the First Chechen War, the Kremlin was anxious to block any support that the Chechen rebels had traditionally received from the Middle East and the wider Muslim world.⁶⁵

The proliferation of non-conventional arms in a volatile Middle East became of particular concern to the Kremlin. As Evgeny Primakov notes in his memoirs, by the mid-2000s Iran's nuclear programme had provoked a great deal of alarm regionally and internationally, while a nuclear-armed Israel remained deeply involved in virtually all conflicts roiling the Middle East.⁶⁶ In 2004 Primakov was called upon by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to join the so-called 'Wise Men's Group', which was tasked with generating recommendations for combatting a range of threats, including WMD proliferation. The group's report warned of progressive erosion of the nuclear non-proliferation regime and warned that the resulting hotbed of dangers could well be

⁶³ Dawisha, 'The Correlation of Forces'.

⁶⁴ R. Dannreuther, 'Russia and the Middle East: A Cold War Paradigm?', *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 64, issue 3, 2012.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ E. Primakov, *Russia and the Arabs* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), p. 341.

the Middle East. Alarmed about both Iran's refusal to cooperate with nuclear inspections and Israel's refusal to sign the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), Primakov urged that "the call to create a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East is even more relevant in a climate of escalating international terrorism",⁶⁷ highlighting the perilous combination of instability, terrorism, and proliferation.

In sum, fear of instability – whether generated through WMD proliferation, the collapse of incumbent regimes, or the spread of Islamist extremist groups – has dominated Russian officials' security outlook on the Middle East in the 2000s.⁶⁸ The region's proximity to Russia's south, coupled with Russia's own large Muslim minority, has further elevated the importance of Russian diplomacy in the Middle East, beyond the Arab-Israeli theatre that dominated its cooperation with the US during the Cold War. Joint "crisis management" in the Middle East was no longer just about preventing the Arab-Israeli conflict from spiralling into superpower confrontation, but its meaning has significantly expanded.

Beyond its concern with containing these perceived security threats, the Kremlin has adopted a largely opportunistic stance in pursuing commercial relationships with both former friends and foes in the Middle East, including Israel, Turkey, Iran, and the Gulf states. From the early 1990s, Moscow has been hard-nosed in its courting of cash-paying customers. In dealing with 'rogue states', it has sought a fine balance between developing profitable economic relations while being careful not to undermine economic relations with more moderate pro-Western states.⁶⁹ The growing relevance of Russia's commercial interests in the Middle East has also been sustained by the multiplicity of actors lobbying the state, whether the military-industrial complex interested in

⁶⁷ Ibid., pp. 350ff.

⁶⁸ As the empirical chapters show, fear of instability became inextricably linked with concerns for domestic and regime security in Russia and the post-Soviet space over time, especially after the Arab Spring.

⁶⁹ Dannreuther, 'Russia and the Middle East'.

weapons customers abroad, oil and gas producers seeking exploration opportunities beyond Russia, or atomic energy players eager to sell civil nuclear technology to Iran and beyond. As a result, there have been stronger push- and pull-factors within Russia,⁷⁰ including regarding possible cooperation with the US in the Middle East.

In sum, post-Cold War Russian foreign policy analysis has drawn attention to a range of economic and security imperatives, which have mandated a pragmatic and low-cost Middle East policy that has been “a far cry from Soviet times”,⁷¹ and is inadequately assessed: “through a revived Cold War prism.”⁷² Writing in 1993 on anticipated Russian foreign policy in the Middle East, Alexei Vassiliev notes that: “the picture has changed beyond recognition: there is no longer any ‘Communist threat’, no ‘Soviet expansion’ or USSR-US confrontation, no approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict as a derivative of that confrontation, and no more brethren-in-ideology of the former USSR.”⁷³ The corollary is that, compared to the Cold War period, the Russian leadership has faced: “a more flexible policy terrain, where the balance of cooperation and competition can be potentially redirected according to changing circumstances and conditions.”⁷⁴ Yet, against the background of the security challenges and commercial opportunities discussed above, analysts have not specified under what circumstances precisely we are most likely to see Russian cooperation with the US, nor have the conditions for Russian linkage diplomacy been spelled out.

⁷⁰ C. Marsh and N. Gvosdev, *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2013).

⁷¹ I. Bourttman, ‘Putin and Russia’s Middle Eastern Policy’, *Gloria Center, Interdisciplinary Center*, vol. 10, 2006.

⁷² R. Dannreuther, ‘Russia and the Middle East’, in H. Carter and A. Ehteshami (eds.), *The Middle East’s Relations with Asia and Russia* (London: Routledge, 2004).

⁷³ Vassiliev, *Russian Policy in the Middle East*, p. 357.

⁷⁴ Dannreuther, ‘Russia and the Middle East’.

The primacy of the Middle East for US foreign policy after 9/11

While the Middle East has presented new security challenges and commercial opportunities to post-Cold War Russia, understanding the drivers of Russian-US cooperation in that region also requires a discussion of its strategic importance to American foreign policy. The end of the bipolar struggle generated early hopes in Washington that a 'New World Order' could be built, one in which the Arab-Israeli conflict would be settled and economic prosperity and political liberalization for the Middle East were in the offing. Addressing Congress on March 6, 1991, following the expulsion of Iraqi forces from Kuwait, President George H. W. Bush promulgated the 'New World Order', outlining his plan for maintaining a permanent US naval presence in the Persian Gulf, providing funds for Middle East development, instituting safeguards against the spread of WMD in the region, as well as achieving an Arab-Israeli peace treaty.⁷⁵ With the USSR no longer a factor, new American military bases in the Persian Gulf, and such key Arab states as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Syria having joined the US-led coalition during the First Gulf War, the Middle East appeared resigned to a new regional order tailored by US influence.⁷⁶

Yet US foreign policy in the 1990s then lacked a strategic focus, struggling to devise a 'grand strategy' amid this unipolar moment.⁷⁷ Some argued that the American focus should be to contain Japan,⁷⁸ others contended that having a 'grand strategy' meant dealing with a rising China,⁷⁹ while a third group advocated a return to an isolationist US foreign policy.⁸⁰ Only select voices highlighted a new type of terrorist threat to the US homeland and urged greater focus upon

⁷⁵ George H. W. Bush, 'Address Before a Joint Session of Congress', 6 March 1991, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=19364>.

⁷⁶ S. Telhami, *The Stakes: America and the Middle East, the Consequences of Power and the Choice for Peace* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2002).

⁷⁷ For officials and experts taking stock of this lack of strategic focus, see 'America's National Interests', The Commission on America's National Interests, July 2000, <https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/amernatinter.pdf>.

⁷⁸ J. Fallows, 'Containing Japan', *The Atlantic*, May 1989, pp. 40-54.

⁷⁹ R. Bernstein and R. Munro, 'The Coming Conflict with America', *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 1997, pp. 18-44.

⁸⁰ P. Peterson, 'The Primacy of the Domestic Agenda', in G. Allison and G. Treverton (eds.), *Rethinking America's Security: Beyond Cold War to New World Order* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992), pp. 57-93.

it.⁸¹ It was not until the terrorist attacks of 9/11 that the US unequivocally re-focused its foreign policy attention upon the Middle East, promulgating a GWoT and launching the costly and protracted invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Taking stock – what drives Russian cooperation in the Middle East today?

During the Cold War, its relationship with the US was the main frame of reference for the USSR's diplomacy in the Middle East. The perceived need for cooperation versus non-cooperation in the region was dictated by its anticipated implications for the superpower relationship. For instance, cooperation in crisis aversion was mandated by the need to prevent a direct confrontation with the US. Against the shifting contexts discussed above – most notably Russia's changing foreign policy during the 1990s, as well as the crystallization of a new Middle Eastern landscape – what have the implications for Russian-US cooperation been? If the drivers of Soviet cooperation with the US in the Middle East were predominantly crisis aversion and the pursuit of status, how have these drivers changed? What is paramount in Russia's calculations on the Middle East today – containing the twin security threats of instability and WMD proliferation, or seeking commercial gain? How will Russia act when pursuit of these objectives appears to be mutually exclusive?

Furthermore, has the USSR's stated rejection of linkage survived in current Russian foreign policy discourse and practice? Or has the post-9/11 primacy of the Middle East for US strategic interests, coupled with Russia's continued clout in the region, opened up new prospects for Russian linkage diplomacy? If post-Soviet Russia sought to instrumentalize regional cooperation to achieve gains in the bilateral agenda with the US, the Middle East would be an appropriate theatre to do so, since it has remained the key region beyond the post-Soviet space in which the

⁸¹ S. Simon and D. Benjamin, 'America and the New Terrorism', *Survival*, vol. 42, no. 1, Spring 2000, pp. 59-75.

Russian government can play the role of enabler or spoiler of US policy. We should, therefore, be analytically attentive to Russian linkage diplomacy vis-à-vis the US as a potential driver of cooperation.

Indeed, scholars have already documented Russian attempts to use its Middle East diplomacy in pursuit of other goals in the Russian-US relationship. Talal Nizameddin, for instance, discusses how NATO expansion and US unilateral policies in the GWoT generated a sense of encirclement in Moscow, causing it to align more closely with Iran and Syria.⁸² Another account, which attempts to isolate the relevance of the ‘US factor’ in Russia’s Middle East policy, is Helen Belopolsky’s work on Russian alignment with so-called challenger states Iran, Iraq, and China.⁸³ However, such accounts typically leave underspecified how exactly the two levels – regional and bilateral – are related in Moscow’s calculations and fail to analytically engage the notion of linkage.

Especially with the advent of the Trump administration in the United States in early 2017, pundits have routinely recycled a myth of deal-making or ‘great bargains’, alleging that either Moscow or Washington DC link cooperation in the Middle East with the Ukraine crisis or other issues. Joseph Nye, for instance, warned in early 2016 that “Russia may try to link cooperation in the Syrian crisis to relief from Western sanctions”,⁸⁴ while *The Economist* headlined a year later that: “Donald Trump seeks a grand bargain with Vladimir Putin.”⁸⁵ Such claims are usually sustained by circumstantial evidence, rarely backed up by analysis of whether linkage is in fact in the

⁸² T. Nizameddin, *Putin’s New Order in the Middle East* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd., 2013).

⁸³ H. Belopolsky, *Russia and the Challengers – Russian Alignment with China, Iran, and Iraq in the Unipolar Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁸⁴ J. S. Nye, ‘The Russian Connection Between Syria and Ukraine’, *The National Interest*, February 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/the-russian-connection-between-syria-ukraine-15237>.

⁸⁵ ‘Donald Trump Seeks a Grand Bargain with Putin’, *The Economist*, 11 February 2017, <https://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21716609-it-terrible-idea-donald-trump-seeks-grand-bargain-vladimir-putin>.

Russian leadership's interest or, indeed, how it would be implemented institutionally. As a result, despite its ubiquity in common parlance on Russian-US relations, the notion of linkage remains devoid of analytical specification, which presents a problem this study seeks to redress.

3) Theoretical framework

3.1) Independent, contextual, and dependent variables

Independent variables: Russia's domestic and international interests

On the basis of the preceding discussion of Russia's post-Cold War foreign policy, this study accounts for a wide array of independent variables that could be said to be driving Russia's cooperation with the US in the Middle East. These interests range from the Russian leadership's security and economic objectives in the Middle East itself, via its bilateral interests with the US, via the perceived imperatives of domestic policy, to considerations of international status. In accounting for such a wide spectrum of drivers, the analysis probes the relative explanatory value of the 'regional' versus the 'bilateral' factor in cooperation, which is a key objective of this study. Put simply: Is Russia's cooperation in the Middle East driven predominantly by its interest in the region itself, or by linkage to other interests vis-à-vis with the US?

In deciphering the plausible regional drivers of Russian cooperation, the empirical chapters will offer a comprehensive historical analysis of Moscow's commercial, cultural, political, security, and non-proliferation interests with the relevant Middle Eastern players examined. The analysis will focus particularly upon the Russian leadership's key security interests in averting regional instability and, by extension, the spillover of such instability to Russia's neighbourhood, and impeding the proliferation of WMD, especially nuclear and chemical arms. Furthermore, a range of commercial interests will be considered, including in the fields of arms sales, civil nuclear

energy, and oil and gas. Finally, existing political relationships, a nostalgia for past Soviet influence, the pursuit of regional status, as well as historical and personal affinities with regional actors, will be taken into account as possible drivers of Russian policy in the Middle East.

The discussion draws upon Andrei Tsygankov's analysis of Russia's post 1990 national interests to embed the discussion of Russian cooperation in an overarching and consistent framework. As noted, this study assumes the specific components of Russia's national interest to be historically contingent and constructed by the country's foreign policy elites, through a process of ongoing contestation and in response to perceived domestic and international challenges and opportunities. Tsygankov's understanding of different interests as represented by Westernist, Statist and Civilizationist thinking serves as a useful point of reference. Since these traditions each entail a distinct identification of the desired Russian 'Self', emphasizing, respectively, Russia's relationship with the West, Russia as an independent state, and Russia as a distinct civilization,⁸⁶ use of such frames lends itself well to this study's Constructivist analysis of Russian cooperation.

Andrei Tsygankov sees Moscow's foreign policy as driven by evolving visions of the national interest, in four different periods from the Gorbachev era of the late 1980s, to the liberal Westernizers' era under Kozyrev in the early 1990s, to the relatively hardline Statist policy under Primakov, to the more pragmatic Statist policy under Putin. This study, analysing Russia's cooperation with the US in the Middle East following Putin's ascent to the presidency in 2000, takes 'pragmatic Statism' as a baseline framework for Russia's national interests, showing how its assertive versus cooperative elements have evolved and changed over the four case studies examined. The influence of Eurasianist and Civilizationist thinking on Russia's policy decisions will be given special consideration, given the geographic focus of this study of the Middle East.

⁸⁶ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*.

Finally, the empirical analysis specifically accounts for the relevance of status as a driver of Russian cooperation. A range of Constructivist scholars interested in the role of social psychological factors and emotions in FPA and IR draw attention to the importance of status, especially as it pertains to the prospects of cooperation. These scholars lament that traditional IR theories, which focus upon the material dimensions of power and economic gain, do not fully exhaust key essential elements of status. They suggest, rather, that status has also to be conceived of as a matter of a positively distinct identity, identity verification, and social attribution.⁸⁷

Larson and Shevchenko argue that especially scholars interested in the prospects of Russian-US cooperation need to account for status, given the inability of other approaches to explain fluctuations in Russia's willingness to cooperate over periods in which Russian interests and domestic politics have remained relatively constant.⁸⁸ Forsberg (et al.) note that states such as Russia, which used to be commonly considered top rated powers, become especially prickly when their social rank is challenged.⁸⁹ Such sensitivity, or 'status inconsistency', arises in the event of a strong incongruence between a state's perceived level of achievement and the recognition accorded to that achievement, for instance, when a country ranks relatively high on economic or military capabilities but may be granted little prestige by the international community. Under such conditions of rank disequilibrium, it is plausible that a nation's decision makers would show a strong desire to change the status quo.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ T. Forsberg, R. Heller and R. Wolf, 'Status and Emotions in Russian Foreign Policy', in T. Forsberg, R. Heller and R. Wolf (eds.), 'Special Issue: Status and Emotions in Russian Foreign Policy', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 47, issues 3-4, 2014, pp. 261-268.

⁸⁸ D. W. Larson and A. Shevchenko, 'Russia Says No: Power, Status, and Emotions in Foreign Policy', in T. Forsberg (et al.), 'Special Issue', pp. 269-279.

⁸⁹ T. Forsberg (et al.), 'Status and Emotions'.

⁹⁰ T. J. Volgy and S. Mayhall, 'Status Inconsistency and International War: Exploring the Effects of Systemic Change', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 1, 1995, pp. 67-84. See also H. Smith, 'Russia as a Great Power: Status Inconsistency and the Two Chechen Wars', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 47, 2014, pp. 355-363 and Liah Greenfeld's work on *ressentiment*, L. Greenfeld, 'The Formation of the Russian National Identity: The Role of Status Insecurity and Ressentiment', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 32, issue 3, 1990, pp. 549-591.

There are many ways of seeking status in international politics, cooperation being just one of them. Alternatives include, for instance, the joining of prestigious international organizations, but also the resort to violence to correct a perceived unjust status inconsistency. Whether status is sought by Russia as an intrinsic social goal or for instrumental reasons (i.e. to leverage it into influence over further objectives) is yet another related question. Andrei Tsyganov, for instance, argues that Russia seeks status recognition from the West as an intrinsic social goal in itself, since it views the ‘West’ as its ‘significant other’.⁹¹

Contextual variable: the trajectory of Russian-US relations

Given that one objective in this study is to probe the explanatory value of linkage diplomacy as a driver of Russia’s cooperation, it is considered useful to treat the trajectory of the Russian-US relationship as a contextual variable in the research design.⁹² Since Vladimir Putin first became Russian President in March 2000, Russian-US relations have been broadly divided into four periods of an either *improving* or *deteriorating* trajectory, as perceived by policymakers in both Moscow and Washington DC:⁹³

Between 2000 and 2004, relations were improving – following 9/11, the US and Russia united in a Global War on Terror (GWOt) partnership under presidents George W. Bush and Vladimir Putin. While relations somewhat soured over the March 2003 Iraq invasion, counterterrorism, economic, and other cooperation continued largely unabated until at least mid 2004.

Between 2004 and 2008 during President Bush’s second term relations were deteriorating. The sum total of disagreements over the US’ ‘Freedom Agenda’, the ‘colour revolutions’ in Georgia and Ukraine, missile defence, NATO expansion, and finally the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, led to a considerable cooling in the relationship.

⁹¹ A. P. Tsyganov, ‘The Frustrating Partnership: Honor, Status, and Emotions in Russia's Discourses of the West’, in T. Forsberg (et al.), ‘Special Issue’, pp. 345-354.

⁹² The theoretical discussion will explain why we should expect covariance between the trajectory of Russian-US relations and the occurrence of linkage diplomacy.

⁹³ This will be shown in detail in the case studies.

Between 2009 and mid 2011, relations again improved. Presidents Obama and Medvedev famously embarked on ‘resetting’ US-Russian relations. A Bilateral Presidential Commission was established to strengthen cooperation in multiple areas.

After mid 2011, deterioration in relations resumed, especially due to disagreements over the civil war in Syria and the crisis in Ukraine. Additional grievances included, on the Russian side, the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1973 on Libya, and on the US side, Edward Snowden finding refuge in Russia in the summer of 2013.

Dependent variable: issue-specific Russian security cooperation with the US in the Middle East

Cooperation

Proceeding from a standard definition of cooperation in the IR literature, I take Russian cooperation with the US to mean that Moscow adjusts its behaviour to the actual or anticipated preferences of the US through a process of policy coordination.⁹⁴ As assumed in the discussion of Cold War cooperation, this coordination process can be explicit or tacit.⁹⁵ Russian cooperation implies that a policy coordination to realize joint Russian-US gains, which need neither be identical nor in the same issue area, occurs. It does not presume an absence of conflict of interests between the Kremlin and the White House, but is based on the assumption that the involved actors’ behaviour is both goal-driven⁹⁶ and involves: “the *voluntary* adjustment [...] of their policies so that they manage their differences and reach some mutually beneficial outcome.”⁹⁷

It should be noted that any state action, entailing the adjustment of behaviour to external preferences, falls on a continuum somewhere between cooperation with completely harmonious interests, cooperation with some conflict of interest, and a unilateral interest-based concession, in which cooperation is compelled through external coercion or deterrence. Whilst these concepts –

⁹⁴ R. Axelrod and R. O. Keohane, ‘Achieving Cooperation under Anarchy: Strategies and Institutions’, *World Politics*, vol. 38, no. 1, 1985, pp. 226-254.

⁹⁵ For a theoretical discussion of tacit versus explicit coordination in bargaining and cooperation, see T. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960).

⁹⁶ Axelrod and Keohane, ‘Achieving Cooperation under Anarchy’.

⁹⁷ J. Grieco, *Cooperation among Nations* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), quoting R. Keohane, *After Hegemony* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

interest harmony, cooperation, and coercion – have discrete meanings at their core, they overlap at the edges. In choosing cases of Russian cooperation, stretching or excessive fuzziness of the concept should be avoided and the latter’s core definitional components be retained. Yet some variance in the degree of these components is inevitable, since state action rarely meets the definitional core of cooperation unconditionally. As the empirical analysis will show, a perception that the Russian government cooperated under duress, had little alternative but to support the US, was more prominent in some case studies than in others.

The Middle Eastern ‘region’

Attempting to draw conceptual and geographic boundaries around the ‘Middle East’, area studies scholars note that there is nothing either natural or neutral about demarcations of ‘regions’, which, rather, have their roots in the security practices of their inventors.⁹⁸ Consequently, different scholars have offered competing lists of countries that make up the ‘Middle East’, depending upon which defining characteristics – the existence of a religious opposition to nationalism, a susceptibility to the pan-Islamic ideal, the presence of pan-Arabist sentiments, or a revisionism driven by the incongruity of nation and territorial state – they have considered most pertinent.⁹⁹ Importantly, as Pinar Bilgin notes, differing definitions of the ‘Middle East’ entail differing understandings of regional security. The term’s definition as an ‘Arab Middle East’ emphasizes the attainment of pan-Arab security concerns, while the ‘Muslim Middle East’ definition takes the ‘Muslim Ummah’ as its referent object. The ‘Middle East’ definition historically conceived of by the US rather entails a conception of security that privileges the security of states (especially that of Israel) and military stability.

⁹⁸ P. Bilgin, ‘Whose “Middle East”? Geopolitical Inventions and Practices of Security’, *International Relations*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2004, pp. 25-41.

⁹⁹ For example, L. Binder, ‘The Middle East as a Subordinate International System’, *World Politics*, vol. 10, no. 3, 1958, pp. 408-429; M. Brecher, ‘The Middle East Subordinate System and Its Impact on Israel’s Foreign Policy’, *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 13, no. 2, 1969, pp. 117-139 and J. Lebovic, ‘The Middle East: The Region as a System’, *International Interactions*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1986, pp. 267-289.

While any one specific regional paradigm merely captures one dimension of regional (in)-security, for the purpose of this study, I define the Middle East in line with US foreign policy interests. Given my analytical focus upon Russian cooperation with the US on those specific security issues *of particular concern to US policymakers* in the region, this definition is most conducive to the research aims posed. According to the US State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, US diplomatic relations with Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Territories, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen fall under its remit.¹⁰⁰

Security 'issues'

Furthermore, following Haas, I adopt a general definition of international 'issues', which: "are separate items that appear on the agenda of negotiators." They arise: "when the terms of interdependence are questioned by one or more of the parties concerned, provided the weaker party succeeds in persuading the stronger to pay attention." As a result: "'issues' become visible, acquire names and places on agendas, elicit studies, and emerge as recurrent topics of discussion in national parliaments and interest groups."¹⁰¹

Thinking about what animates both US and Russian policy in the Middle East, we ponder a large number of possible issues: regional instability, WMD non-proliferation, terrorism, the free and secure flow of oil, credibility with allies etc. For the purpose of this study, I feel it critical to focus upon those security issues that are of particular concern to the US. Since a key goal is to assess whether Russian cooperation is driven by the pursuit of American quid pro quos, it seems intuitive that those security issues prioritized by the US – i.e. those on which Russian cooperation is considered especially relevant – are most likely to be at the core of linkage diplomacy.

¹⁰⁰ Website of the US Department of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, <http://www.state.gov/p/nea/>.

¹⁰¹ P. Haas, 'Why Collaborate? Issue-linkage and International Regimes', *World Politics*, vol. 32, 1980, pp. 357-405.

In the above section I have considered it useful to distinguish regional issues from bilateral issues in Russian-US relations, in order to allow for a clear demarcation between what will be introduced below as leverage building versus linkage diplomacy. This is especially relevant given an obvious overlap between the shared Russian-US regional and bilateral agendas. To give an example, the Syrian Civil War broadly, and Syrian chemical weapons demilitarization narrowly, have constituted a regional security issue on which the US and Russian governments cooperated in 2013 and 2014. At the same time, the Syrian issue could be said to have been part of the Russian-US bilateral agenda. Given the aim to analytically isolate evidence of linkage diplomacy, I define the ‘bilateral’ as everything that is *not* also part of the shared ‘regional’ agenda.

3.2) Research propositions and auxiliary assumptions

Proposition 1

Russia’s cooperation with the United States in the Middle East is driven by its narrow security, economic, and other interests in that region.

The first proposition holds that Russian objectives in cooperation with the US are entirely a function of narrow regional (Middle Eastern), rather than bilateral considerations. In this ideal scenario, in which the Russian leadership’s concerns in cooperation are de-linked from assessments of its relationship with the US, cooperation materializes in a situation in which: “neither needs to link issues, since each will do what the other wants it to; each will obtain its best outcome, without making its decisions contingent on the other's behavior, without linkage.”¹⁰² If Russia’s cooperation is driven by its commercial, cultural, political, security, and non-proliferation interests in the Middle East, the empirical analysis should reveal little or no evidence of Russian linkage diplomacy.

¹⁰² A. Stein, ‘The Politics of Linkage’, *World Politics*, vol. 33, 1980, pp. 63-64.

Proposition 2

Russia's cooperation with the United States in the Middle East is driven by expectations of linkage to other issues in the Russian-US bilateral agenda.

If the second proposition holds true, Moscow decides to support US policy in the Middle East with a view to extracting larger payoffs in the bilateral relationship. Moscow's cooperation, in this scenario, is mostly 'exchange money', that is, capital for compromise with Washington on issues outside the Middle East.¹⁰³

On linkage diplomacy

Issue-linkaging is ubiquitous in international politics and has received extensive treatment in the cooperation literature.¹⁰⁴ As William Wallace notes: "linkage between unrelated or only loosely-related issues in order to gain increased leverage in negotiation is an ancient and accepted aspect of diplomacy."¹⁰⁵ A useful analogy for linkage diplomacy between states is the practice of vote-trading, or 'logrolling', in the US legislature. Since each senator has an incentive to appear effective to their constituents, there are many opportunities for mutually rewarding activities between senators. This state of affairs has led to the emergence of "a folkway which involves helping out a colleague and getting repaid in kind" – it includes vote-trading but involves so many types of mutually rewarding behaviour that: "it is not an exaggeration to say that reciprocity is a way of life in the Senate."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ This study does not assume propositions 1 and 2 to be mutually exclusive, given its underlying belief that Russian interests in cooperation are socially constructed and multifaceted. Russian cooperation could be driven by both regional and linkage interests. The propositions presented here are ideal types and the task of this study is to probe their relative explanatory value.

¹⁰⁴ M. McGinnis, 'Issue Linkage and the Evolution of International Cooperation', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 30, issue 1, 1986; R. E. Tollison and T. D. Willett, 'An Economic Theory of Mutually Advantageous Issue Linkage in International Negotiations', *International Organization*, vol. 33, 1979, pp. 425-49.

¹⁰⁵ W. Wallace, 'Atlantic Relations: Policy Coordination and Conflict', *International Affairs*, vol. 52, 1976, p. 164.

¹⁰⁶ D. R. Matthews, *US Senators and their World* (New York, NY: Vantage Books, 1960), p. 100, quoted in R. Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

Addressing how issues can be linked in interstate diplomacy with the goal of obtaining advantages in negotiation, Tollison and Willett note that: “through the formal or informal linking of issues [...] the possibility emerges of indirectly paying compensation through positions taken in other negotiations.”¹⁰⁷ They explain that, since providing explicit side payments is difficult in diplomacy, the best alternative is often to find another area of negotiation which has highly skewed benefits. By linking the two negotiations, there may be a possibility of securing agreement that brings benefits to both countries.¹⁰⁸

Thus what I refer to in this study as *linkage diplomacy* involves a Russian strategy of trying to make cooperation vis-à-vis a given Middle Eastern security issue conditional upon American behaviour on a different issue outside the region. For such a strategy to work, it is necessary that Russian officials be perceived to successfully ‘deter’. As Schelling explains: “Deterrence [...] is concerned with influencing the choices that another party will make, and doing it by influencing his expectations of how we will behave. It involves confronting him with evidence for believing that our behaviour will be determined by his behaviour.”¹⁰⁹

Theoretical assumptions regarding the scope of linkage diplomacy

Theoretical literature on cooperation offers a range of propositions delineating what should be a conducive context for pursuing linkage diplomacy. These propositions will be discussed below and their explanatory value assessed in the empirical chapters. The analysis will distinguish between: (1) *institutional-contextual factors* (including the time horizon and institutional constellation of players involved in cooperation); (2) perceptions of the *meaningfulness* and *costliness* of cooperation, and (3) the contextual variable in this study, which relates to the

¹⁰⁷ Tollison and Willett, ‘An Economic Theory’.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Schelling, *Strategy of Conflict*, p. 13. See also J. D. Fearon, ‘Signalling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands Versus Sinking Costs’, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 41, no. 1, 1997, pp. 68-90.

trajectory of relations between the players involved in cooperation. If linkage is indeed found to be a driver of Russia's cooperation (Proposition 2), then these three aspects should determine the scope for its successful pursuit.

(1) Institutional-contextual factors

The scope Russian diplomats have to pursue linkage over Moscow's cooperation on a Middle Eastern security issue should partially be a function of the specific security issue and the resultant form of cooperation. Proceeding from the basic definition of 'cooperation' offered above to identifying the precise *forms* which Russian cooperation with the US has actually taken over the past 15 years, we see that the assumption of a dichotomy between spontaneous crisis management and sustained conflict resolution, that underpinned the Cold War account of cooperation, obscures important nuances. Russian cooperation has, for instance, taken the following forms:

- voting in support of the US at the UN Security Council;
- supporting the US in arenas of negotiation outside the UN;
- forgiving debt to Middle Eastern states at the request of the US;
- exercising diplomatic leverage over regional players to further US objectives, and
- pursuing joint WMD disarmament with the US in the region.

Furthermore, specific Middle Eastern security issues have historically entailed specific institutional forms of cooperation. For instance, during the period under consideration, the Iranian nuclear issue has been dealt with primarily using the so-called 'P5+1' (involving the US and Russia, plus China, France, the UK, and Germany), whereas the 'Middle East Quartet' has been the key forum addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (involving the US and Russia, plus the EU and UN). For Syrian chemical weapons demilitarization in 2013 and 2014, a novel form of cooperation within an OPCW-UN Joint Mission was conceived. In many instances, the UN Security Council, on which the Russian Federation has a permanent seat and veto right, remains the central venue to negotiate and enact cooperation.

In this study I take the form of cooperation to entail variance on: (1) the number of players involved (Russian-US bilateral versus multilateral cooperation); (2) the government agencies and actors involved on both the US and Russian sides; (3) the nature of cooperation (negotiations versus military-technical cooperation), and (4) the time horizon involved (ad hoc versus iterated versus protracted engagement). Arguably, the scope for Russian linkage diplomacy should partially depend upon the form of cooperation and concomitant institutional constellations of players involved from both sides.

Tollison and Willett recognize the importance of such institutional factors, noting that the participation of different diplomats, with diverging stakes and levels of seniority in different international negotiations, can obscure the smooth process of linkage diplomacy.¹¹⁰ Especially when cooperation is negotiated at a technical working level, for instance, by arms control experts lacking a full view of the bilateral relationship, prospects for linkage should be constrained. In such instances, it should only be once policies percolate to the top and the same upper echelon officials responsible for making policy in multiple issue areas discuss cooperation that opportunities for linkage diplomacy should open up.¹¹¹

To turn from the institutional constellation of players to the time factor, all else being equal, the extent to which talks involved in cooperation are institutionalized and iterated should also matter for the possibility of pursuing linkage. In response to the highly stylized idea of a ‘one-shot’ Prisoners’ Dilemma game, which is often used as the point of departure in theoretical discussions of cooperation in IR,¹¹² scholars have noted the fundamental importance of time. For instance, Snidal argues that assuming cooperation to be of a: “one-shot nature is inadequate for analyzing

¹¹⁰ Tollison and Willett, ‘An Economic Theory’.

¹¹¹ Stein, ‘The Politics of Linkage’, p. 81.

¹¹² Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation*.

problems where considerations of play through time are important.”¹¹³ Whether cooperation materializes through extended engagement or discrete momentary decisions matters. Lipson notes that the mere fact of repetition changes several key features of cooperation, since it permits the actors involved to make threats and commitments, it makes reputation important, and allows actors to make their strategy contingent on the prior choices of others.¹¹⁴

Returning to the different forms of cooperation listed above, it is important to note that they involve different time horizons. For instance, cooperation in the P5+1 or the UN Security Council can extend over weeks or months, unlike ad hoc shifts in the Russian government’s policy position, which can also meet the definition of cooperation. In sum, the occurrence of linkage in this study should partially be a function of institutional-contextual factors, including the constellation and mandate of government actors involved, as well as the temporal characteristics of cooperation.

(2) Perceptions of the meaningfulness and costliness of cooperation

Furthermore, the scope for the Russian leadership to pursue linkage with the US should be partially a function of American perceptions of Russian actions. As Larson notes, ‘cooperation’ and ‘defection’ – terms which are taken at face value in the game theory literature – are far from unambiguous in the real world. Whether a cooperative act is actually interpreted as cooperation is heavily influenced by pre-existing beliefs held by individual players.¹¹⁵ Also, perceived objectives in cooperation affect whether policymakers construe support as sincerely motivated or a defection as justifiable. Perceived intentionality, as well as the costliness of concessions, are

¹¹³ D. Snidal, ‘Coordination versus Prisoners’ Dilemma: Implications for International Cooperation and Regimes’, *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 79, no. 4, December 1985, pp. 923-942.

¹¹⁴ C. Lipson, ‘International Cooperation in Economic and Security Affairs’, *World Politics*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1984, pp. 1-23.

¹¹⁵ D. Larson, ‘The Psychology of Reciprocity in International Relations’, *Negotiation Journal*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1988, pp. 281-301.

important elements favouring reciprocity in cooperation. A cooperative step is perceived to be more meaningful if it appears intentional, rather than forced by a third party or circumstances, as well as relatively costly, rather than simply amounting to a correction of previous breaches.¹¹⁶

As a result, expectations of reciprocity in cooperation cannot be assessed without considering how the parties construe and subjectively interpret the meaning of their interaction. Thus the scope for linkage should also be determined by whether the Kremlin is perceived by American officials to have had a viable alternative to cooperation, and whether Russian cooperation is considered meaningful and costly or not. These factors should influence how likely US officials are to think of Russian cooperation as warranting reciprocity.

(3) The trajectory of relations between the players involved

Returning to the contextual variable in this study – the trajectory of the Russian-US relationship – we would finally assume that the extent to which Russian officials can extract larger payoffs from the US over cooperation in the Middle East should be partially a function of the quality of the bilateral relationship. The better the relationship, and the ‘thicker’ the concomitant Russian-US agenda, the more scope, in theory, there should be for linkage diplomacy since sustained reciprocity generates trust as a result of the "recurrent and gradually expanding character" of bilateral engagement.¹¹⁷

In this context, Keohane usefully distinguishes between two different forms of reciprocity in IR. He takes ‘specific reciprocity’ to imply that partners exchange items of equivalent value in a strictly delimited sequence. ‘Diffuse reciprocity’, by contrast, involves an exchange in which the definition of equivalence is less precise and the sequence of events less narrowly bounded. A

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ R. Keohane, ‘Reciprocity in International Relations’, *International Organization*, vol. 40, no. 1, 1986.

concept with similar connotations to that of diffuse reciprocity is ‘social exchange’: “an ongoing series of sequential actions which may continue indefinitely, never balancing but continuing to entail mutual concessions within the context of shared commitments and values.”¹¹⁸ While the nature of rewards in diffuse reciprocity is underspecified, Keohane warns that some degree of rough equivalence has to be integral to the meaning of reciprocity, in the most basic sense in which good is unmistakably returned for good, and bad for bad.

Expectations of ‘diffuse reciprocity’ become especially relevant when the “shadow of the future” in cooperation is large, given the involved actors’ expectations that they will continue to interact. Returning to the contextual variable, all else being equal, the “shadow of the future” should correlate with the trajectory of bilateral relations. The better the Russian-US relationship, the greater the anticipation of diffuse reciprocity in cooperation, given the expectation of durable and frequent interaction going forward. If Russian-US ties are improving, it is more likely for both sides to assess specific security cooperation in the Middle East within the context of a long-term overall relationship.

To summarize the above discussion, if Russia’s cooperation with the US in the Middle East is found to be driven by expectations of linkage, as stipulated in Proposition 2, we would expect the actual scope for such linkage to be determined by institutional-contextual factors, US perceptions of the meaningfulness and costliness of Russian actions, as well as the trajectory of the Russian-US bilateral relationship.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

Theoretical assumptions about Russian leverage building in cooperation

Furthermore, the cooperation literature turns our attention to plausible Russian strategies *within* cooperation. Since this study assumes the Russian interest in cooperation to be multifaceted and subject to ongoing contestation, it is conceivable that the Russian leadership might decide to cooperate with the US on a Middle Eastern issue, for instance to discipline an ally, while then protecting its commercial or other interests with that ally.

Neoliberal institutionalists argue that states under anarchy are *rational egoists*: they seek to maximize absolute gains and worry little about how they fare relative to others. Concerns about ‘cheating’ are the only real impediment to cooperation, but can be mitigated, for instance, by international regimes.¹¹⁹ Realists, by contrast, argue that the general insecurity under international anarchy leads states to constantly worry about their relative positions.¹²⁰ They contend that a state under anarchy is a *defensive positionalist*; it is indeed worried that its partners in cooperation might cheat, but is even more concerned about its physical survival and political independence, which both depend upon its relative capabilities. As a result, a state: “will decline to join, will leave, or will sharply limit its commitment to cooperation if it believes that gaps in otherwise mutually positive gains favor partners.”¹²¹

Assuming Moscow had apprehensions about its cooperation generating relatively greater gains for the US, it would have strategies available in order to mitigate such concerns (short of not cooperating at all). Having decided that cooperation is in its primary interest – whether for regional considerations (Proposition 1) or in anticipation of linkage with the US (Proposition 2) – Russian officials and diplomats can then shape the terms of cooperation, or accompany

¹¹⁹ A. Stein, ‘Coordination and Collaboration Regimes in an Anarchic World’, *International Organization*, vol. 36, 1982, pp. 299-324.

¹²⁰ J. Gowa, ‘Anarchy, Egoism, and Third Images’, *International Organization*, vol. 43, 1986, pp. 167-86.

¹²¹ Grieco, *Cooperation Among Nations*, p. 10.

cooperation with other measures, such that additional gains are accrued. Importantly, it is assumed that Russia could pursue leverage for itself – for instance, in protecting its commercial interests in the Middle East that might suffer as a result of its cooperation with the US – or for its regional partners – for instance, in bolstering their security position, which US policy threatens to render more vulnerable.

The example of Syrian chemical weapons demilitarization in 2013-2014 serves to illustrate leverage building in cooperation. Having decided that its primary regional objectives were best met by cooperating with the US in ridding its ally Syria of chemical weapons – in order to prevent a punitive military strike against the Assad regime – did Russia attempt to counterbalance such policy with other measures, worried that the American position in Syria would be unduly bolstered through such cooperation? For example, did Moscow step up its conventional weapons sales to Damascus? Such a step would amount to leverage building for a Middle Eastern partner vis-à-vis the US. To give a different example, Russian attempts to exclude financial or energy-related sanctions against Iran from UN SC Resolution 1929, which Moscow supported in principle, amounted to an instance of leverage building for itself, since Russian businesses stood to benefit from such a policy.

In accounting for Russian officials' pursuit of leverage in cooperation, I introduce an element of rational choice into the Constructivist prism underpinning this study. While I assume Russian objectives in cooperation to be socially constructed, I also assume that Russian leaders make rational choices in cooperation as to which course of action will most likely enable them to maximize utility from cooperation. Whilst rejecting Rational Choice Theory's contention that actors' identities and preferences are fixed, I adopt its assumption that Russian behaviour in cooperation is consciously goal-driven. This behaviour, I argue, is the outcome of a rational decision-making process within the Russian leadership, in which possible outcomes of actions are

spelled out and a choice is made to maximize what are socially constructed and not necessarily mutually exclusive interests in cooperation with the US.¹²²

4) Research design

4.1) Case selection

I conducted a small-n qualitative analysis of four case studies in order to assess the plausibility of the two competing propositions and to analyse Russian leverage building in cooperation. The choice of an in-depth, comparative case study approach was considered appropriate, given the need to identify the drivers behind Russian cooperation in the Middle East, and to uncover the nuanced mechanics of leverage building and linkage diplomacy.

A basic requirement guiding the choice of cases was to make sure they entailed a shift in the Russian position from non-cooperation or equivocacy to cooperation, whether explicit or tacit. The cases also had to be chosen from periods of both improving and deteriorating Russian relations with the US, to allow for variance in the contextual variable. As stated earlier, the post-9/11 period can be broadly divided into four distinct phases of either improvement or deterioration in bilateral relations. This classification lent itself well to the case study selection: 2000-2004 (Chapter 2); 2004-2008 (Chapter 3); 2009-2011 (Chapter 4), and 2011-2014 (Chapter 5).

I also selected cases involving security issues which have been of particular concern to the US. Given the primary goal of assessing whether Russian cooperation in the Middle East has been driven by expectations of linkage, it seemed intuitive that precisely those security issues

¹²² A. H. Kydd, 'Methodological Individualism and Rational Choice', in C. Reus-Smit and D. Snidal (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

prioritized by the US – i.e. those over which Russian cooperation was considered especially relevant – would be most conducive to studying linkage diplomacy.

Finally, I chose cases entailing different types of security issues (ranging from nuclear and chemical weapons proliferation to conventional security issues), which in turn required different forms of cooperation. Such additional variance enabled me to probe the assumption that the scope for any Russian linkage pursuit could be a function of institutional-contextual factors. Since Moscow views different venues for cooperation as more or less status-enhancing, such analysis also enabled me to flesh out status-seeking as a driver of Russian policy.

A detailed review of Russian-US cooperation over the past 15 years yielded four case studies that met the criteria outlined above particularly well:

The **first case study** looks at Russian cooperation with the US following the March 2003 invasion of Iraq. While Russia had rejected the war, it supported UN Security Council Resolution 1483 in May 2003, as well as subsequent UN resolutions on Iraq. Moscow also expressed readiness to negotiate forgiving Iraq's debt and was involved in talks with the US throughout 2003 and 2004 on assisting in the economic reconstruction of Iraq.

The **second case study** deals with events preceding and following the 'Cedar Revolution' in Lebanon in early 2005. Whilst Russia has had more troubled relations with the US since 2004, it supported the Bush administration in calling on Syria to pull its troops out of Lebanon, following the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in Beirut. In doing so, Moscow urged Syria's compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1559, from which it originally abstained in September 2004.

The **third case study** covers the months leading up to Russian support for UN Security Council Resolution 1929 in June 2010, which imposed sanctions on Iran, during a period of ‘reset’ in Russian-US relations. The Russian government also signed a ban on the delivery of the S-300 defensive missile system to Tehran.

Finally, the **fourth case study** looks at Russia’s collaboration with the US in the removal and destruction of Syria’s declared chemical weapons in 2013 and 2014. While bilateral technical Russian-US exchanges on the Syrian chemical stockpile in 2012 and 2013 fell short of cooperation, Moscow agreed to cooperate after the Eastern Ghouta chemical weapons attack in August 2013. Following the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2118 on 27 September 2013, practical cooperation to implement its terms proceeded over several months, despite the continued worsening of Russian-US bilateral relations over the Ukraine crisis.

I decided to focus upon the post-9/11 period, omitting the 1990s, for a number of reasons. The first, practical, aim was to keep the scope of the study manageable. Second, it was 9/11 – a watershed moment for US foreign policy in the Middle East – which exacerbated the regional security landscape in that it precipitated the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan and the 2003 invasion of Iraq. 9/11 further elevated Middle Eastern security issues in terms of their strategic importance for US foreign policy, making them especially conducive to the study of Russian-US linkage diplomacy.

Two prominent cases of Russian cooperation with the US were considered for inclusion – the Medvedev government’s abstention from UN Security Council Resolution 1973 on Libya in March 2011, which could be construed as cooperation, and Russia’s cooperation in the P5+1 towards UN Security Council Resolution 2231 on Iran in 2015. Considering the ‘reset’ period (2009-2011), I decided to include Iran negotiations rather than the Libya vote, given the more

extensive diplomacy involved, which I anticipated would allow for a richer analysis of linkage diplomacy. Having decided to study Iran sanctions negotiations in 2009 and 2010, I chose a different type of security issue in the final period (2011-2014), opting for Syrian chemical weapons demilitarization. Aware that this issue would represent the only case study to involve a level of military-technological cooperation (the removal and destruction phase of the disarmament effort), I was curious to learn what it might reveal about Russian objectives and strategies in cooperation.¹²³

4.2) Data collection, measurement, and fieldwork

Since this study is concerned with the drivers of Russian cooperation, the key objective was to obtain widespread interview access to officials. However, it should be acknowledged at the outset that, first, scrutiny of final decision-making processes on foreign policy, while constrained in any political system, is especially limited in the Russian Federation. Whilst a number of domestic actors, most notably the military-industrial complex, the oil and gas industry, and the Russian Orthodox Church, represent important lobbies influencing Russian Middle East policy, foreign policy decisions are in the final instance taken by a small circle including the President and his key advisors.¹²⁴

In a second note on research constraints, while historians might say that archival evidence – diaries, letters, memoranda, minutes of meetings – provides an ‘unobtrusive’ measure of policymakers’ perceptions where they have less reason to distort their language, arguably even the

¹²³ Russia’s post-9/11 cooperation with the US in the invasion of Afghanistan was excluded in order to maintain the geographic focus upon the Middle East. I also decided not to include a case study involving Russian non-cooperation, which would have provided variance on the dependent variable. An analysis of the occurrence, conveying and mechanics of Russian linkage diplomacy in cooperation, which was of primary interest to this author, is only feasible in cases in which the Russian government decided to cooperate.

¹²⁴ Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*; F. Hill, ‘Putin: The One-Man Show the West Doesn’t Understand’, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, vol. 72, no. 3, 2016.

thoughts officials express in private or intragovernmental documents may be biased by their desire to win favour with superiors, organizational interests, or a concern for 'history'.¹²⁵ In other words, even when access to decision-makers' accounts is obtained, such evidence needs to be treated with caution. Larson, therefore, advises that, when engaging in interviews, the analyst should be acutely aware of being exposed to instrumental language, which is intended to serve purposes other than expressing the communicator's true beliefs. The analyst might, therefore, wish to use an indirect method of inference, which first tries to ascertain the subject's communication goal and its effect on verbal content, before making any judgements about beliefs.¹²⁶

Bearing these constraints of Russian FPA in mind, I proceeded to conduct interviews with high-level Russian and US officials involved in my four case studies, speaking with over 50 US officials, and 20 Russian officials and experts between March 2016 and October 2017. Interviews were conducted in Washington DC, Moscow, Manama, Amman, Beirut, as well as via phone or Skype. While on the American side, I obtained access to officials at the National Security Council (NSC), State Department and Pentagon, I was limited to ex- and current Foreign Ministry officials on the Russian side.

I recognize that using US officials' perceptions as a window into Russian preference formation in cooperation is suboptimal. Yet such an approach was viewed as the best proxy, given the constraints on interview access on the Russian side. Furthermore, I interviewed third-party

¹²⁵ Larson, 'The Psychology of Reciprocity'.

¹²⁶ Ibid. On the specific challenges of interviewing elites in Russia, see S. Werning Rivera (et al.), 'Interviewing Political Elites: Lessons From Russia', *Political Science and Politics*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2002, pp. 683-688. For literature consulted on the general challenges of elite interviewing, see J. M. Berry, 'Validity and Reliability Issues in Elite Interviewing', *Political Science and Politics*, vol. 35, no. 4, December 2002; P. H. J. Davies, 'Spies as Informants: Triangulation and the Interpretation of Elite Interview Data in the Study of the Intelligence and Security Services', *Political Studies Partnership*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2001; J. D. Aberbach and B. A. Rockman, 'Conducting and Coding Elite Interviews', *Political Science and Politics*, vol. 35, no. 4, December 2002.

official sources to add nuance and anecdotes to my narrative. Given the comparatively limited access to Russian government officials, I also interviewed my contacts in the Moscow expert community for additional insights. Based in Moscow between July 2015 and April 2016, and affiliated with the Carnegie Moscow Center and the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute of Oriental Studies, I was able to build a network with Russian policy analysts and former diplomats and discuss my research informally with them. I also regularly attended events and conferences, for instance at the Russian International Affairs Council, *IMEMO*, *RIA Novosti*, the Russian Academy of Sciences, and other venues. These experiences all informed my understanding of Russian foreign policy at a more fundamental level.

On the one hand, the importance of the interviews conducted cannot be overstated, given the nuanced evidence obtained. Russian and US officials also shared personal anecdotes that were absent from other primary source material. On the other hand, it was important to triangulate the interview material with memoirs of key actors and published primary evidence (government speeches, press releases etc.), in order to build the most comprehensive account of Russian cooperation.¹²⁷ I studied Kremlin and Russian Foreign Ministry documents, press releases, and commentaries related to Russia's relations with the US, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Iran over the relevant time period. I also conducted a thorough analysis of Russian press coverage of the events studied, relying mostly upon *The Current Digest of the Russian Press*, the Sputnik digital archive, as well as key outlets such as *Kommersant*, *Novaya Gazeta*, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, and *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*.

¹²⁷ Primakov, *Russia and the Arabs*; George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2010); C. Rice, *No Higher Honour: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2011); J. Bolton, *Surrender Is Not An Option – Defending America At The United Nations And Abroad* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007); K. Annan, *Interventions: A Life in War and Peace* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), and V. Nouzille, *Dans Le Secret Des Présidents – CIA, Maison-Blanche, Elysée: Les Dossiers Confidentiels 1981-2010* (Paris: Fayard, 2010).

A final note on interview proceedings. Whether speaking with respondents in person, via phone or Skype, I initially inquired about their consent to being recorded and quoted in my study. Most US interlocutors consented for the interview to be recorded, which allowed for the meetings to be transcribed. When no such consent to record was provided, I took written notes. In most instances, it was agreed that I would be allowed to use the information provided in the interview, but would not attribute it to the interviewee directly unless explicit, additional consent via email exchange was provided to this end. Roughly half of my interviews with Russian officials were off-the-record. All interviews in Moscow were conducted in Russian and the transcripts or notes from these interviews were translated into English by the author.¹²⁸

5) The argument

This study argues that Russian cooperation with the US in the Middle East is predominantly driven by its security, non-proliferation, and economic interests in that region, as opposed to expectations of US reciprocity. This holds true during times of both improving and deteriorating bilateral relations. Whilst direct linkage diplomacy vis-à-vis the US does not meet the test of explanatory variable in this study, Russian concerns with status, a preference for multilateral diplomacy, as well as the desire to protect the authority of the UN Security Council have been identified as auxiliary drivers of Russia's cooperation with the US.

Furthermore, Russia seeks to build regional leverage in cooperation, driven by its historical interests with Middle Eastern allies. As this study shows, leverage building in cooperation seeks to bolster both Moscow and Russia's regional partners, and can take the form of expanding

¹²⁸ Interview quotes by Russian sources in the text are translations by the author. The titles of Russian primary sources are translated by the author in the footnotes. Lengthy titles of sources are given in abbreviated form in the footnotes. For full titles, see the bibliography. A final note on the transliteration: I have used “y” to denote “й”, “ ’ ” for “ь”, “yu” for “ю”, “ya” for “я”, “i” for “и” and “ий”, “e” for “э”, “kh” for “х”, “zh” for “ж”, “ts” for “ц”, “ch” for “ч”, “sh” for “ш” and “sch” for “щ”.

economic and political ties with client states, curtailing US unilateral influence over conflict resolution, shielding clients diplomatically and providing weapons systems, as well as championing consensual over coercive approaches to arms control.

Russian pursuit of direct linkage could not be confirmed as a driver of cooperation. That said, there is evidence that Moscow pursues diffuse reciprocity, is eager to accumulate goodwill or 'credit' with the US, which can then be used to find accommodation over other bilateral issues. The pursuit of diffuse reciprocity is an important additional driver of Russian cooperation, especially when Russian-US bilateral relations are on an upward trajectory. This reflects the fact that, whilst its interests in the Middle East are important to Moscow in their own right, the US remains a key reference point for Russia's foreign policy.

The institutional form of cooperation, which results from the specific nature of any security issue, marginally influences the scope for Russia's pursuit of reciprocity. Especially when cooperation involves ad hoc and short-lived diplomacy, or technical talks led by low- to mid-level 'issue' experts, as opposed to sustained engagement between senior officials with responsibility for the broader relationship, opportunities for linkage diplomacy are inherently limited. However, the sparse evidence of linkage in this study is more convincingly explained by stated policy and US perceptions of the meaning and costliness of Russian actions, rather than by the institutional-contextual factors stipulated in the cooperation literature. When Russian-US relations deteriorate significantly, scope for reciprocity in cooperation is additionally reduced.

Furthermore, the success of cooperation does not depend upon the contextual variable. While a positive trajectory in the Russian-US relationship is always perceived to facilitate issue-specific cooperation in the Middle East, a negative trajectory has no automatic adverse effect on

cooperation. Indeed, under certain conditions, issue-specific cooperation can be fully de-linked from evolving bilateral crisis.

6) Contributions to the literature

This project makes important contributions to the IR and Russian FPA literatures. First, the study speaks to the community of Russian foreign policy analysts, since it focuses upon Russian objectives and strategies in cooperation with the US. Recent years have seen a flurry of pundit analysis suggesting that Russia is amenable to ‘deal-making’, ‘trades’ or ‘linkage’ in conducting its Middle East diplomacy. However, few accounts have provided granular insight into the underlying drivers of Russia’s Middle East policy, weighing the relative explanatory value of Russia’s commercial versus security and non-proliferation interests in that region, let alone subjecting the notion of linkage to rigorous empirical verification. The need for such nuanced analysis seems all the more pressing, given: (1) exacerbating security challenges in the Middle East which, over 15 years into the Global War on Terror, do not appear to abate; (2) Russia’s growing influence in the Middle East in recent years, and (3) enduring tensions in the broader Russian-US bilateral relationship.¹²⁹

Second, this study fills a gap in the scholarship on cooperation in IR by providing an empirical account of whether and how linkage diplomacy between great powers plays out in practice, how it varies with the state of their bilateral relationships, to what extent it depends upon the specific form of cooperation, as well as how much it actually matters in explaining cooperation. Whilst there is a substantial body of literature addressing US-Soviet linkage diplomacy during *détente*,

¹²⁹ Dmitry Suslov, for instance, warns that the “limited systemic confrontation” between Russia and the US is “for the long haul”, while Dmitri Trenin argues that the conflict is about principle and unlikely to be resolved in the foreseeable future. D. Suslov, ‘For a Good Long While’, *Russia in Global Affairs*, 18 December 2014, and D. Trenin, ‘Russia and the United States: A Temporary Break or a New Cold War?’, *Carnegie Moscow Center*, 30 December 2014. This pessimistic sentiment is echoed by US experts on the American-Russian relationship, such as Legvold, *Return to Cold War*.

its relevance and drivers have not been rigorously studied in relation to Russia's contemporary Middle East diplomacy.

7) Outline of the thesis

Chapters 2 to 5 present the empirical analysis gathered in this study in four case studies of Russian cooperation with the US in the Middle East over the past 15 years:

Chapter 2 argues that, at a time of relative economic and political weakness, Russia's cooperation in supporting UN Resolution 1483 and subsequent resolutions on Iraq was driven by a pragmatic desire to secure commercial contracts in post-war Iraq, to thwart future US unilateralism, as well as elicit American reciprocity. Moscow then built leverage in cooperation, shaping the provisions of UN resolutions 1483, 1511, and 1546 with a view to strengthening the Security Council's role in an Iraqi settlement, reducing scope for the Coalition Provisional Authority's (CPA) prerogative in determining Iraq's future, and involving regional states. Furthermore, Russia pursued economic leverage for its own businesses in Iraq, lobbying the US and UN regarding its existing contracts under the 'Oil-for-Food' programme, eyeing further opportunities in economic reconstruction, defending its long-term investments in the Iraqi oil sector, while using Iraq's Soviet-era debt as a bargaining chip.

Russian officials also hoped for continued pragmatic cooperation with the US on counterterrorism, the Middle East, in the NATO-Russia Council, but also on energy and economic interests. As the chapter shows, expectations of US diffuse reciprocity were thus an important contextual factor explaining Russian cooperation. Any notion of direct linkage, on the other hand, was rejected by US officials as a matter of principle. Since Russia was by no means central to US policy in the Middle East in 2003, and since Russia was unable to rehabilitate its

image as a partner in Iraq, having opposed the invasion, US officials were then hardly amenable to granting Russia reciprocity over cooperation.

Chapter 3 argues that, having abstained from the vote on UN Security Council Resolution 1559, Russia's readiness to cooperate in calling for Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon in early 2005 was chiefly aimed at preventing an escalation in the region, including possible US military action against Damascus. Getting behind international support for the resolution's enforcement was also not conceived of by Moscow as a significant concession, considering that its stakes in Syria's continued presence in Lebanon were limited. Russia's insistence on Syrian withdrawal was then framed by Moscow as an essentially unchanged position in support of existing UN resolutions. Leverage in cooperation was sought by drawing out the Syrian departure from Lebanon to avoid internal and regional weakening of the Assad regime, selling defensive weapons systems to Damascus, as well as shielding Syria from UN sanctions amid the international probe into Rafik Hariri's murder.

The chapter shows that Russian cooperation was not driven by linkage in the conventional sense of demanding American quid pro quos, nor were there ambitious expectations for diffuse US reciprocity at a time of growing bilateral tension. Rather, Russian support for Syrian troop withdrawal constituted an effort to undermine US neoconservative democracy promotion in the Levant, in the final instance to prevent an emerging link between the Middle Eastern and post-Soviet regions in the Bush administration's 'Freedom Agenda-mindset'.

Chapter 4 shows that Russia's diplomacy on the Iran nuclear issue in 2009 and 2010 was, first and foremost, intended to elicit Tehran's compliance with existing UN resolutions. While Russia remained less concerned about the military dimension of Iran's nuclear programme than the US, Moscow feared Washington or Tel Aviv might take unilateral measures, including the use of

force, to resolve the dispute. In that context, Russia's position gradually shifted towards support for the American 'pressure track' on Iran, also given the perceived diplomatic intransigence of the Ahmadinejad government in defying the Obama administration's diplomatic overtures. Having decided to cooperate with the US in disciplining Iranian behaviour, Russia then negotiated qualified language and carve-outs in 1929, especially related to Iran's military, energy, and financial sectors. However, the Kremlin did not try to abort the multilateral sanctions effort altogether, being adamant to preserve the UN Security Council as the chief venue for negotiations on Iran.

Furthermore, mindful that containing a nuclear Iran topped the Obama administration's foreign policy agenda, Russia hoped its cooperation would elicit US reciprocity on bilateral issues, especially European missile defence, ratification of the 1-2-3 Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, and Russia's bid for WTO accession. Yet, while Russia calculated that cooperation on Iran would make an 'atmospheric' contribution to a more constructive relationship overall during the Obama-Medvedev 'reset', there is only selective evidence that Russian officials sought direct quid pro quos from their US counterparts.

Finally, **Chapter 5** argues that Russia's cooperation on Syrian chemical weapons demilitarization in 2013-2014 was predominantly driven by a desire to avert a punitive Western military strike against Syria, which Moscow worried would play out analogously to the 'Libyan scenario' in 2011. A concern with chemical non-proliferation in the volatile region, as well as the forceful international outcry over the August 2013 Eastern Ghouta chemical attack, additionally played into Russian officials' calculations, although they would not have constituted sufficient conditions for cooperation in the absence of a military threat. Having opted for cooperation with the US, Russia then pursued leverage for Bashar Al-Assad. Its efforts consisted in carving out an independent role for the Syrian regime in multilateral cooperation, shielding it from further

allegations of chemical weapons use, and supplying Damascus with additional military hardware, all with a view to strengthening its hand in future political negotiations.

Yet, as the chapter shows, there is no evidence that Moscow pursued linkage diplomacy vis-à-vis Washington in pursuit of other gains. At best, the Kremlin hoped for an atmospheric contribution of joint chemical disarmament to halt the downward trajectory in Russian-US bilateral relations following the collapse of the Obama-Medvedev 'reset'. Indeed, amidst the practical implementation of cooperation in an OPCW-UN Joint Mission, officials tried to de-link the joint work in Syria from the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis in late 2013 and early 2014.

Chapter 6 summarizes the key findings from the empirical study and addresses their generalizability in IR. Areas for further research will also be identified.

Chapter 2: “Securing gains on the way out” – why Russia cooperated with the United States on Iraq following the March 2003 invasion

1) Introduction

This chapter looks at Russian cooperation with the US following the 2003 American invasion of Iraq. Once *Operation Iraqi Freedom* was underway, Moscow supported the UN Security Council resolutions concerning Iraq and pursued a role in the political and economic recovery of the country. Having opposed the war, the Russian government quickly moved to accommodate the apparent military victor, calculating that this would provide the best chance to protect Russian companies' commercial interests in Iraq, ensure the UN Security Council's continued relevance, as well as pursue pragmatic cooperation with the George W. Bush administration. The chapter argues that, at a time of relative economic and political weakness, Russia's cooperation was equally driven by commercial interests in Iraq, the desire to thwart future US unilateralism, and by hope for American reciprocity.

Seeking to maximize gains *within* cooperation, the Russian leadership defended its economic, political, and security interests in Iraq. First, Moscow shaped the provisions of UN resolutions 1483, 1511, and 1546, with a view to strengthening the Security Council's role in an Iraqi settlement, reduce scope for the CPA's prerogative in determining Iraq's future, as well as involve regional states, all with a view to enhancing Russia's own leverage. Furthermore, the Russian government pursued economic gains in Iraq, lobbying the US and UN regarding its existing contracts under the 'Oil-for-Food' programme, eyeing further opportunities within the economic reconstruction effort, defending its long-term investments in the Iraqi oil sector, while using Iraq's Soviet-era debt as a bargaining chip.

Russia's actions materialized during a period of pragmatic cooperation with the US, still characterized by the “afterglow” of close collaboration in the post-9/11 GWoT. Russian-US

relations followed a promising trajectory between 2001 and 2003. Cooperation on counterterrorism and in Afghanistan was especially noteworthy. The American unilateral abrogation of the ABM Treaty and NATO's membership invitation to the Baltic states irritated Moscow, but did not undermine the pursuit of pragmatic cooperation in areas of mutual interest. Notwithstanding their disagreement over the Iraq War, both sides continued to hope for good relations well into 2004. During the early stage of the US war in Iraq, the state of the Russian-US relationship – a contextual variable in this study – was thus characterized by a positive trajectory.

Against this backdrop of improving relations, Moscow's readiness to shift from having opposed the Iraq War to cooperating in settling the conflict played out over several stages:

During the first phase, lasting for eight weeks between the start of *Operation Iraqi Freedom* and the adoption of UN SC Resolution 1483, the Kremlin's return to cooperation at the UN was driven by perceptions of a swift American victory. During the second phase, which saw a slow but steady deterioration of Iraq's security landscape until the end of 2003, Russia pushed for greater UN involvement in any Iraqi settlement, while lobbying for its existing agreements under the 'Oil-for-Food' programme to be designated priority contracts and signaling lukewarm readiness for partial debt forgiveness to Iraq within a Paris Club framework.

During the final and third stage in 2004, which played out against exacerbating sectarian violence in Iraq, Moscow stepped up its efforts for swift sovereignty transfer to Iraq and for involving Iran and Syria in an Iraqi settlement. Whilst Russia continued to protect its commercial interests in Iraq to the best of its abilities, it soon realized that there was no money to be earned until the country became stabilized, therefore scaling down its expectations for LUKoil's West Qurna 2 project and agreeing to forgive 90% of Iraq's Soviet-era debt in December 2004.

The rest of this chapter will provide an in-depth empirical account of Russian cooperation and its drivers. Rather than proceeding chronologically, the chapter will critically engage with different Russian interests in cooperation, assessing their relative explanatory value, and refer to the three phases outlined when relevant:

The first part will address this study's primary research question and focus upon Moscow's principal objectives in supporting the US after the Iraq invasion. I will show that the Russian leadership's strategy was formulated against a perception of US victory and impunity, and was then driven to make the most of this *fait accompli* in saving its seat at the table, while also securing economic gains in Iraq. A discussion of leverage building in cooperation, driven by Russia's economic, political, and security interests with Iraq will follow. The chapter will conclude by asking whether Moscow pursued linkage diplomacy in cooperation to elicit *quid pro quos* from the Bush administration in return for Russian gestures of goodwill over Iraq, during what was still a period of pragmatic cooperation in Russian-US relations. The evidence of both direct linkage, as well as more latent expectations of diffuse reciprocity, will be assessed and explained.

2) The key drivers of Russian cooperation

2.1) A seat at the table and economic gains – Russia's pragmatic cooperation despite principled opposition to the Iraq War

The following section argues that Russia's cooperation with the US following the March 2003 invasion of Iraq was initially propelled by a perception of swift US victory, which accentuated the gap between US strength and Russian weakness. It was then driven by a recognition that accepting this *fait accompli* and returning to a cooperative stance provided the best chance to salvage the UN Security Council's reputation, as well as protect Russia's interests in Iraq and in

its bilateral relationship with the US. At a deeper level, the Kremlin's cooperative position crystallized against the background of economic weakness and continued instability in Chechnya, leading President Putin to charter a middle course catering to the preferences of different domestic constituencies.

Russia's pragmatic cooperation after the Iraq invasion, Putin calculated, allowed the pursuit of various national interests, ranging from protecting Russian commercial investments in Iraq, continuing its partnership with the US, strengthening the President's domestic standing in the run-up to Duma and presidential elections, confronting an Islamist terrorist threat emanating from Russia's south, as well as asserting Russian status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. In this case study, propositions 1 and 2 – introduced in the previous chapter – are relevant. The Russian leadership's cooperation with the US was both driven by economic and security interests in the Middle East, and by expectations of US reciprocity, although there is little evidence of Russian officials pursuing direct linkage in the form of American quid pro quos.

2.2) Russia's stance on the Iraqi disarmament issue prior to the US invasion

Prior to the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, the Russian government's position had consisted in calling for Iraqi compliance with existing UN resolutions, while lobbying for the lifting of sanctions against Baghdad and opposing military action.

Russia and the UN Security Council before Operation Iraqi Freedom

The international community's systematic engagement with Iraq's alleged WMD programme began in the context of the First Gulf War. Shortly after Iraqi forces were ejected from Kuwait, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 687, calling on Baghdad to destroy its stockpile and the means to produce WMD, while also limiting the country's ballistic missile capability. A UN

Special Commission (UNSCOM) was established to oversee the inspection, destruction, and monitoring of Iraq's chemical and biological weapons, while the IAEA was asked to thwart Iraqi efforts to develop nuclear weapons.¹

Moscow supported the US-led coalition during the First Gulf War, as well as resolutions 678 and 687 that installed the arms inspection regime in Iraq. This cooperative stance with the American approach to Iraq heralded Foreign Minister Kozyrev's foreign policy of distancing Russia from its old Middle Eastern clients in the early 1990s. Abandoning their historically close contacts with Iraq was seen as a test of political correctness among Russian elites eager to integrate into the 'West'.² From the mid 1990s, however, and given growing disappointment with US policy and the revival of economic relations with Baghdad, Moscow lobbied for the lifting of sanctions and criticized American and British airstrikes in Iraq, which were carried out in the context of their policing the air exclusion zones in the north and south of the country.³

In the summer of 1994, Russia's permanent representative to the UN, Sergey Lavrov, argued that the Security Council should respond to the "positive steps" undertaken by Iraq and that restrictions should be weakened or abolished.⁴ Pressure for the lifting of sanctions also came from Russian lawmakers. After President Yeltsin replaced Andrey Kozyrev with Evgeny Primakov as Foreign Minister in 1996, economic ties with Iraq expanded, while Russian diplomats consistently denounced unilateral US actions and sought to erode the other Security Council members' support for the sanctions regime. The Russian government's position, which was that Iraq should fulfill existing UN resolutions, while Moscow would in turn lobby for the lifting of restrictions, was sustained not just by its concern to thwart the Americans' coercive diplomacy

¹ 'UN SC Resolution 687 (1991)', 3 April 1991, <http://www.un.org/Depts/unmovic/documents/687.pdf>.

² A. Kreutz, *Russia and the Middle East: Friend or Foe?* (New York: Greenwood Publishing, 2006).

³ Dannreuther, 'Russia and the Middle East', pp. 28-30.

⁴ Kreutz, *Russia and the Middle East*.

vis-à-vis Iraq. It was also driven by the prospect of greater economic cooperation with an Iraqi regime liberated from sanctions. Russia's sanctions relief campaign was both couched in the language of principle and pragmatic in the pursuit of economic gain.

When Vladimir Putin assumed the Russian premiership in late 1999, the Kremlin returned to a more pliant stance on Iraq, facilitating the adoption of UN SC Resolution 1284 through abstention. The resolution established the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) and later became if not the *casus belli*, then the manufacturer of a climate for war in 2003.⁵ When Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Aziz visited Moscow in early 2002, shortly after President Bush declared Iraq to be part of an "axis of evil" of rogue WMD proliferators,⁶ the Iraqi guest was reportedly told there was nothing to discuss until Baghdad agreed to the return of international inspectors.⁷ Furious, Aziz left and Iraqi Vice President Ramadan criticized the Russian Foreign Ministry sharply for failing to implement President Putin's policy course on Iraq.⁸

Such frictions notwithstanding, Baghdad continued to urge Russia to ward off US military action. Moscow, in turn, advocated for a political solution to the crisis, while stressing the need for Iraqi compliance with existing resolutions. Once the Iraqi government sent a letter to the UN in September 2002 stating its willingness to allow inspectors to return unconditionally, Moscow celebrated the development as a win for Russian diplomacy and argued against the necessity of

⁵ Ibid., p. 135.

⁶ G. W. Bush, 'State of the Union Address', 29 January 2002, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>.

⁷ 'Saddam Hussein Will Show His Weapons to UN Inspectors', *Kommersant*, 6 February 2002, p.10, in The Current Digest of the Russian Press (CDRP), no. 6, vol. 54, 6 March 2002, p. 5.

⁸ 'MID Rossii ne vpolnyaet ukazanii prezidenta Putina' ("The Russian Foreign Ministry Does Not Implement President Putin's Orders"), *newsru.com*, 4 February 2002, https://www.newsru.com/world/04feb2002/iraq_moscow.html.

passing a new Council resolution.⁹ Eventually, however, Russian support for what became Resolution 1441 in November 2002 was consistent with its efforts to deflect the spectre of military action against Iraq.¹⁰

The Russian leadership then continued to oppose war, whilst demanding Iraqi cooperation with the international community. In late January 2003, President Putin reiterated that "diplomatic measures had not been exhausted", but that if the Iraqis impeded the inspectors' efforts, then: "Russia could reach agreement with the US on other, tougher solutions."¹¹ A week later, Russia's Foreign Minister characterized Secretary of State Colin Powell's report to the Security Council, in which the US official presented information on the Iraqi regime's ties to international terrorism and evidence of its possession of WMD as confirming the need for international inspectors to continue their work, rather than as a convincing *casus belli*.¹²

Russia's principled scepticism of sanctions

The Russian leadership's opposition to sanctions and military action against Iraq was driven by different considerations.

While officials feared regional destabilization close to Russia's borders, resulting from the use of force against Iraq, their opposition to the sanctions regime reflected a broader apprehension of coercive measures as a tool of diplomacy. Fundamentally, Russian scepticism towards sanctions

⁹ 'Interview with Igor Ivanov', *Vremya MN*, 24 September 2002, pp.1-2, in CDRP, no. 39, vol. 54, 23 October 2002, pp. 1-3.

¹⁰ S. Lavrov at 'UN Security Council, 4644th Meeting', 8 November 2002, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2002/SC7564.doc.htm>.

¹¹ V. Putin, 'Na vstreche s prepodavatelayami i studentami Kievskogo natsional'nogo universiteta' ("Meeting with Teachers and Students of Kiev's National University"), 28 January 2003, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21852>.

¹² 'UN Security Council, 4701st Meeting', 5 February 2003, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2003/sc7658.doc.htm>.

was rooted in the USSR's own suffering under a US embargo, imposed during the Cold War.¹³ That said, it also cut across various elite circles for ideological and conceptual reasons. While Russia's Westernists put primacy on amicable relations with the US and were thus bound to support the pressure track on Iraq in the 1990s, the Statists' principled rejection of sanctions reflected their broader opposition to any outside interference in a sovereign state's internal affairs. Primarily concerned with Russian power and independence in a pluralist international order, Statists worried about setting any precedents in international politics that might be used against Russia itself.¹⁴ With the appeal of Kozyrev and Yeltsin's relatively pro-Western foreign policy eroding from the mid 1990s and Statist voices gaining in prominence, Russian calls for sanctions relief on Iraq grew louder.

Russia's Eurasianists, on the other hand, believed Iraq and Russia to be part of the same Eurasian geopolitical and geo-economic heartland. In its post-Cold War, hardline incarnation represented by figures such as Alexander Dugin, a prominent form of Eurasianism has viewed Russia as a constantly expanding land-based empire in a struggle for power against sea-based Atlanticism.¹⁵ According to this view, Russia should build a 'Pax Evrasiatica', absorbing Russia, France, Germany, China, India, but also the Muslim world. Only by pursuing such a strategic unity of Eurasian geopolitical organisms, so the argument went, could Russia survive in the face of geopolitical struggle with the US.¹⁶ Since Iraq was conceptualized as part of 'Pax Evrasiatica', Russian support for US-led efforts to punish Baghdad was out of the question for Eurasianists.

¹³ Interviews with Russian experts.

¹⁴ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*.

¹⁵ D. Shlapentokh, 'Alexander Dugin's View of the Middle East', *Space and Polity*, vol. 12, no. 2, August 2008.

¹⁶ A. Tsygankov, 'Hard-line Eurasianism and Russia's Contending Geopolitical Perspectives', *East European Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 3, 1998, pp. 328-9.

Yet, whilst the ideological current regained some prominence after the 1993 Duma elections,¹⁷ given growing elite disillusionment with Russia's then pro-Western course, Eurasianism remained mainly an intellectual phenomenon. Opinion polls noted a slight year-on-year surge in Russian citizens' positive views of Iraq by early 2003, but analysts attributed the new 'Iraqophilia' to a growing hostility towards US policy vis-à-vis Iraq, rather than a genuine pro-Eurasianist sentiment.¹⁸ As will be elaborated later in this chapter, the Russian leadership's growing opposition to sanctions did not just reflect a Statist position of principle, but further represented commercial considerations, since Russian companies stood to gain from the lifting of restrictions on Iraq.

Russia's concern with the proliferation of WMD in the Middle East

Russian official scepticism of sanctions coexisted with concern about WMD proliferation in the Middle East, which led Moscow to insist that Iraq cooperate with international inspectors. Following the invasion, President Putin reiterated that Russia always had a "joint interest with the US in addressing one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century – the proliferation of WMD",¹⁹ and made clear that his difference with the Bush administration over Iraq had related to "practical ways how to resolve [the] problem", while there was a shared understanding of its "essence".²⁰ Whilst Russia's media was widely opposed to a US invasion, it also recognized the proliferation dangers emanating from Baghdad, with *Novaya Gazeta* writing that: "President Bush is obviously

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 315.

¹⁸ 'Iraq or America: Against Whom Are We Friends?', *Public Opinion Foundation*, 6 February 2003, <http://bd.fom.ru/report/map/dd030531>.

¹⁹ V. Putin, 'Interview with *The New York Times*', 4 October 2003, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22145>.

²⁰ 'President Bush and President Putin in Press Availability at Camp David', 27 September 2003, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/09/20030927-2.html>.

right that, as long as Saddam Hussein and the Baath Party are in power, Iraq will strive to have WMD, no matter how many inspections you carry out.”²¹

Similar arguments resonated across the expert community, with *IMEMO*'s Georgiy Mirskiy warning in mid 2002 that: “Iraq has gotten used to the idea of doing business with Moscow, based on the belief that the presumed financial benefits of working with Iraq are more important to the Russians than issues concerning WMD. But it is mistaken: whether or not Iraq acquires such weapons is of great importance to Russia.”²² Vladimir Lukin, Deputy Speaker of the Duma, argued that thwarting Iraqi WMD aspirations should be at the top of Russia's list of priorities, since these: “pose a direct and clear threat – physical as well as economic – to our country's modernization.”²³ While there was a convergence of strategic interests between Russia and the US in the objective to thwart Iraqi ambitions to develop a WMD capability, there was divergence on the means of achieving that end. Russian officials continued to argue that diplomatic tools had not yet been exhausted, opposing the American preference for sticks over carrots with the tightening of sanctions and eventual military campaign.

2.3) Explaining the shift in Russia's position amid *Operation Iraqi Freedom* – dealing with a *fait accompli*

Against the backdrop of these varied considerations – scepticism about coercive measures, opposition to WMD proliferation, as well as its economic interests in Iraq (discussed in detail later) – the Russian government opposed the March 2003 invasion. That said, Moscow was less vocal than Berlin and Paris in its criticism of US policy. During the eight weeks between March

²¹ ‘Za Nami Poslednee Slovo. A Za Amerikoi — Delo’ (“We Have the Last Word – and America the Last Action”), *Novaya Gazeta*, 19 March 2003,

<https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2003/03/20/19094-za-nami-poslednee-slovo-a-za-amerikoy-delo>.

²² ‘Allowance Made for Russia for the Sake of Smart Sanctions’, *Izvestia*, 4 April 2002, in CDRP, no. 14, vol. 54, 1 May 2002, p. 5.

²³ ‘Decades of Peace’, *Moskovskie Novosti*, no. 9, 11-17 March 2003, p. 5, in CDRP, no. 9, vol. 55, 2 April 2003, p. 4.

20 and the adoption of UN SC Resolution 1483, Russia's stance then shifted towards cooperation with the US, driven by an understanding that this represented the most expedient course to salvage commercial interests in Iraq, bilateral interests with the US, as well as the value of Russia's permanent seat on the UN Security Council. The following passage traces the Kremlin's crystallizing position towards endorsing Resolution 1483 in May 2003 and discusses its underlying drivers. I argue that both regional concerns and bilateral interests with the US underpinned Russia's stance, confirming the explanatory value of propositions 1 and 2 in this first case study.

After the invasion: amid limited friction, Russia signals willingness to cooperate on Iraq

Condoleezza Rice's famous advice to "punish France, forgive Russia, and ignore Germany",²⁴ given the triumvirate's opposition to the Iraq War, reflected a broader US perception that Moscow had been less vocal in criticizing American policy than Paris or Berlin. In late January 2003, as pressure for war mounted in the wake of Hans Blix' and Muhammed El-Baradei's reports on the findings of disarmament inspections to the Security Council, President Putin continued to argue against military action. Yet he softened that stance by emphasizing that, while: "good relations with the United States do not mean complete harmony with that country, nor do they allow us to slide into confrontation."²⁵ His supplications that the disagreement with the US should not be "overdramatized"²⁶ fittingly captured the government's balancing act of opposing military action as a matter of principle, while downplaying the extent of friction with the Bush administration.

²⁴ Rice, *No Higher Honour*, pp. 212-214.

²⁵ 'Hurry Up and Turn on the Light', *Vremya Novostei*, 29 January 2003, in CDRP, no. 4, vol. 55, 26 February 2003, pp. 1-3.

²⁶ 'President Vladimir Putin Held Negotiations With President Jacques Chirac', 10 February 2003, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/28133>.

Once *Operation Iraqi Freedom* began, it still generated a wave of hostile Russian rhetoric. Amid the initial verbal condemnation of US military action as a “great political mistake”,²⁷ efforts to return to cooperation with the US were further hampered by several incidents. While the Duma delayed ratification of the Russian-American Treaty on the Reduction of Strategic Offensive Potentials (SORT) and qualified the Americans’ actions as aggression,²⁸ the White House accused Russian businesses of supplying arms to Iraq. When Russia’s diplomatic convoy came under fire, withdrawing from a besieged Baghdad, this marked perhaps the greatest irritant in bilateral relations in the immediate aftermath of the invasion.²⁹ Nevertheless, President Putin stated early into *Operation Iraqi Freedom* that Russia was not interested in seeing an American defeat in Iraq.³⁰ The government also reined in the head of Russia’s Central Religious Islamic Board, Talgat Tadzhuiddin, for inciting *jihad* against the US.³¹

Indeed, from early April 2003, the Russian government took steps to accommodate the US. Igor Ivanov was instructed to discuss Iraq with Powell in Brussels on April 3.³² A week later, the Russian leader himself convened with his German and French counterparts in St. Petersburg, where the three called for a return of the Iraq file to the UN Security Council. Once negotiations got underway towards Resolution 1483, Moscow requested changes to the draft, but eventually voted in its favour on May 22. Russia then supported UN SC resolutions 1511 and 1546 on Iraq, sought to participate in the economic reconstruction of the country, and joined the Paris Club

²⁷ ‘Zayavlenie po situatsii v Irake’ (“Announcement on the Situation in Iraq”), 20 March 2003, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21942>.

²⁸ ‘O Zayavlenii Gosudarstvennoi Dumy’ (“On the Announcement by the Federal Duma”), 21 March 2003, <https://www.gazeta.ru/parliament/info/laws/18249.shtml>.

²⁹ These frictions will later be discussed in greater detail.

³⁰ ‘Iz Interv’yu Prezidenta Rossii Predstavitel’yam SMI Central’nogo Chernozem’iya’ (“From the Interview of the Russian President to Media from Russia’s Central Black Earth Region”), 2 April 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/526510.

³¹ ‘Prosecutor General’s Office Puts Time Limit on Jihad Against US’, *Kommersant*, 5 April 2003, p. 5, in CDRP, no. 14, vol. 55, 7 May 2003, pp. 5-6.

³² ‘Igor Ivanov Meets With Colin Powell’, 3 April 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/526230.

deliberations on Iraq's outstanding debt burden, of which a significant amount was owed to Moscow.

“Baghdad fell quicker than Grozny”

The Kremlin's return to cooperation was sustained by the impression that the American military campaign was proceeding more swiftly than anticipated. Within the first week of the Iraq invasion, such success was not yet apparent and Russian officials stated that: “the fighting has lasted for a week already and it is unclear how much longer it will continue.”³³ The Russian press noted with gratification that a US: “*blitzkrieg* did not materialize.”³⁴ Anticipating protracted fighting, Russia's Defence Ministry assisted in setting up refugee camps along the Iraqi-Iranian border.³⁵

Once Baghdad fell in early April, however, the Russian government begrudgingly admitted its erroneous predictions for the course of the war. To the surprise of Russian military experts, Iraqi forces were retreating swiftly and: “unlike during the early operations in Afghanistan, there was no sense of being bogged down.”³⁶ *Novaya Gazeta* noted with incredulity that “Baghdad had surrendered quicker than Grozny”, adding that the American “*blitzkrieg*” in Baghdad must look completely unrealistic to Russians, after two bloody sieges of Grozny in 1995 and 2000, each of which lasted for more than a month.³⁷ Prior to war, Russian observers had expected a 2-3 week

³³ ‘Y. V. Fedotov Na Voprosy Slushatelei “Golos Rossii”’ (“Y. Fedotov Answers Questions by Listeners of *The Voice of Russia*”), 27 March 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/crime/-/asset_publisher/3F51ZsLVsX4R/content/id/527038.

³⁴ ‘Blits-Krik’ (“Blitzkrieg”), *Novaya Gazeta*, 30 March 2003, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2003/03/31/18984-blits-krik>.

³⁵ ‘My Prosto Ne Pospevaem Za Voinoi’ (“We Simply Cannot Keep Up With the War”), *Novaya Gazeta*, 26 March 2003, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2003/03/27/19017-my-prosto-ne-pospevaem-za-voynoy>.

³⁶ Rice, *No Higher Honour*, p. 207.

³⁷ ‘Bagdad Sdalsya Ran'she Groznogo’ (“Baghdad Surrendered Quicker than Grozny”), *Novaya Gazeta*, 13 April 2003,

US aerial bombardment of Iraq, followed by a protracted ground invasion entailing heavy losses on the side of the aggressor.³⁸ Once Baghdad was taken, a Russian diplomat recalled that: “we and our specialists were honestly shocked that the Iraqi army was overrun so quickly.”³⁹ With Russia’s inaccurate predictions for the course of the invasion exposed, experts also used the occasion to invoke an urgent need to reform Russia’s own military.⁴⁰

From April 2003, Russian policy on Iraq was thus formed against a perception of swift US victory, which was believed would enable the Bush administration to establish an Iraqi regime friendly and allied to the US for the long-term.⁴¹ During that period, before US fortunes in Iraq deteriorated with mounting insurgency, the Abu Ghraib prisoner scandal, and the battles of Fallujah in 2004, there was not yet a sense in Moscow of America’s Middle East policy being “utterly incompetent” – that perception would only gain traction in subsequent years.⁴²

Making the most of the fait accompli

Against this backdrop of swift invasion, the Kremlin calculated that it was best to accommodate the perceived winner. A pragmatically oriented Russian leadership, Elena Suponina argues, concluded that: “this is life, reality. What sense would it still have made to constantly oppose all American steps?”⁴³ President Putin himself now downplayed Russia’s previous opposition to the

<https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2003/04/14/18851-bagdad-sdalsya-ranshe-groznogo>.

³⁸ See ‘K Tanku Priravnyat’ Sedlo’ (“Equating a Saddle to a Tank”), *Novaya Gazeta*, 16 April 2003, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2003/04/17/18806-k-tanku-priravnyat-sedlo>.

³⁹ Interview with a Russian diplomat.

⁴⁰ ‘Tainye Pruzhiny Irakskoi Voiny’ (“The Secret Springs of the Iraq War”), *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 28 June 2003, http://old.redstar.ru/2003/06/28_06/2_01.html.

⁴¹ ‘Bagdad Sdalsya Ran'she Groznogo’.

⁴² Interview with a US source.

⁴³ Interview with Elena Suponina, Moscow, 18 April 2016.

war, noting that, whilst Russia had been against invasion: "we need to proceed from the *realities* that exist today, and we need to think about the future."⁴⁴

In this context, select Russian voices invoked lessons learnt in the 1999 Kosovo crisis. Back then, according to *Izvestia*, Russia opposed NATO's war against Serbian President Milosevic to the end, undermined its relations with the West, while its interests in the Balkans suffered long-term damage.⁴⁵ The Kosovo scenario, according to another Russian paper, should have taught Russian diplomats that "useless squabbling" with the US, even over a mistaken operation, would not be conducive to protecting Russia's interests in Iraq.⁴⁶ Instead, accepting the *fait accompli* meant moving past one's anger over US unilateralism, getting back to joint work, and thereby protecting Russian interests to the greatest extent possible. As *Novaya Gazeta* put it "cleaning up the garbage left by others" was not "the most pleasant thing", but sometimes it is required.⁴⁷

May the UN not suffer the fate of the League of Nations

Recognizing the invasion as a *fait accompli*, the Russian leadership's priority shifted to returning the Iraqi file to the UN as quickly as possible. This was seen as crucial not just in order to protect Russia's economic and security interests – which are captured by Proposition 1 in this study – but also the status that attached to its permanent seat on the Security Council. On the first day of *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, the Kremlin criticized the invasion as a "big political mistake", but also noted a concern for its implications for international law.⁴⁸ Indeed, some Russian observers

⁴⁴ 'O sovместnoi press-konferentsii s Prezidentom Ukrainy Kuchmoi' ("On the Joint Press Conference with Ukraine's President Kuchma"), 2 May 2003, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21985>. Emphasis added.

⁴⁵ 'Restraint of an Honest Broker', *Izvestia*, 13 March 2003, pp. 1-2, in CDRP, no. 10, vol. 55, 9 April 2003, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁶ 'We Go to Iraq and They Come to Chechnya?', *Izvestia*, 5 September 2003, p. 4, in CDRP, no. 36, vol. 55, 8 October 2003, pp. 2-4.

⁴⁷ 'Vremya Ubirat' Musor' ("Time to Clear Out the Rubbish"), *Novaya Gazeta*, 5 May 2003, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2003/05/05/18646-vremya-ubirat-musor>.

⁴⁸ 'Zayavlenie po situatsii v Irake'.

feared that the war heralded the “end of the UN era” and that the organization could suffer the same fate as the League of Nations.⁴⁹

According to one official representing the US at the UN, Russian officials were initially hostile to the US and refused to cooperate after the invasion, and the atmosphere on the Security Council was “very bitter”. As soon as China, however, signalled its willingness to work on a new draft resolution for Iraq: “Russia saw that if they did not get onboard, they would be left outside the process.”⁵⁰ Ambassador John Negroponte similarly recalled a Russian eagerness to “help write the rules and have a seat at the table”, once initial anger over the invasion had dissipated.⁵¹

When contacts on Iraq resumed at the UN, President Putin noted that the latter’s central role “should not only be restored, but indeed strengthened”, warning that if the Security Council continued to be ignored, this would undermine international efforts against a range of threats.⁵² Putin argued that Russia’s appreciation of the UN outweighed its economic interests in Iraq, exhorting that: “oil, money, loans – all this is, of course, very important, but much more important is something else [...] how we want the architecture of international security to look like.”⁵³ Other official Russian statements similarly cast the Iraq invasion as opening a period of historical significance, since it had put the world at a “cross-roads” and the choices made in its aftermath would determine the foundations of the future world order.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ ‘Epokha OON Zakonchilas?’ (“Has the UN’s Era Ended?”), *Novaya Gazeta*, 19 March 2003, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2003/03/20/19091-epoha-oon-zakonchilas>.

⁵⁰ Interview with James Cunningham, Washington DC, 24 June 2016.

⁵¹ Interview with John Negroponte, Washington DC, 30 June 2016.

⁵² ‘Sovmestnaya press-konferentsiia s Entoni Blierom’ (“Joint Press Conference with Tony Blair”), 29 April 2003, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21984>.

⁵³ ‘O sovместnoi press-konferentsiis s Prezidentom Ukrainy Kuchmoi’.

⁵⁴ ‘The Big Eight Must Not Supplant The United Nations’, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 22 May 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/mezdunarodnye-ekonomiceskie-forumy/-/asset_publisher/MgP0QsN4ZAF2/content/id/519982?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_MgP0QsN4ZAF2&_101_INSTANCE_MgP0QsN4ZAF2_languageId=en_GB.

Once Resolution 1483 was passed, Sergey Lavrov noted with satisfaction that Russia was now an “equal partner” in the regulation of the conflict.⁵⁵ Following 1483, the Russian government continued to advocate for enhancing the UN’s role in Iraq. Any measure adopted for its circumvention, for instance, an agreement signed between the CPA and the Interim Governing Council of Iraq (IGC) in November 2003, were treated with suspicion by Moscow.⁵⁶ Russia’s championing of the Security Council was crucially driven by status considerations. Since Russia saw itself as a great power deserving of co-equal partnership with the US, the American circumvention of the Security Council over Iraq had been perceived almost as an affront to Russian dignity. As Roy Allison notes, since Russia’s core problem with the Iraq invasion consisted in the US challenge to the pluralist principles of international order, addressing that challenge by returning Iraq to the UN was a paramount Russian national interest.⁵⁷

Controlling a Bush administration “running amok”

The Russian leadership’s desire to return the Iraq file to the Security Council was also driven by a perception that US foreign policy had become unpredictable. Moscow wanted to ensure a modicum of control over the Bush administration’s unilateralist predilections going forward. A Russian concern that the American GWOt might take on other states predated the Iraq War amid the promulgation of the ‘Bush Doctrine’, but intensified after *Operation Iraqi Freedom*. A day before the invasion, *Novaya Gazeta* prophesied that: “having begun to establish order in one Middle Eastern country, America will not stop, simply cannot stop.”⁵⁸ Then serving in Israel, US Ambassador Kurtzer recalled that: “right after the invasion, everyone was nervous that we were

⁵⁵ ‘Interv’yu S. V. Lavrova Gazete Vremya Novostei’ (“S. Lavrov’s Interview with the Newspaper *Vremya Novostei*”), 27 May 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/519382.

⁵⁶ ‘A. Yakovenko Answers a Media Question’, 17 November 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/496434?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&_101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA_languageId=en_GB.

⁵⁷ R. Allison, *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁵⁸ ‘Za Nami Poslednee Slovo’.

going to go elsewhere [...] the Russians might have figured it is better to work with us and keep us a little under control, rather than to see us run amok in the region.”⁵⁹

Economic gains and continued pragmatic cooperation with the US

Finally, the Kremlin calculated that continued obstruction of multilateral cooperation on Iraq would likely hamper the pursuit of its economic interests in Iraq and other bilateral objectives with Washington. Russian companies sought to save the substantial contracts held under Iraq’s ‘Oil-for-Food’ programme and hoped for a share of the Iraqi economic reconstruction pie. In the medium term, LUKoil was keen to invest in Iraq’s oil sector, while the Russian government needed to settle Iraq’s outstanding Soviet-era debt with international partners. These various economic interests, Russian officials calculated, would be pursued most successfully not by blocking US policy on Iraq, but by bringing it back under UN auspices. Russia was also eager to salvage its extensive bilateral agenda with the US, calculating that cooperation in the economic, energy, counterterrorism, and arms control spheres would suffer the least damage if Russia swallowed its anger over the Iraq War and returned to a constructive stance at the Security Council.⁶⁰

The broader backdrop to Russian cooperation: economic weakness and the Chechen wars

The preceding discussion of the drivers of Russia’s cooperation, which has emphasized both regional and bilateral (US-related) considerations, needs to be embedded in a broader analysis of Russia’s national interests at the time. These interests formed against an understanding amongst the elites that Russia depended upon continued partnership with the US and had limited means to confront American policy. In short, Russia cooperated on Iraq in 2003 and 2004 from a position of self-perceived weakness.

⁵⁹ Phone interview with Daniel Kurtzer, 7 July 2016.

⁶⁰ These drivers will be fleshed out in Part 3 of this chapter.

The Russian government's moderate public rhetoric amid *Operation Iraqi Freedom* conveyed an awareness of dependence. Speaking at a press conference on April 3, Vladimir Putin noted that Russia was not interested in an American defeat, since the US was Russia's largest economic partner, while the US dollar exchange rate would directly affect Russian citizens' savings and the Central Bank's reserves.⁶¹ A few months later, Putin acknowledged the limitations of Russia's economic might, noting that: "we are fully aware of what Russia is, what place it occupies in the world, and what our capabilities are."⁶² Vyacheslav Trubnikov, who was then Deputy Foreign Minister, echoed the perception of weakness, acknowledging that: "Russia had many domestic issues in 2003, Chechnya was still a problem, the oil price was weak, the leadership was still more focused on the domestic agenda and decided to let the Iraq issue go."⁶³

Economic weakness was compounded by political impotence. As General Trubnikov saw it: "there was no way Russia could have gotten through to the US administration back then, to influence their policy on Iraq."⁶⁴ When President Putin dispatched former Prime Minister and long-time Saddam Hussein go-between Evgeny Primakov to Baghdad for a last-ditch effort to avert war in February 2003, the US did not even take Russian mediation efforts into consideration.⁶⁵ Prominent Russian experts such as Elena Suponina and Fyodor Lukyanov echoed the sense of Russian impotence, noting that even if Moscow was ready to occupy the niche left by the USSR in the Arab world, it could not do so in any case, given the lack of resources to

⁶¹ 'Vladimir Putin Dal Otsenku Situatsii V Irake I Perspektivam Rossiisko-Amerikanskikh Otnoshenii' ("V. Putin Assessed the Situation in Iraq and the Outlook for Russian-US Relations"), 3 April 2003, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/28415>.

⁶² V. Putin, 'Interview with *The New York Times*'.

⁶³ Interview with Vyacheslav Trubnikov, Moscow, 10 October 2017. Given the economy's dependence upon raw material exports, the Russian leadership was also anxious about the impact of a prospective US invasion of Iraq on global oil prices and raised these concerns repeatedly with US officials.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ D. Trenin, 'Russia's Foreign Policy in the Crises over Kosovo (1999), Iraq (2003), and Libya (2011): Lessons Learned by Moscow', Lecture given at Monterey Summer Symposium on Russia, Summer 2017, <http://sites.mjis.edu/russianinitiative/mssr-podcasts/>.

influence the situation in Iraq, let alone counter American moves.⁶⁶ Russia's own perception of weakness was finally compounded by America's apparent strength. As noted earlier, *Operation Iraqi Freedom* looked extraordinarily successful at the beginning. Even by September 2003, President Putin conceded that if it did not turn out to be possible to agree on a "high-quality" document for what would become Resolution 1546, an Iraqi settlement would be arrived at anyway, since the: "coalition forces are big powerful states with a strong economy, with large military forces."⁶⁷

Russia's national interests, 2001-2004

Russian national interests in the early 2000s, which provided the context for Moscow's post-March 2003 diplomacy on Iraq, are best summed up as Russia pursuing what Tsygankov calls 'pragmatic cooperation' with the West. Pragmatic cooperation combined Statist and Westernist impulses to achieve the twin objectives of furthering economic growth and preserving Russia's great power status. The new set of national interests formed within a shifting landscape of international conditions, most notably Russia's relative yet imperfect recovery from the 1998 financial crisis and the beginning of the Second Chechen War in August 1999.⁶⁸ The imperative to eradicate terrorism in Chechnya and re-establish a strong state after the perceived 'chaos' of the 1990s was further reinforced by the 9/11 attacks in the US, which allowed President Putin to 'bandwagon' with the Bush administration's GWoT. While the Russian leader used the notion of a shared terrorist threat to reshape Russia's relations with the US, positive signals for a new bilateral partnership predated 9/11, with the much-cited amicable Bush-Putin summit in Slovenia

⁶⁶ 'Arabs Need the USSR. And Americans Need Russia', *Vremya Novostei*, 3 April 2002, p.1, in CDRP, no. 14, vol. 54, 1 May 2002, p. 5.

⁶⁷ V. Putin, 'Na Vstreche S Prepodavatel'nyami I Studentami Kolumbiiskogo Universiteta' ("Meeting Teachers and Students of Columbia University"), 26 September 2003, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22129>.

⁶⁸ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*.

in June 2001 and a subsequent successful meeting between the presidents in Shanghai in October.⁶⁹

According to Andrei Tsygankov, the Statist-Westernist conception of the national interest was supported by an “alliance of oligarchs and *siloviki*”, two Russian elite constituencies that had amassed substantial influence by the early 2000s. The oligarchs, strengthened by the recovery of Russia’s economy, stood to gain by the pro-Westernist dimension of Putin’s course. Proponents of cooperation with the Bush administration included not just Russian companies hoping for access to Iraq’s market, but also those eager to do business with the US itself – mostly representing the oil, gas, and metallurgical industries. The *siloviki*, bolstered by the prevailing perception of a terrorist threat, advocated a Statist foreign policy, not ruling out cooperation with the West in the war on terror *per se*, but emphasizing that it should be of tactical nature.⁷⁰

Importantly, the Statist camp was arranged along a spectrum between hardliners seeing the US exclusively as an adversary, and more modest voices viewing it as merely a competitor. Robert Nurick, at the time Director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, recalled the constant tension between these viewpoints in discussions following 9/11. While one set of Russian elites acknowledged the need for US cooperation to address the terrorist threat to Russia’s south, another set was distinctively uncomfortable with the prospect of a US presence in the Middle East and Central Asia, since it reminded Russians of their own weakness. One Russian General, Nurick recounted, commented on the need to work with the US in the following way: “I understand it here (pointing to his head), but I hate it here (pointing to his chest).”⁷¹ Given their principled prioritization of Russian power and sovereignty, most Statists did not advocate outright opposition to the US over the Iraq war, but carefully calculated which policy course would best

⁶⁹ Interview with Alexander Vershbow, Washington DC, 4 October 2017.

⁷⁰ Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy*.

⁷¹ Interview with Robert Nurick, Washington DC, 21 June 2016.

serve Russia's national interests. Sergey Karaganov, for instance, wrote that Russia would suffer from full-scale war in Iraq, but also: "had no desire to quarrel with America."⁷²

The Eurasianists' position was clearer and recommended that Russia join a broad anti-American coalition after 9/11. The Iraqi crisis, in particular, was characterized as marking: "the official beginning of the era of direct American hegemony on a world scale."⁷³ Within days of the start of *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, the Duma debated two resolutions for adoption. The Communists – part of the Eurasianist camp – called for halting all cooperation with the US, boycotting American imports and arming Iraq. While such a position did not reflect President Putin's thinking, the draft resolution received over one third of votes, showing that anti-American sentiments were far from a marginal phenomenon among Russia's elite.⁷⁴

Vladimir Putin's course

Amid the push and pull of the Westernist, Statist, and Eurasianist constituencies, President Putin prioritized Russia's economic growth. Given Russia's relative weakness and limited resources, balancing the US needed to yield to pragmatic cooperation with it, especially on energy and counterterrorism. To that end, it was also important not to overplay Russia's opposition to America on traditional issues, such as NATO's membership invitation to the Baltic states or the abrogation of the ABM Treaty.

Although Putin had assumed the presidency vowing to eradicate terrorism in Chechnya, his popularity also depended upon the perception of economic progress, especially in the wake of

⁷² 'We Have No Desire to Quarrel with the US', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 10 February 2003, p. 9, in CDRP, no. 6, vol. 55, 12 March 2003, pp. 4-5.

⁷³ 'Fermentation of the New World', *Izvestia*, 21 February 2003, p. 4, in CDRP, no. 7, vol. 55, 19 March 2003, pp. 5-6.

⁷⁴ 'How Russian Deputies Tried to Revive a Corpse', *Vremya Novostei*, 21 March 2003, p. 3, in CDRP, no. 12, vol. 55, 23 April 2003, p. 1.

Duma elections scheduled for late 2003 and presidential elections in early 2004. While anti-Americanism resonated with parts of the population, improving standards of living were more important than playing up to Russian ‘greatness’ and opposing US policy.⁷⁵ Notwithstanding the growing personalization of decision-making amid the securitization of the Chechen conflict,⁷⁶ it was important to cater to public sentiments in crafting a balanced post-Iraq invasion course vis-à-vis the US.

As one Russian commentator warned: “as long as our GDP is less than 10% of America's and the structure of Russia's raw-material and metals economy lags a good 100 years behind the US' post-industrial economy, the Americans will be able to get by without us, but we won't be able to manage without them.”⁷⁷ The need for continued economic modernization was reinforced by Evgeny Primakov’s assessment of Russia’s economic outlook in early 2004, in which he noted that the prospects for “external factors” (i.e. raw material prices) driving GDP growth had reached their limits and that Russia would face the twin challenge of weakening external growth factors and insufficiently strong domestic growth factors for the first time since 1998.⁷⁸ Economic risk factors, including inflation, discontent over the state’s refusal to subsidize the cost of housing and energy, or a drastic fall in oil prices, had the potential to thwart Putin’s chances of re-election in 2004. Furthermore, Putin understood the threat for Russia from Islamist fundamentalism to be

⁷⁵ Shlapentokh, ‘Is the “Greatness Syndrome” Eroding?’. The anticipated appeal of anti-Americanism was contested within Russian expert circles. See ‘Lovushka Dlya Prezidenta’ (“A Trap For the President”), *Novaya Gazeta*, 12 March 2003, <https://www.novayagazeta.ru/articles/2003/03/13/19192-lovushka-dlya-prezidenta>.

⁷⁶ On how counterterrorism in Chechnya served the installation of the *power vertikal*, see P. Baev, ‘Putin's Counter-Terrorism: The Parameters of a Strategic Dead-End’, *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2006.

⁷⁷ ‘What Is Not Going To Happen’, *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 27 July 2004, p. 3, in CDRP, no. 30, vol. 56, 25 August 2004, pp. 1-3.

⁷⁸ ‘K Voprosu Ob Osnovnykh Itogakh Vnutri- I Vneshnepoliticheskogo Razvitiya 2003 Goda’ (“On the Main Results of the Domestic and Foreign Policy Results in 2003”), 16 January 2004, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/materialy-po-voprosam-ekonomiceskogo-razvitiya-rossii/-/asset_publisher/oSUNZRJVOK4D/content/id/490306.

greater than the conventional threat from America, thus positioning himself against the hardline Statists.

Ultimately, according to Tsygankov, the new national interest combined different imperatives, in that: “economic improvement was seen as a way to confirm Russia’s great power status and to preserve the required space to maneuver to defend Russia’s political interests in world politics.”⁷⁹ Such interests included the promotion of relations with countries such as Iraq and Iran, as long as the West was not unduly antagonized. At the time of the Iraq War, Russian elite preferences lined up such that Moscow could be seen neither to be ‘forgiving’ the Bush administration for its military adventurism, nor spoiling relations with an America that remained an important source of investment and cooperation. Cooperating on Iraq in the aftermath of the invasion, the Russian leadership thus sought to protect economic leverage in Iraq, defend the UN Security Council, as well as pursue pragmatic cooperation with the US, charting a carefully calibrated course designed to cater to the various interests outlined above.

3) On Russian leverage building in cooperation: shielding commercial interests and championing the UN’s role in Iraq

Russia’s historical interests in Iraq set the stage for understanding why Moscow first sought to prevent *Operation Iraqi Freedom* and then focused upon building a constructive political and economic relationship with the new Iraqi government, as well as achieving significant UN involvement in a settlement of the conflict. Pursuing leverage in post-war Iraq, Moscow sought to protect its own commercial interests as well as its position in the wider region. Furthermore, Moscow argued that it wanted to strengthen Iraqi sovereignty and independence by assisting it to define its own political and economic future. While Russia’s discourse was couched in the

⁷⁹ A. Tsygankov, *The Strong State in Russia: Development and Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 146.

language of seeking leverage for the Iraqis, its concern was ultimately with raising the profile of the UN over the CPA, thus enhancing Russia's own leverage as a permanent Security Council member.

3.1) Russia's historical interests vis-à-vis Iraq

Established in 1944, the USSR's diplomatic relations with Iraq became part and parcel of its association with Third World national liberation movements after the July 1958 military coup that overthrew the pro-Western Iraqi monarchy and brought General Abd Al-Karim Qasim into power. The General re-established Iraq's ties with Moscow, which had been cut following Iraq's accession to the Baghdad Pact in 1955, and began purchasing Soviet arms.⁸⁰

The relationship experienced tension related to a number of issues over the years, including the Baath Party's persecution of Iraqi Communists and Kurds, Iraq's widening ties with the West following the post-1973 rise in global oil prices, as well as the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which was condemned by Baghdad. Following the beginning of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980, the USSR also halted all military aid to its former client. Nevertheless, the relationship was cordial overall and its economic dimension especially significant, with Iraq receiving approximately half of total Soviet exports to the Middle East. Between the 1950s and 1980s, the USSR constructed over 80 large factories on Iraqi soil.⁸¹

During the initial years of Yeltsin's reign, the Russian-Iraqi relationship was considered of little importance. The sanctions regime, imposed on Iraq following the First Gulf War, greatly curtailed economic cooperation. The picture shifted only from 1993, when Russia and Iraq agreed to honour contracts concluded during the Cold War and to engage in further economic activity. A

⁸⁰ Kreutz, *Russia and the Middle East*.

⁸¹ Ibid.

flurry of mutual visits between Russian and Iraqi officials in 1994 coincided with a deteriorating trajectory in Russian relations with the West, which also led the Kremlin to revisit its stance regarding international sanctions. An expansion of cooperation within the confines of the sanctions regime intensified under Primakov's tenure as Foreign Minister.

Russian economic interests in Iraq: 'Oil-for-Food', resource extraction and debt repayment

Russia's economic interests with Iraq have been multifaceted. By the end of the Cold War, Baghdad owed Moscow some USD8.5 billion in debt, which the Kremlin hoped to recover over time. Furthermore, under the UN's so-called 'Oil-for-Food' programme, which was adopted with UN Resolution 986 in 1995 and allowed Iraqi companies to sell USD2 billion in oil over a six-month period to pay for civilian imports, Russian companies had received favourable treatment. By 1999, they produced the highest volume of goods delivered.⁸²

Russia also stood to gain from investments in Iraq's oil sector. After the Iraq Petroleum Company was nationalized in 1972, Western commentators prophesied the failure of the venture, yet Iraq managed to establish a state-run oil extraction industry in northern Rumaylah, assisted by Moscow. Baghdad then signed contracts to supply Iraqi oil to East Germany, Bulgaria, Hungary, and other Soviet states.⁸³ In April 1995, the two sides adopted an intergovernmental agreement worth USD15 billion, granting Russian companies drilling rights at the West Qurna and North Rumayla oil fields. A separate agreement was endorsed in 1997, planning for Russian businesses' involvement in second-stage development at West Qurna.⁸⁴

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Primakov, *Russia and the Arabs*.

⁸⁴ G. Golan, 'Russia and the Iraq War: Was Putin's Policy a Failure?', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 37, no. 4, 2004.

Importantly, the lifting of UN sanctions on Iraq was a precondition for the implementation of the projects. However, Iraq cancelled the agreement in December 2002, although other Russian-Iraqi cooperation deals were signed as late as January 2003. In August 2002 Baghdad also announced the prospective conclusion of a 10-year trade package with Russia, worth USD40 billion and including 67 contracts in the areas of oil and gas extraction, transportation, and communications.⁸⁵ Meanwhile, the Russian government remained hopeful that the West Qurna deal could be revived in the future. By early 2002, when President Bush promulgated the “axis of evil” and the spectre of war against Iraq became progressively obvious, Elena Suponina applauded Russian-Iraqi economic cooperation. “It is not clear”, Suponina argued, “how the Americans tend to compensate for all this”, in trying to get Moscow to support US-led military action against Iraq.⁸⁶

Iraq's location south of Russia's 'soft underbelly'

While Russia's economic interests were significant, some voices argued that the commercial factor alone should not determine Russian policy on Iraq, which was also important for politico-security reasons. One Russian expert warned in February 2003 that Moscow had a vital interest in seeing a “stable” Iraq, because Russia: “still does not have, and evidently will not have for a long time to come, a properly secure border to the south.”⁸⁷ The prospect of Moscow ruining its relations with other Arab states, or risking a backlash from Russia's own Muslim population over a pro-US stance on the Iraqi crisis, were also important risks for the Kremlin to consider.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ ‘Iraqi Oil Officials Make a Sacrifice’, *Vremya Novostei*, 12 February 2002, p. 5, in CDRP, no. 6, vol. 54, 6 March 2002, p. 7.

⁸⁷ ‘Not By Oil Alone’, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 17 February 2003, p. 6, in CDRP, no. 7, vol. 55, 19 March 2003, pp. 6-7.

Concern for Iraq's stability and territorial integrity was chiefly informed by Russia's own historical experiences with centrifugal tendencies in the 1990s during the Chechen Wars. Fear of a causal chain set in motion by military action against Iraq, starting with the collapse of institutions, facilitating the rise of extremist formations which would spill beyond Iraqi borders, emanated from Russian official and expert assessments amid the Iraq invasion.⁸⁸ As Andrey Kortunov recalls, influential elites reasoned that: "if you want to fight terrorism, why would you target Iraq: at best, it has nothing to do with Al Qaeda, at worst you destroy the country and it becomes a stronghold for terrorist groups."⁸⁹

At the beginning of the invasion, Igor Ivanov warned that the precise consequences of war were difficult to gauge, but that it was clear that it would undermine the international struggle against terrorism. The American attempt to "force upon the Iraqis and other peoples in the Middle East certain government models" could only lead to further radicalization and formation of terrorist cells.⁹⁰ President Putin noted in October 2003 that:

"of course, we know that the Saddam Hussein regime was not a liberal one, many called it a criminal one [...] but it fought against the fundamentalists. He either exterminated them physically, put them in jail or just sent them into exile. Now, there is no more Saddam and we witness the infiltration of a great number of members of different terrorist organizations onto Iraq's territory."⁹¹

Saddam: a difficult partner

While the Kremlin considered Iraq's territorial integrity and stability to be vital, Russian-Iraqi ties were fraught with mutual mistrust. Already during the Cold War, the Iraqi regime recognized its

⁸⁸ 'Y. V. Fedotov Na Voprosy Slushatelei "Golos Rossii"'.
⁸⁹ Interview with Andrey Kortunov, Moscow, 4 April 2016.

⁹⁰ 'Vystuplenie I. S. Ivanova Na Plenarnom Zasedanii Gosudarstvennoi Dumy' ("Address by I. Ivanov at the Plenary Session of the Federal Duma"), 21 March 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/crime/-/asset_publisher/3F51ZsLVSx4R/content/id/528142.

⁹¹ V. Putin, 'Interview with *The New York Times*'.

value as part of the “anti-Western” camp and used this as leverage vis-à-vis its Soviet patron.⁹² The Iraqi regime did not consult or even inform Moscow when planning and executing major foreign policy decisions, such as attacking Iran in 1980 and occupying Kuwait a decade later.⁹³ Evgeny Primakov notes that “in the early days”, the Iraqi leader was: “nothing like the figure on the podium saluting military parades, with endless bursts of gunfire from a rifle propped against his side – the snapshot of a truly atavistic Saddam that appeared on TV screens everywhere in 2003 [...] the early Saddam was different and the Kremlin had good reasons to see him as a genuinely promising leader.”⁹⁴ Trying to make sense of how Saddam increasingly fell prey to a sense of impunity, Primakov attributes blame to Western policy. Since the US supported Saddam against Iran during the 1980s, it nurtured a sense that the Americans would never: “sink Saddam outright since it had a vested interest in the balance of power in the Persian Gulf.”⁹⁵ Remembering his last trip to Baghdad before the Iraq War, tasked by President Putin to persuade Saddam to step down, Primakov recalled the Iraqi leader rejecting his proposal with a litany of accusations against Russia.

After the US invasion, Russian officials confirmed their prior mistrust towards the Saddam regime. President Putin himself noted that it was good that Saddam had been overthrown, since “we always said that this regime does not meet modern requirements and ideas about human rights and democracy and that it needs to be changed and eliminated”, although not “by military means”.⁹⁶ A few months later, the Russian leader argued that the Iraqi regime had never shown “any desire to change its nature, was not inclined to compromises” and: “even our efforts to exert

⁹² Kreutz, *Russia and the Middle East*, p. 82.

⁹³ Primakov, *Russia and the Arabs*.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 321.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ “Vystuplenie V. Putina Na Zasedanii “Peterburgskii Dialog”” (“Address by V. Putin at the Petersburg Dialogue”), 11 April 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/524798.

direct pressure on Saddam did not produce any results.”⁹⁷ That said, concern over Iraq’s territorial integrity outweighed frustrations with Saddam’s intransigence: “Of course we weren’t happy with everything Saddam did, but we understood better than the Americans, that he was the guarantor of stability and security in the region.”⁹⁸

Against this backdrop of Russia’s historical economic and security interests vis-à-vis Baghdad, the following section of the chapter will discuss how Moscow attempted to protect these *within* cooperation with the US, following the March 2003 invasion. As the analysis will show, Russian efforts to build leverage came in two forms. First, in shaping the provisions of the main UN resolutions 1483, 1511, and 1546 which were adopted with reference to Iraq, and second, in lobbying the new Iraqi government and the Bush administration regarding Russian companies’ post-war commercial prospects.

3.2) Negotiating UN SC Resolution 1483 in May 2003: Russia’s key objectives

Following the start of *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, the Russian government’s most significant cooperative step came with its endorsement of Resolution 1483. While voting in support of the text, Russia pushed for significant changes to the US-British sponsored draft, eager to protect its economic interests, delineate clear obligations for the American and British “occupying powers” and give a strong role to the UN in Iraq. Negotiations proceeded smoothly, since the Kremlin was keen to return the Iraqi file to UN auspices as quickly as possible given its perception of swift US victory. Unable to prevent war, the Russian government also understood that it had limited leverage in co-authoring the rules for a post-invasion Iraq. That said, Russian negotiators managed to achieve significant changes to the initial draft text and met their core objectives.

⁹⁷ V. Putin, ‘Interview with *The New York Times*’.

⁹⁸ Interview with a Russian diplomat.

Turning to original negotiating positions, the Bush administration set out to achieve the complete lifting of sanctions on Iraq, the winding down of the 'Oil-for-Food' programme, as well as stipulating a modest role for the UN in Iraq.⁹⁹ Russian officials, on the other hand, opposed the automatic lifting of sanctions, but insisted on the need to prove the alleged presence of WMD by letting UN inspectors return to Iraq, and demanded that the 'Oil-for-Food' programme be extended until the final lifting of economic restrictions.¹⁰⁰ Moscow also wanted a clear definition of the temporary rights and obligations of the 'occupying powers' to be included in the resolution.

Finally, Resolution 1483 called on the UN to play a "vital role" in post-war Iraq, recognized the US and Britain as "occupying powers", supported the formation of an Iraqi interim administration, lifted most economic sanctions while stipulating that the UNMOVIC and IAEA mandates be revisited by the Security Council, and announced the termination of the 'Oil-for-Food' programme after a six-month phase-out. Moscow characterized the result as a "compromise", stressing that its key objectives had been met.¹⁰¹ Criticizing American media for celebrating the text as a victory for the coalition forces, Sergey Lavrov noted that the US had made substantial concessions to Russia and that an American "triumphant mood" was unwarranted: "The Americans and British have realized the simple truth: they cannot solve the Iraqi problem unilaterally."¹⁰²

⁹⁹ 'Press Briefing by Ari Fleischer', 8 May 2003,

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=61089>.

¹⁰⁰ 'Vystuplenie S. Lavrova Na Zasedanii SB OON' ("S. Lavrov's Address to the UN Security Council"), 5 May 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/vystuplenia-zaavlenia/-/asset_publisher/97FOfHiV2r4j/content/id/522198.

¹⁰¹ 'Sergey Lavrov at the Official UN Security Council Meeting During the Passage of the Resolution on the Postwar Settlement in Iraq', 22 May 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/519846?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&_101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA_languageId=en_GB.

¹⁰² 'Interv'yu S. V. Lavrova Gazete Vremya Novostei'.

The legal designation of 'occupying powers'

In negotiating Resolution 1483, Moscow insisted that the US and Great Britain be recognized as 'occupying powers' in Iraq.¹⁰³ The wording was considered important since: "under the provisions of the Geneva and Hague conventions, the 'occupying authority' was responsible for life support in the country and for meeting its humanitarian needs."¹⁰⁴ Under no circumstances, a Russian official explained to me, could there be a situation of *bezvlastie* ("power vacuum") in Iraq.¹⁰⁵ To the Russian leadership, it was critical that Resolution 1483 unambiguously recognized "there was a war, with which the UN had nothing to do", but proceeding from this legal situation, and considering that the coalition forces should ensure security in accordance with international law, it was then possible for Russia to work with them as an equal partner through the Security Council.¹⁰⁶

As the US saw it, Russia insisted on the 'occupying powers' label in order to make clear: "that Iraq was *our* problem, and it being our problem, it was *our* responsibility to deal with it, and there was a limited amount they were going to do to make that an easy proposition." At the same time, Russia wanted Iraq to be returned to an international framework, such that: "anything that looked like us [the US] trying to go around that framework would create a problem."¹⁰⁷ The language preferred by Moscow did not immediately fall on receptive ears in Washington. Indeed, administration officials had "a long internal policy and legal argument" as to whether the US should be characterized as an occupying power. Eventually: "Washington concluded that there

¹⁰³ This was important to all other P5 states on the Security Council, not just Russia. Interview with Kim Holmes, Washington DC, 3 October 2017.

¹⁰⁴ 'Fedotov To Qatar's Al-Jazeera TV Channel', 20 May 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/520158?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&_101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA_languageId=en_GB.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with a Russian official.

¹⁰⁶ 'Interv'yu S. V. Lavrova Gazete Vremya Novostei'.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Cunningham, emphasis added.

were benefits to be derived from accepting ‘occupying power’ status and agreed with Moscow on this point.”¹⁰⁸

Specifying the UN’s involvement in post-invasion Iraq

Furthermore, the Russian leadership was concerned with a firm legal basis for the UN’s involvement in post-invasion Iraq. Early White House statements indicated that the Bush administration’s vision for such involvement was limited.¹⁰⁹ As early as 3 April, when Powell met his Russian counterpart in Brussels, the Secretary of State announced that the UN would not play a leading role in postwar Iraq, but only be involved in humanitarian operations and in helping to create an interim civilian administration.¹¹⁰ Condoleezza Rice recalls in her memoirs the: “silly debate inside the administration about how much authority to give the UN.” While the Pentagon and Vice President Cheney’s office “scoured every word of the resolution [1483], to make sure that the US had free rein to rebuild Iraq without the nettlesome advice of the international community”, the State Department advocated for more robust UN involvement.¹¹¹

Sergey Lavrov, in turn, complained in mid-April 2003 that: “the victorious coalition intends to provide itself for arrangements in Iraq [...] until the moment power can be transferred to the new government.” If the UN is passed by in this way, Lavrov warned: “the occupation authorities alone will be responsible for the development of the situation, with all the ensuing consequences.”¹¹² Returning the Iraqi file to UN auspices in a substantive way, rather than just giving it a cosmetic role in reconstruction efforts, was crucial given sentiments concerning

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ ‘Press Briefing with Ari Fleischer’, 4 April 2003, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=61068>.

¹¹⁰ ‘Russia, France And Germany Want the Impossible’, *Kommersant*, 5 April 2003, p. 5, in CDRP, no. 14, vol. 55, 7 May 2003, p. 6.

¹¹¹ Rice, *No Higher Honour*, p. 215.

¹¹² ‘Interv’yu S. Lavrova “Nezavisimoi Gazete” (“S. Lavrov’s Interview with *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*”), 18 April 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/vystuplenia-zaavlenia/-/asset_publisher/97FOfHiV2r4j/content/id/523926.

Russia's status as a permanent Security Council member. "The key to our position", Lavrov argued: "is that the prerogatives of the current permanent members of the Security Council be under no circumstances affected."¹¹³

Strengthening the UN's role was also important to reduce America's unilateral sway over determining the economic future of Iraq, and by extension Russian commercial interests. While the Russian government understood that, initially: "the US would determine who gets 'which share of the pie' in Iraq, it was keen to deal not so much directly with the US, but via the UN structures."¹¹⁴ Speaking to the BBC a month after the adoption of Resolution 1483, President Putin noted Russia's substantial economic interests in Iraq and warned that, when it came to new investments "the future Iraqi government must make its *own* decisions", in what was clearly a criticism of the CPA.¹¹⁵

The Iraqi disarmament file and the sanctions regime

The fate of the prior UN sanctions regime was also contentious. The White House argued that it should be lifted immediately because the restrictions no longer served a "useful purpose", with the Saddam regime gone, and humanitarian assistance to the Iraqi people now being of paramount importance.¹¹⁶ Russia opposed the lifting of any sanctions before the Iraqi disarmament file had been conclusively closed, in compliance with previous UN resolutions.¹¹⁷ Moscow argued that UNMOVIC inspectors should return to Iraq to find the WMD on which the Bush administration's

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Interview with a Russian diplomat.

¹¹⁵ V. Putin, 'BBC Interview with David Frost', 22 June 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/breakfast_with_frost/3010956.stm. Emphasis added.

¹¹⁶ 'Press Briefing by Ari Fleischer', 22 April 2003, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=61077>.

¹¹⁷ 'Alexander Yakovenko On The Lifting Of Sanctions Against Iraq', 22 April 2004, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/523574?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&_101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA_languageId=en_GB.

casus belli had been built. The White House deflected such pressure, insisting that coalition forces lead the effort to locate the WMD.¹¹⁸

Russian officials acknowledged the “humanitarian” imperative to lift some economic restrictions, while emphasizing that “the very procedure of final lifting of the sanctions” should be based on Security Council resolutions adopted earlier.¹¹⁹ While the argumentation was couched in exclusively legal terms, Russian statements also betrayed a desire see the US exposed over what might have been erroneous claims over WMD in Iraq. The Russian side recognized that the question of the presence of WMD in Iraq was key to the victors’ prestige and was not willing to make the closing of the disarmament file an easy proposition.

Russia’s rejection of the immediate lifting of restrictions was also intimately linked with its desire to see the ‘Oil-For-Food’ programme phased out in a way that would not harm its own businesses.¹²⁰ Finding a compromise on these questions required that Resolution 1483 specify the remaining legal power of those UN resolutions adopted prior to the Iraq invasion. In the end, the Russian government characterized the endorsed formulation, which underlined the intention of the Council to revisit the mandates of UNMOVIC and the IAEA, as a win for Russian diplomacy.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ ‘Press Briefing by Ari Fleischer’, 8 May 2003.

¹¹⁹ ‘Igor Ivanov with Saud Al-Faysal’, 8 May 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/521534?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&_101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA_languageId=en_GB.

¹²⁰ ‘Fedotov To Qatar’s Al-Jazeera TV Channel’.

¹²¹ ‘Interv’yu I. S. Ivanova Rossiiskim I Zarubezhnym SMI’ (“I. Ivanov’s Interview with Russian and International Media”), 22 May 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/519838. A US official, on the other hand, noted that the Bush administration did not “yield” to Russia on this point, but “simply recognized that the future roles of UNMOVIC and the IAEA could not be decided at the time and in fact did not need to be, so the Security Council kicked the issue down the road.”

3.3) UN resolutions 1511 and 1546

While Russia's UN delegation negotiated Resolution 1483 under the impression of a swift US victory in Iraq, resolutions 1511 and 1546 were adopted in a changing climate, the coalition forces appearing increasingly bogged down. In this context, Russia's quest for economic and political leverage on the Iraq file continued, mainly in lobbying for the UN Security Council's role in Iraq to be further enhanced. In negotiating Resolution 1511, Russian officials also sought a strict timetable for restoring Iraq's sovereignty and the determination of a clear mandate for a multinational force (MNF) accountable to the Security Council.¹²² Moscow further hoped to involve Iraq's neighbours, including Iran and Syria, in an Iraqi settlement. As the Security Council moved towards negotiating Resolution 1546, Russia insisted that the MNF should stay in Iraq only at the explicit request of the new interim government.

After Resolution 1483: a shifting security landscape in Iraq

In the autumn of 2003, the Russian-US push-and-pull over the specifics of Resolution 1511 occurred against the backdrop of a deteriorating security landscape in Iraq. Following April's initial euphoria over the coalition forces' swift capture of Baghdad, August saw growing Shia demonstrations in Baghdad's suburbs, as well as a major terrorist attack targeting the UN headquarters in Baghdad, killing the UN Special Envoy Sergio de Mello. These events strengthened the conviction in Moscow that a threat in Iraq emanated not just from local resistance to the occupation, but from Islamist radicals flocking to Iraq to build a terrorist safe haven.¹²³ Commenting on the growing quagmire, Lavrov noted in an *Izvestia* interview that the

¹²² 'Briefing by Yuri Fedotov', 15 September 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/506818?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&_101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA_languageId=en_GB.

¹²³ 'UN Smoked Out of Iraq', *Kommersant*, 21 August 2003, p. 9, in CDRP, no. 33, vol. 55, 17 September 2003, pp. 6-7.

US was losing as many soldiers in Iraq as the USSR had lost in Afghanistan, if calculated on a daily basis.¹²⁴

Russia and UN Resolution 1511

As negotiations towards Resolution 1511 got underway in this shifting climate, the mandate for an MNF for Iraq was contentious. The US made clear that anything but full US command of the MNF was out of the question.¹²⁵ The Kremlin was pliant, recognizing that the coalition forces represented the most effective military contingent on the ground, and did not, in theory, even preclude the participation of Russian forces under American command. Behind the scenes, however, such a Russian commitment was considered out of the question.¹²⁶ Furthermore, Russian diplomats demanded explicit guarantees as to the MNF mandate, period of stay, and all related judicial matters.

Only in working out a “high-quality” document addressing these issues, President Putin argued, could one ensure that a new resolution would not just be a “fig leaf”.¹²⁷ Since it was crucial to give the Iraqis confidence that they would drive a political settlement, the UN’s role needed to be strengthened: “not because we would like to diminish the significance of the United States, but in order to [...] make it clear to the Iraqi people that a qualitative change is taking place.” To that end, whilst Moscow had previously insisted that the US and UK be labelled “occupying powers”, it was now critical that their status be changed to “international forces”. At the same time, the

¹²⁴ ‘Interview with Sergey Lavrov’, *Izvestia*, 9 September 2003, p. 1, in CDRP, no. 36, vol. 55, 8 October 2003, pp. 1-2.

¹²⁵ ‘Press Briefing by Scott McClellan’, 3 September 2003, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=61156>.

¹²⁶ Russian experts saw the prospect of Moscow sending a Russian contingent to Iraq as highly unlikely, ‘Iraq: The Russians are coming’, *Vremya Novostei*, 5 September 2003, <http://www.vremya.ru/print/79362.html>. As a US official noted, Washington never took seriously Russian theoretical offers to contribute troops to the MNF and actually preferred Russian non-participation, since de-confliction mechanisms with the Russian military would otherwise have been needed.

¹²⁷ V. Putin, ‘Na Vstreche S Prepodavatatelyami I Studentami Kolumbiiskogo Universiteta’.

Russian leader warned, one needed “to stay on realistic grounds”, and power should be transferred from coalition forces to local authorities, including military structures: “only when they [became] strong enough for this.”¹²⁸

The language of the MNF’s mandate remained controversial throughout the negotiations, since less than two weeks before the Security Council vote a new draft resolution presented by the Bush administration did not include provisions preferred by Russia.¹²⁹ However, Russian officials appeared satisfied with the eventual compromise wording on the MNF, which stipulated that its functions be subordinate to the task of promoting the restoration of Iraq’s sovereignty. This provision, Russia argued, guaranteed permanent Security Council control over the political settlement in Iraq.

Furthermore, on the issue of drawing up a timeline for returning sovereignty to the Iraqi people, the Bush administration was hesitant. The American position was that “any premature effort to transfer sovereignty” was: “simply going to be harmful.”¹³⁰ Russian and other actors’ pleas for a timetable were brushed aside, a senior administration official commenting that “I don’t think anybody wants to compromise on a transfer of sovereignty that might fall apart”, or “set artificial timetables.”¹³¹ Russian commentators assumed nefarious motives behind US resistance, charging that: “Washington’s main objective [was] to use a new resolution to put as much international military and financial assistance as possible at its disposal in Iraq, but at the same time not to share any real power.”¹³²

¹²⁸ V. Putin, ‘Interview with *The New York Times*’.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ ‘A Senior Administration Official on the President’s Bilateral Meetings’, 24 September 2003, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=80632>.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² ‘Russia’s Chinese Tactic’, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 15 September 2003, p. 6, in CDRP, no. 37, vol. 55, 15 October 2003, p. 16.

The Russian leadership, in contrast, advocated for a specific timetable.¹³³ “Today perhaps”, Igor Ivanov conceded in late September 2003: “there might not yet be structures in Baghdad, ready to take full responsibility for the fate of their country. But the important thing is [...] a plan for restoring their sovereignty.” Developments in Afghanistan, where a similar transition period had been launched with outside assistance, showed that: “there was already a clear formula for a political settlement.”¹³⁴ Importantly, the timetable – establishing deadlines for creating a provisional government, forming a constitutional assembly, writing a constitution, and holding elections – needed to precede other measures, even the formation of an MNF.¹³⁵ On Russia’s insistence, Resolution 1511 then stipulated a deadline for writing a timetable on the restoration of Iraqi sovereignty, to be submitted to the Security Council by December 15.

Russian calls for an international conference on Iraq

While Russia welcomed that Resolution 1511 recognized the significance of neighbouring states contributing to an Iraqi settlement, its calls for regional involvement intensified soon after. At the beginning of 2004, Sergey Lavrov noted that it was “in many ways thanks to Russia’s active position, that Kofi Annan had created a consultative group on Iraq”, including all states neighbouring Iraq, Egypt, and the five permanent Security Council members.¹³⁶ Moscow then set out to organize an international gathering, modelled according to the Bonn conferences on Afghanistan.¹³⁷ Both Russia’s preference for a clear timetable structuring a transition period in

¹³³ ‘Open Session and Closed Consultations’, *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 24 July 2003, p. 1, in CDRP, no. 29, vol. 55, 20 August 2003, pp. 17-18.

¹³⁴ ‘Stenogramma Telemosta S Uchastiem I. S. Ivanova Na GA OON’ (“Transcript of the Teleconference with I. Ivanov at the UN General Assembly”), 25 September 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/crime/-/asset_publisher/3F51ZsLVSx4R/content/id/504554.

¹³⁵ ‘Interview with Sergey Lavrov’, 9 September 2003.

¹³⁶ ‘Interv'yu S. V. Lavrova Po Itogam 2003 Goda’ (“S. Lavrov’s Interview on the Results of 2003”), 5 January 2004, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/vystuplenia-zaavlenia/-/asset_publisher/97FOfHiV2r4j/content/id/491538.

¹³⁷ ‘Interv'yu Y. V. Fedotova Itar-tass’ (“Y. Fedotov’s Interview with *Itar-Tass*”), 12 March 2004, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/ee/-/asset_publisher/mo1LgbIkJbRf/content/id/481700.

Iraq, and its calls for a Bonn-type conference, indicate that Moscow looked at the Iraqi situation through the prism of Afghanistan.

Moscow's preference for an international conference was driven by two considerations. First, its invoking of the prestigious Bonn conferences suggests that Moscow anticipated status gains from organizing the event. But more importantly, Russian diplomats genuinely believed that regional involvement was required to pacify Iraq, confer legitimacy on a new Iraqi government, expected to be installed in the summer, and prevent further spillover of instability. It is no coincidence that calls for an Iraq conference coincided with more general Russian pleas to revisit the idea of a new regional security architecture for the Middle East.¹³⁸ Once an international conference on Iraq was convened in Sharm Al-Shaikh in November 2004, Sergey Lavrov noted with satisfaction that the effort: "was fully in line with Russia's traditional proposals for an Iraqi settlement."¹³⁹

Russia and UN Resolution 1546

Adopted in June 2004, UN Resolution 1546 endorsed the formation of a sovereign Interim Government in Iraq, welcomed the end of the occupation by 30 June, and called for democratic elections by January 2005. The Russian government had noted as early as March that the modalities for the transfer of power from the occupation to the Iraqi people, scheduled for 30 June, needed to be determined either by a new UN resolution or the type of international conference discussed.¹⁴⁰ While mechanisms for the power transfer had originally been stipulated

¹³⁸ 'War in Iraq – What Is to Be Done?', *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 14 April 2004, p. 7, in CDRP, no. 15, vol. 56, 12 May 2004, p. 5.

¹³⁹ 'Sergey Lavrov on the Outcome of the International Meeting on Iraq', 23 November 2004, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/454726?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&_101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA_languageId=en_GB.

¹⁴⁰ 'Yuri Fedotov Interview with Interfax News Agency', 23 March 2004, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/480268?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&_101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA_languageId=en_GB.

in a November 2003 agreement between the CPA and the IGC, Russia rejected the document because it circumvented the UN Security Council. Instead, Moscow argued a new government had to be formed in a way that was “transparent” and perceived to be “legitimate”.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, the new resolution was to clarify that the MNF should stay in Iraq only at the explicit request of the interim government.

Against the backdrop of these baseline Russian demands, negotiations towards Resolution 1546 dragged on for approximately two months and in early June *Izvestia* reported that Russia was still far from satisfied with the draft. At that stage, Moscow wanted two separate resolutions – the first determining the status of the local government to be adopted immediately, a later resolution discussing the mandate of the Iraqi army and security forces.¹⁴² This demand reflected an ongoing Russian-US disagreement over how to define the relationship between the MNF and the new Iraqi security forces. Whether the MNF would henceforth need Iraq’s consent for specific operations was especially contentious. The US rejected an Iraqi ‘veto right’ over US military operations and demanded that: “American troops will remain under the command of US officers and be accountable to their Defense Ministry and the US President.”¹⁴³ American reluctance to cede full authority over its operations prevailed in the context of a deteriorating security situation in Iraq in the spring of 2004, especially given Sunni insurgent violence in Fallujah coinciding with Shia uprisings in Najaf and Sadr city.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹Indeed, when the IGC was dissolved on 1 June and a new Cabinet of Ministers became active, Elena Suponina critically noted that: “questions about the new government are arising not so much because of its makeup, as because of the way it was formed; at the bidding of the Americans”, ‘Two Presidents In Half An Hour’, *Vremya Novostei*, 2 June 2004, p. 1, in CDRP, no. 22, vol. 56, 30 June 2004, pp. 21-22.

¹⁴² ‘Moscow and Paris Revolt against UK–US Resolution on Iraq’, *Izvestia*, 4 June 2004, <http://iz.ru/news/290721>.

¹⁴³ ‘Press Gaggle by Scott McClellan’, 25 May 2004, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=66000>.

¹⁴⁴ Rice, *No Higher Honour*, pp. 269-273.

Resolution 1546 eventually stipulated that “the presence of the MNF is at the request of the incoming Interim Government of Iraq”, that its mandate shall be reviewed at Baghdad’s request or 12 months from the adoption of the Resolution, while annexed letters detailed a security partnership to be established between the Iraqi government and the MNF. Overall, Iraqi security forces were encouraged to progressively play a greater role and ultimately assume full responsibility for security in Iraq. The Russian government was satisfied with these provisions, welcoming what it viewed as a qualitatively new stage of sovereignty restoration in Iraq.

The preceding section discusses how Russian officials sought leverage in cooperation by shaping the contents of resolutions 1483, 1511, and 1546 in order to strengthen the UN Security Council role in an Iraqi settlement, reduce the scope for CPA unilateralism, and involve regional states. Whilst this quest for leverage tended to be couched in a discourse about empowering the Iraqi people, Russia’s key concern was with the prerogative of the UN Security Council in setting the framework for an Iraqi settlement. Beyond that, Russia attempted to protect existing, and enhance future, economic interests in post-war Iraq, as will be discussed below. Economic leverage was built both in negotiating the aforementioned resolutions, as well as through separate bilateral and multilateral discussions.

3.4) ‘Oil-for-Food’ and economic reconstruction

Russia’s contracts under the ‘Oil-for-Food’ programme – lobbying for prioritization

After the invasion of Iraq, Russia was concerned that its contracts under the ‘Oil-for-Food’ programme be honoured. Sergey Lavrov issued an early warning that the Russian government was prepared to endorse temporary amendments to the programme in order to meet Iraq’s humanitarian needs, but would not “restructure” its mechanisms since this was not merely a

“technical matter”.¹⁴⁵ Having achieved a six-month extension of the programme with Resolution 1483, the Russian government convened businesses involved in its implementation for a meeting at the Foreign Ministry. Igor Ivanov professed that Moscow was interested not only in preserving but also strengthening the role Russian companies had in implementing the ‘Oil-for-Food’ programme. To this end, Ivanov promised, 30 Russian diplomats had already returned to Baghdad to establish contacts with the IGC and assist Russian businesses in opening representations. Meanwhile, Russian diplomats at the UN in New York were busy making the case that already financed and approved contracts under ‘Oil-for-Food’ should be honoured before the programme’s termination in November.¹⁴⁶ Throughout the summer and into autumn, the Russian government engaged in lobbying efforts bilaterally with the US and at the UN, noting by 1 October that 75% of Russian contracts had been designated priority cases and pushing for the completion of the review process over the ensuing weeks.¹⁴⁷

While Russia’s efforts were geared towards building commercial leverage, Moscow stressed their humanitarian character, arguing that “continuity” was best for the Iraqi people. Yuri Fedotov explained that there were three principal requirements to tackle Iraqi reconstruction successfully: security; transparency, and continuity. Invoking the latter, Fedotov praised the ‘Oil-for-Food’ programme since it had been: “designed to address the acute economic and humanitarian problems in Iraq.” The Russian government expected, so Fedotov argued, that most Russian contracts be honoured and warned that he would raise the issue at the Madrid Donor Conference.

¹⁴⁵ ‘UN Security Council, 4726th meeting’, 27 March 2003, <https://www.un.org/en/sc/meetings/records/2003.shtml>.

¹⁴⁶ Yuri Fedotov explained the technical procedure for contract designations after the passing of Resolution 1483: ‘Yuri Fedotov Interview with *Vremya Novosti*’, 11 June 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/517394?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&_101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA_languageId=en_GB.

¹⁴⁷ ‘Russian-American Iraq Consultations’, 1 October 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/504258?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&_101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA_languageId=en_GB.

At this time, the Kremlin was eager to protect existing contracts, especially because prospects for new investment in Iraq seemed dim.¹⁴⁸ Business conditions were assessed as unfavourable, both because of the difficult security situation in Iraq,¹⁴⁹ as well as greater international competition for contracts.

In interviews given to mark the expiry of ‘Oil-for-Food’ on 21 November, Fedotov drew up a balance sheet of Russian lobbying efforts over the past six months. While Russian businesses had provided goods and services worth USD2.3 billion to Iraq under the programme between December 1996 and March 2003, Russian contracts worth over USD1.6 billion had been designated priority cases going forward, including for big projects in the energy, oil and gas, water management, and irrigation sectors.¹⁵⁰ Russia’s relative success in protecting its commercial leverage was also attributed to Moscow’s cooperative stance vis-à-vis Washington after the March invasion. One US official told *Vremya Novostei* amid the closure of ‘Oil-for-Food’ that “Russian’s interests in Iraq will be taken into account”, partially given President Putin’s “open and honest” position on the war and good relations with President Bush. Many US officials interviewed, however, stressed that the initial extension of the programme had not been a bow to Russian pressure, but had been seen as the “right thing”, especially since the Bush administration did not have a ready alternative.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ ‘Interv’yu Y. V. Fedotova Agentstvu “Interfaks” (“Y. Fedotov’s Interview with *Interfax* Agency”), 21 October 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzCA/content/id/499962.

¹⁴⁹ In early 2004 Russian citizens working on infrastructure projects in Iraq for the Russian company *Interenergoserwis* were kidnapped in several incidents. ‘Second Blood’, *Russky Kuryer*, 27 May 2004, p. 2, in CDRP, no. 21, vol. 56, 23 June 2004, p. 22.

¹⁵⁰ ‘Yuri Fedotov Interview with *Vremya Novostei*’, 21 November 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/496002?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw&_101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw_languageId=en_GB. In Russia’s public assessments, the figures on the financials under ‘Oil-for-Food’ did not always match. For calculations diverging from those stated in the text, see ‘Moscow Will Defend Its Economic Interests’, *Vremya MN*, 26 April 2003, p. 5, in CDRP, no. 17, vol. 55, 28 May 2003, pp. 3-4.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Cunningham. Phone interview with Matthew Bryza, 12 July 2016.

Russia and the UN probe into corruption under the 'Oil-for-Food' programme

Subsequently, allegations that Russian businesses and officials had engaged in corrupt practices under 'Oil-for-Food' would test the Russian-US relationship. In April 2004 the Security Council adopted Resolution 1538, approving the creation of an independent inquiry to investigate irregularities under the programme. The Independent Inquiry Committee was to be headed by former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker, who insisted his activities be backed up by a Security Council resolution, which Russia initially opposed. The Russian Foreign Ministry noted pointedly that such "historical investigations" should not be the chief priority of the Security Council, whose work on Iraq should rather be "forward looking".¹⁵²

Different individuals and entities came under focus from UN and US corruption probes into 'Oil-for-Food', including Belarus' Infobank, Duma Deputy Speaker Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, former Putin Chief of Staff Alexander Voloshin, a low-level UN official and Russian citizen Alexander Yakovlev, as well as Kofi Annan's own family. The Volcker Committee criticized what it viewed as Moscow's insufficient cooperation, which in turn prompted sharp Russian responses questioning the body's "ethical standards".¹⁵³ The issue remained a headache between Moscow and Washington throughout 2004, leading some US officials to question how far US cooperation with Russia should go. The Russian press, for its part, accused Washington of using the scandal to push for reform of the UN, at a time when the Bush administration also appointed the hawkish John Bolton US Ambassador to the UN.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² 'Statement by Alexander Yakovenko', 22 April 2004, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/475956?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&_101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA_languageId=en_GB.

¹⁵³ 'Yuri Fedotov to Questions from Interfax News Agency', 30 November 2004, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/454334?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw&_101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw_languageId=en_GB.

¹⁵⁴ 'Russian Fall Guy in the UN', *Vremya Novostei*, 10 August 2005, pp. 1-2, in CDRP, no. 32, vol. 57, 7 September 2005, p. 12.

Russian interests in economic reconstruction

Beyond protecting its existing contracts under the 'Oil-for-Food' programme, Russia was also eager for a broader share of the Iraqi economic reconstruction pie. On the US side, planning for reconstruction began in earnest in the late summer of 2003, as preparations for a donor conference in Madrid got underway. August and September saw initial consultations between US and Russian officials on possible contributions from Moscow¹⁵⁵ and the topic was taken up at the Bush-Putin summit at Camp David on 26 September.¹⁵⁶ It was quite clear, however, that the Russian government was not considering financial contributions, but instead eyed prime and sub-contracts for Russian businesses in reconstruction work. Indeed, since Russia did not pledge a donor contribution at the Madrid conference on 23-24 October, it was not considered a critical player in Iraq's economic recovery at the time.¹⁵⁷

In its pursuit of participation in the reconstruction venture, Russia used its historical experience as leverage, arguing that its specialists were viewed "like friends" in Iraq and knew its economy "inside out."¹⁵⁸ The unique competitive advantages enjoyed by Russian businesses were emphasized in official statements, especially since the leadership was aware of the exacerbating competitive landscape in post-war Iraq. President Putin went as far as to argue that: "the Iraqi population undoubtedly has a much greater confidence in its traditional partners than, frankly, those who control the situation there today."¹⁵⁹ Russia's eagerness to return to Iraq as an economic player was also underscored by the fact that a substantial number of specialists

¹⁵⁵ From 6-7 August, for instance, Bill Burns was in Moscow for consultations with Yuri Fedotov and Alexander Saltanov.

¹⁵⁶ 'Press Briefing by Scott McClellan', 26 September 2003, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=61167>.

¹⁵⁷ Interviews: Anthony Wayne, Washington DC, 27 June 2016. Alan Larson, Washington DC, 23 June 2016.

¹⁵⁸ V. Putin, 'Interv'yu agentstvu ANSA, gazete "Korr'ere della sera" i telekompanii RAI' ("Interview with the ANSA Agency, *Corriere Della Serra* and the TV Company RAI"), 3 November 2003, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22185>.

¹⁵⁹ 'Otvety V. Putina Na Voprosy Uchastnikov Vsemirnogo Ekonomicheskogo Foruma' ("V. Putin's Answers to Questions From Participants of the International Economic Forum"), 3 October 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/503714.

remained in the country even as the security situation deteriorated. In early April 2004, 550 Russian civilians worked in Iraq, 370 of them contracted by *Teknopromeksport* on the Yusifa power plant construction, and ca. 200 individuals building the Baghdad South and Dora power plants for *Interenergoserwis*.¹⁶⁰

In lobbying to protect its economic leverage in Iraq, Moscow recognized the need to engage the new Iraqi government. President Putin hosted IGC head Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim in December 2003 and promised that: “Russian companies could invest up to USD4 billion in Iraq in the near future.”¹⁶¹ Russian diplomats had resumed their work in Baghdad as early as June 2003, led by interim chargé-d’affaires Aleksandr Kinshchak, to help Russian companies return to the Iraqi market. Trying to maximize leverage, Russian officials also explicitly linked the fate of existing ‘Oil-for-Food’ contracts to any readiness to commit future investments.¹⁶² Anticipating competitive pressures in the Iraqi market, Moscow further demanded that funds for reconstruction projects be administered transparently and fairly. The creation of a new UN/World Bank trust fund for Iraq at the Madrid Conference was therefore welcomed by Russia, since it mitigated fears that the US alone would call the shots in awarding reconstruction contracts.¹⁶³

The December 2003 Pentagon directive

Such Russian fears were not unfounded, given a prevailing view among some US officials that states which had opposed Saddam’s removal should not benefit from access to funds for Iraq’s reconstruction. Passing a wartime supplemental appropriations bill in April 2003, the US Senate

¹⁶⁰ ‘Russian Specialists Leaving Iraq’, *Izvestia*, 14 April 2004, p. 2, in CDRP, no. 15, vol. 56, 12 May 2004, pp. 1-2.

¹⁶¹ V. Putin, ‘Opening Remarks at a Meeting with Abdel Aziz al-Hakim’, 22 December 2003, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22263>.

¹⁶² ‘Statement by Alexander Yakovenko’, 21 October 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/500378?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&_101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA_languageId=en_GB.

¹⁶³ ‘Interv’yu Y. V. Fedotova Agentstvu “Interfaks”’, 21 October 2003.

initially discussed an amendment that sought to limit reconstruction funding for French, German, Russian, Chinese, and Syrian businesses.¹⁶⁴ Although the amendment was discarded, fears about being cut out of Iraqi reconstruction efforts emanated from Russian press coverage published early into the invasion.

In late December 2003, the Pentagon issued a directive stating that nations opposed to the Iraq invasion may not bid for USD18.6 billion in reconstruction contracts, money granted by Congress.¹⁶⁵ The White House scrambled to soften the blow,¹⁶⁶ although Russian media was unforgiving in interpreting its Press Secretary's statement as endorsing Paul Wolfowitz's plan.¹⁶⁷ In interviews US officials also downplayed the importance of the Pentagon statement, saying it was mostly a "political message", while few in the administration supported a concerted US effort to punish the Franco-German-Russian anti-war troika. One official also clarified that, even had Russia been able to bid for prime contracts, these were typically awarded to US companies capable of fulfilling complex procurement system rules.¹⁶⁸ Still, Russian officials reacted coolly to Wolfowitz' statement.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ 'Congressional Record, Daily Digest. Senate Passed Wartime Supplemental Appropriations Bill', 3 April 2003, <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2003/4/3>.

¹⁶⁵ 'Pentagon Bars Three Nations from Iraq Bids', *The New York Times*, 10 December 2003, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/10/world/a-region-inflamed-the-reconstruction-pentagon-bars-three-nations-from-iraq-bids.html>.

¹⁶⁶ 'Press Briefing by Scott McClellan', 10 December 2003, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=61607>.

¹⁶⁷ 'Russia Remembers International Debt', *Kommersant*, 11 December 2003, pp. 9-10, in CDRP, no. 49, vol. 55, 7 January 2004, pp. 27-28.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Kurt Volker, Washington DC, 27 June 2016.

¹⁶⁹ 'Yuri Fedotov on Statements by US Officials Regarding Contracts in Iraq', 10 December 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/493586?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&_101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA_languageId=en_GB.

3.5) Iraqi oil resources and Russian businesses

Already before the March 2003 invasion, Russia had been greatly concerned about its investments in the Iraqi oil sector.¹⁷⁰ In early 2003 an official Russian delegation visited Washington DC to discuss its apprehensions, and since the Bush administration was then keen to moderate Russian opposition to the war, US officials assured they did not want to see Russian companies cut out of Iraqi oil development, while not making explicit promises.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, officials mollified Russia's concerns, saying the Iraqi oil sector was a "big pie and growing" and: "there would be enough for everybody."¹⁷² In the immediate aftermath of the invasion, the Russian leadership was anxious that the US would determine access to Iraq's hydrocarbon resources, which increased the perceived need for swift accommodation with the Americans.

Against this backdrop, Moscow pushed for international monitoring of disbursements from the Iraq Development Fund and Iraqi oil export proceeds in negotiating Resolution 1483.¹⁷³ Russian officials stressed the importance of Iraq's oil sector throughout 2003 and statements were again couched in a humanitarian discourse. Moscow publicly reasoned that investments in oil fields "generate quick returns", free up additional funds that can then be re-invested in other Iraqi sectors such that "new jobs will appear, people will receive salaries" and both: "economic and humanitarian tasks will be solved."¹⁷⁴

As noted earlier, LUKoil had concluded an agreement with the Saddam regime for the development of the West Qurna 2 field. Before consenting to Resolution 1483, the Russian

¹⁷⁰ Golan, 'Russia and the Iraq War', p. 436.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Steve Pifer, Washington DC, 28 June 2016.

¹⁷² Interview with a US official.

¹⁷³ 'I. S. Ivanov S Predstaviteli Rossiiskikh Kompanii, Rabotayushhikh V Irake' ("I. Ivanov with Representatives of Russian Businesses that Operate in Iraq"), 9 June 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/517610.

¹⁷⁴ 'Interv'yu Y. V. Fedotova Agentstvu "Interfaks"', 21 October 2003.

government reached an understanding with the US according to which the agreement would be suspended rather than annulled. As a result, no other companies could sign a deal on West Qurna 2 before a new Iraqi government had been installed, so that LUKoil had an opportunity to settle the matter with the new authorities.¹⁷⁵ Given this objective, Russia's eagerness to quickly return a diplomatic mission to the Iraqi capital appeared all the more logical. Russia's Union of Oil and Gas Producers, led by former Energy Minister Yuri Shafranik, also stressed the need for investment opportunities outside Russia and concluded a cooperation agreement with the Foreign Ministry to further that end. At the signing ceremony in November 2003, Shafranik warned that: "for our companies there can be no other way but to implement serious projects outside of Russia."¹⁷⁶

By late 2004, there was cautious optimism that progress on West Qurna 2 was imminent. Russian Energy Minister Igor Yusufov, present at President Putin's summit with the IGC head Ayad Allawi, stated that bilateral talks on previously signed contracts and further cooperation were being prepared, and that LUKoil and *Zarubezhneft* were prepared to invest USD4 billion in West Qurna. Asked by a journalist whether such a decision could be made without US approval, Yusufov noted pointedly that the agreement "was in keeping with the spirit of cooperation between Russia and Iraq", although the Russian media joked afterwards that: "nothing is going to be possible without the Americans."¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁵ 'Yuri Fedotov Interview With *Vremya Novostei*', 11 June 2003.

¹⁷⁶ 'Stenogramma Vystuplenii A. I. Denisova I Predsedatelya Soyuza Neftegazopromyshlennikov Rossii Y. K. Shafranika' ("Transcript of Address by A. Denisov and Y. Shafranik, the Chairman of Russia's Oil Industrialists Union"), 5 November 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/economic_diplomacy/ism_communication/-/asset_publisher/fajfwCb4PqDA/content/id/498298.

¹⁷⁷ 'Vladimir Putin Plays with Someone Else's Puppets', *Kommersant*, 23 December 2003, p. 1, in CDRP, no. 51, vol. 55, 21 January 2004, pp. 16-17.

Again, Russia used one form of economic leverage for other commercial gains, signalling it was willing to forgive Baghdad's Soviet-era debt in return for resumed cooperation in the oil and gas sector.¹⁷⁸ Such hopeful signs notwithstanding, Moscow saw more immediate economic opportunities in sectors other than Iraqi oil exploration. When Al-Allawi visited Moscow in December 2004, talks with the Iraqi delegation focused chiefly upon projects in the electric power industry, rather than West Qurna.¹⁷⁹ Again, the precarious security situation in Iraq likely explains Russia's reservations. As Rice recalls, whilst Iraqi oil production resumed shortly after the invasion, key pipelines were destroyed as the insurgency grew, and output plateaued at ca. two million barrels per day in October 2003, staying at that below pre-war average until June 2004.¹⁸⁰

3.6) Relief for Iraq's Soviet-era debt

Finally, the Russian government hoped at best to recover the USD8.5 billion Iraq held in Soviet-era debt,¹⁸¹ at least to use the prospect of a partial or complete write-off as a bargaining chip. Prior to the war, Russian officials already shared their concerns about debt recovery with their US counterparts. In statements early into the war, the Russian leadership repeatedly complained that nobody had ever forgiven Russia its own debt.¹⁸²

That said, the Kremlin signalled its readiness for partial debt forgiveness within a Paris Club framework, aware that such relief would stimulate Iraq's reconstruction. In June 2003, six months before former Secretary of State James Baker was dispatched by Washington on an international mission to elicit support for debt relief, there was still hope in Moscow that at least some part of

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ 'Endless Fight', *Vremya Novostei*, 8 December 2004, pp. 1-2, in CDRP, no. 49, vol. 56, 5 January 2005, pp. 21-22.

¹⁸⁰ Rice, *No Higher Honour*, p. 268.

¹⁸¹ This was the amount given by Russian Finance Minister Kudrin, without interest.

¹⁸² V. Putin, 'Interview with *The New York Times*'.

the debt could be recovered. Following a Paris Club meeting, Russian media wrote that Moscow could expect to recover up to USD3.5 billion of the money owed.¹⁸³ As the security landscape deteriorated, Russian hopes gradually dissipated. By mid 2004, the Kremlin likely calculated that Baghdad needed serious external support and was in no position to repay the debt anyway. Better, therefore, to engage in a gesture of goodwill before the Iraqi elections scheduled for January 2005, in order to heighten Moscow's chances of winning lucrative future deals. It is along those lines, then, that President Putin discursively framed his December 2004 decision to forgive over 90% of Iraq's debt, announced during Al-Allawi's visit to Moscow.¹⁸⁴

The debt issue was also a Russian-US leverage ploy. While those officials representing the US at the Paris Club negotiations cared little about the Russian position, focused instead upon engaging major creditors such as Japan and Germany, given their traditionally austere financial policies,¹⁸⁵ others with responsibility for the US-Russia relationship remembered Iraq's debt being an "extremely sensitive issue".¹⁸⁶ Whilst the Russian government had little hope of fully recovering the debt, it was keen to use the issue as leverage on other economic interests. Moscow wanted assurances from Washington regarding its investments in Iraq's oil sector, one Russian official noting in February 2004 that: "to write off Iraq's debt, at a time when it was not yet clear how and in whose interests the country's oil wealth would be exploited, would be – to put it mildly – unreasonable."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ 'Freedom with Interest', *Vremya Novostei*, 14 July 2003, pp. 1-2, in CDRP, no. 28, vol. 55, 13 August 2003, pp. 18-19.

¹⁸⁴ V. Putin, 'Meeting With Iyad Allawi', 7 December 2004, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22733>.

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Larson.

¹⁸⁶ Phone interview with Thomas Graham, 7 July 2016.

¹⁸⁷ 'Interv'yu V. B. Khristenko Zhurnalu "Itogi"' ("V. Khristenko's Interview With the Journal *Itogi*"), 6 February 2004, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/487008.

It also seems unsurprising that Mr. Baker, travelling to Moscow in December 2003 for talks on the debt, left the Russian capital without significant results, given that Russian commercial prospects had just been dealt a blow by the Pentagon directive.¹⁸⁸ Indeed, the Russian side informed Mr. Baker that Moscow's stance in the debt negotiations: "would be determined by, among other things, regard for Russia's economic interests in Iraq."¹⁸⁹ At the same time, Russia's bargaining chip had limited value. Since it was clear that Baghdad was in no position to repay the debt, Russian debt relief would eventually be seen as a "limited gesture" rather than a serious concession.¹⁹⁰

4) Russian expectations of reciprocity as a driver of cooperation

This chapter argues that Russia's cooperation with the US following the March 2003 invasion of Iraq was propelled by a perception of swift US victory, and subsequently driven by a recognition that accepting this *fait accompli* provided Moscow with its best chance of salvaging the UN Security Council's reputation, as well as protecting its economic interests in Iraq and bilateral relationship with the US. At a deeper level, Russia's cooperative position crystallized against the backdrop of economic weakness and continued instability in Chechnya, leading President Putin to calculate that pragmatic cooperation with the US was most likely to elicit Western support for modernizing the economy and help him confront an Islamist terrorist threat emanating from Russia's south.

¹⁸⁸ The White House had to defend this unfortuitous timing, see 'Press Briefing by Scott McClellan', 12 December 2003, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=61609>.

¹⁸⁹ 'Vladimir Putin Meets with James Baker', 19 December 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/492738?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&_101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA_languageId=en_GB.

¹⁹⁰ Interviews with US sources.

Importantly, pragmatic cooperation was thus intended to ensure continued partnership with the US in many areas beyond Iraq. Since the Bush administration reciprocated the desire for good relations, as will be discussed below, there should have been opportunities in theory for the Russian government to pursue linkage diplomacy in return for its cooperative stance on Iraq. Such opportunities should have arisen especially since, first, dealing with a post-invasion Iraq topped the American list of foreign policy priorities in 2003-2004, and second, there was a relatively rich Russian-US bilateral agenda, including issues that would have lent themselves to linkage.

However, as the analysis shows, the Kremlin was in no position to engage in linkage diplomacy over its support for UN resolutions 1438, 1511, and 1546 because Russian policy was perceived by US officials more as opportunism than cooperation. A widespread US perception that Russia had little choice but to pragmatically cooperate after *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, and simply sought a “seat at the table” for itself and some “economic gains on the way out”, was further compounded by Russia’s relative weakness at that time.

If Russian officials expected quid pro quos, their US counterparts were reluctant to entertain them. The overarching American view was that Russia, first, was not an ally in the war, and second, mattered little to US policy after the invasion. While Russian cooperation in this case study was partially driven by considerations pertaining to the Russian-US bilateral agenda – confirming the relevance of Proposition 2 – Moscow did not have the power to pursue linkage. The scope to pursue US reciprocity was constrained not so much by the institutional-contextual factors introduced in the previous chapter, or by the trajectory of bilateral relations for that matter. It was, rather, chiefly curtailed by US perceptions of the meaningfulness and costliness of Russia’s cooperation. All that said, the Bush administration was still inclined to pursue pragmatic

cooperation throughout 2003 and 2004. Such willingness, however, was not conceived in any way to be “reciprocal” for Russia’s stance on Iraq.

4.1) Bilateral relations during the Iraq War: in the “afterglow” of the Slovenia Summit in June 2001

US-Russian relations followed a promising trajectory between 2001 and 2003, characterized by cooperation on counterterrorism and Afghanistan, and suffered only limited friction over the American abrogation of the ABM Treaty and NATO’s membership invitation to the Baltic states. Speaking at the 300th anniversary of St. Petersburg, two months into the Iraq War, President Bush called his Russian counterpart a “strong leader” with a “vision”, promising Russia would “enjoy the friendship of the United States” in fulfilling: “its potential for greatness.”¹⁹¹ At that time, Russian officials seemed equally relieved that the Iraq issue had left bilateral relations relatively unscathed, with Russia’s Ambassador to the US Yuri Ushakov applauding that “the atmosphere and the spirit of relations” could: “not be compared to what they were only a few weeks ago.”¹⁹² Hosting President Putin at Camp David in September, Bush characterized US-Russian relations as “broad and strong”, calling Moscow an ally in the GWoT, encouraging further cooperation on Afghanistan, missile defence, energy and investments, and heralding a “new level of partnership” with Russia.¹⁹³ The Bush administration also sought Moscow’s diplomatic assistance in dealing with perceived WMD threats emanating from North Korea and Iran.

Within the administration, especially Thomas Graham and Steve Hadley tirelessly lobbied for engagement with Russia. Other senior officials – Richard Armitage, Colin Powell, and the

¹⁹¹ ‘Press Availability with President Bush and President Putin’, 1 June 2003, <https://georgewebush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/06/20030601-2.html>.

¹⁹² ‘Interview By Yuri Ushakov’, *Izvestia*, 29 May 2003, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/519110?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw&_101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw_languageId=en_GB.

¹⁹³ ‘President Bush and President Putin in Press Availability at Camp David’, 27 September 2003.

President himself – had good rapports with their Russian counterparts and advocated for cooperation at a time when hawks in the Pentagon, the Vice President’s office, and Congress favoured a different line. The level of senior personal dedication to resolving outstanding issues after the Iraq invasion was noteworthy. To give one example, in the weeks leading up to the Security Council vote on Resolution 1483, Colin Powell and Igor Ivanov spoke at least three times about the text.¹⁹⁴

While relations faltered over the course of 2004 and 2005, as will be discussed in the next chapter, there was a shared desire for cooperation at least until mid 2004. Therefore, it seems plausible that the Kremlin might have leveraged its cooperation over Iraq to achieve US reciprocity within the bilateral agenda. Russian diplomats might have judged, on the basis of the extensive and constructive engagement with American counterparts outlined above, that their hopes for reciprocity were not unfounded. Indeed, US officials visited Moscow regularly and there was still: “a lot of US interest in Putin.”¹⁹⁵ At a time when relations were still “in the afterglow of Bush’s and Putin’s Slovenia summit in June 2001”,¹⁹⁶ when Condoleezza Rice recommended “forgiving Russia” for opposing the Iraq War, and the Graham-Hadley tandem approach to Russia found broad support among even the more hawkish voices at the State Department, the context seemed conducive to Russia pursuing reciprocity in cooperation. As noted in the introduction, the better the trajectory of bilateral relations, the greater the scope for Russian pursuit of linkage and reciprocity in theory.

¹⁹⁴ Phone calls took place on 26 April and 7 May and Colin Powell visited Moscow on 15 May, having dispatched Kim Holmes to the Russian capital a week before. Resolution 1483 was passed on 22 May.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with a US source.

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Daniel Fried, Washington DC, 22 June 2016.

4.2) Looking for evidence of linkage diplomacy

Counterterrorism: Chechnya and Georgia

Did the Russian government explicitly leverage its post-invasion cooperation on Iraq to receive greater US support for its own counterterrorism agenda in Chechnya and vis-à-vis Georgia? Certainly, throughout 2003 and 2004 the level of US support for Russia's Chechnya campaign remained of concern to the Kremlin. Following 9/11, Putin had proven quite successful in 'bandwagoning' with the Bush administration's GWoT, discursively linking his own counterterrorist campaign in the Second Chechen War to the US effort. Whereas the US had repeatedly criticized Russian conduct in Chechnya before 9/11, attitudes softened after the attacks. Colin Powell famously proclaimed that "Russia is fighting terrorists in Chechnya, there's no question about that",¹⁹⁷ although views on Chechnya within the Bush administration remained nuanced.¹⁹⁸ The US never fully endorsed Putin's securitization of the Chechen conflict as part of the GWoT. An awareness of the grievances of the Chechen people, perceptions of excessive Russian counterterrorism measures, as well as worries about opportunistic Russian use of its securitization linkage for objectives in Georgia, all led the US to continue to advocate for a political solution to the conflict.¹⁹⁹

Against this background, the Russian government appealed for greater US understanding of Russia's predicament in Chechnya following the Iraq invasion. President Putin argued that, while the terrorist problems emanating from Iraq and Chechnya were similar in many ways, Iraq was geographically remote from the US homeland, while Chechnya was an integral part of the Russian Federation. "It serves US interests to support Russia's efforts aimed at maintaining

¹⁹⁷ 'Press Briefing by Colin Powell at the NATO Rome Summit', 28 May 2002, <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s020528f.htm>.

¹⁹⁸ M. McFaul, 'U.S. Foreign Policy and Chechnya', *Twentieth Century Foundation*, March 2003.

¹⁹⁹ H. Notte, "'It's the Same War" – Explaining the Durability of States' Partnerships with the United States in its Global War on Terror', MPhil Thesis, *University of Oxford*, 2014.

stability in the Caucasus”, Putin concluded, and while: “we see understanding of this problem from the US President [...] we do not always meet understanding from various agencies and ministries of the United States.”²⁰⁰

In the period immediately preceding and following the Iraq invasion, the Bush administration undertook friendly gestures on the Chechnya file vis-à-vis Moscow. Powell mentioned Chechnya as a terrorist haven in his crucial 5 February address to the Security Council.²⁰¹ Three Chechen groups were designated terrorist organizations. And shortly before the vote on Resolution 1483, the State Department condemned a terrorist attack in Chechnya,²⁰² possibly in a show of goodwill to Moscow amid negotiations on the Security Council. The US-Russia working group on counterterrorism continued to meet and Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and Deputy Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Trubnikov, leading the effort, remained satisfied with the progress.²⁰³

There is, however, little evidence that Russian officials pursued linkage, saying to US officials: “Since we now support you on Iraq, you should stop criticizing what we do in Chechnya.” As Russia saw it, the Chechen and Iraqi campaigns were not up for ‘barter’, since they were now part and parcel of the same international counterterrorism effort. Whilst the Russian leadership argued that the Iraq War should never have been part of the fight against terrorism in the first place, had tragically only *heightened* the threat from Islamist fundamentalism in the region, Moscow was still not interested in a US defeat, since it saw itself as a US partner in a joint counterterrorism fight. Rather than characterizing Russia’s discourse on the Chechen issue as ‘linkage’, it is more

²⁰⁰ V. Putin, ‘Interview with *The New York Times*’.

²⁰¹ ‘UN Security Council, 4701st Meeting’, 5 February 2003.

²⁰² ‘Igor Ivanov at Joint Press Conference with Colin Powell’, 15 May 2003,

http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/us/-/asset_publisher/unVXBbj4Z6e8/content/id/520934?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_unVXBbj4Z6e8&_101_INSTANCE_unVXBbj4Z6e8_languageId=en_GB.

²⁰³ Interview with Richard Armitage, Washington DC, 20 June 2016.

accurate to say that the association was direct. While Grozny had long been a front in the international fight against terrorism, so Moscow argued, imprudent US foreign policy had turned Baghdad into another front, and cooperation was required to fight on both fronts.²⁰⁴ In this context, Moscow: “expected assistance in dealing with Chechnya and was somewhat irritated and baffled by the US’ unwillingness to do that wholeheartedly.”²⁰⁵

The Georgian nexus adds an additional layer of complexity to this argument. Following 9/11, the Russian Defence Ministry had repeatedly warned that it would take action against Chechen terrorists hiding in Georgia’s mountainous Pankisi Gorge. As Allison shows, Russia was initially reluctant to criticize the ‘Bush doctrine’ logic of pre-emptive self-defence, used to support the American *casus belli* for Iraq, seeking to retain the hypothetical option of pre-emptive strikes in its neighbourhood.²⁰⁶ However, Russia soon realized that it could not hope for a ‘Georgia-for-Iraq’ deal with the US – that is, Russian support for a US attack on Iraq in return for US support for Russian pre-emptive strikes inside Georgian territory.²⁰⁷ Rather, Washington created the Georgia Train and Equip Programme (GTEP), enabling Tbilisi to eradicate terrorist cells on Georgian soil with US assistance. Following the invasion, whilst Russian officials occasionally used the precedent of the Iraq war to pressure Georgia, threats were never explicit²⁰⁸ since Russia understood the difficulty of invoking a pre-emptive logic it had been reluctant to embrace over Iraq. If the Pankisi Gorge was a constant source of friction between Rice and Sergei Ivanov, the US felt that Moscow actually: “wanted no part in the rats’ nest of Chechen and al Qaeda fighters in that godforsaken place.”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁴ For this chain of argumentation, see ‘We Go to Iraq, And They Come to Chechnya?’.

²⁰⁵ Interview with Graham.

²⁰⁶ Allison, *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention*.

²⁰⁷ ‘There Won’t Be any Trading of Concessions with Russia’, *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 14 September 2002, p.7, in CDRP, no. 37, vol. 54, 9 October 2002, pp. 7-20.

²⁰⁸ Interview with Bryza.

²⁰⁹ Rice, *No Higher Honour*, p. 356.

The Middle East Peace Process

Russian officials hoped that cooperation with the US on Iraq would ensure their continued involvement in Middle Eastern diplomacy more broadly. Moscow: “still wanted to have a seat at the table for the Middle East Peace Process and was constantly reminding the US of that.”²¹⁰ Whilst Russian diplomats later became disillusioned with the Middle East Quartet’s leverage,²¹¹ the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was one of Russia’s regional priorities in 2003 and work within the Quartet was viewed as: “flexible, dynamic and constructive.”²¹² According to Ambassador Kurtzer, “the Russians remained very anxious to participate in Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking” at the time of the Iraq invasion²¹³ and a Russian diplomat working on the issue admitted that, while there was some reduction in contact in March 2003, Russia urged its partners to continue the joint work.²¹⁴

To Russia, cooperating on Iraq thus meant creating a favourable environment for enhancing its own profile in Middle Eastern diplomacy more broadly. As discussed, Russian efforts also extended to calling for an international conference on Iraq. Yet the calculation was not about pursuing linkage, but rather enhancing Russia’s status and building capacity to control a possibly unpredictable US Middle East policy. Commenting on Igor Ivanov’s extensive tour of the region in the autumn of 2003, Elena Suponina noted that it was “important for the Middle East that Moscow establish an active presence in the region at the very least”, if only: “to remind the Americans that one man cannot win a war.”²¹⁵

²¹⁰ Interview with A. Elizabeth Jones, Washington DC, 21 June 2016.

²¹¹ Interview with Vladimir Morozov, Moscow, 17 October 2016.

²¹² Interview with a Russian diplomat.

²¹³ Interview with Kurtzer.

²¹⁴ Interview with a Russian diplomat. Ambassador Vdovin, Russia’s Special Envoy to the Quartet, travelled to the Middle East two weeks into *Operation Iraqi Freedom* to pursue continued progress on the Road Map to Peace. Yuri Fedotov took up the issue with Bill Burns in Moscow in early August 2003.

²¹⁵ ‘Ivanov Favours New Resolution on Iraq’, *Vremya Novostei*, 18 July 2003, p. 5, in CDRP, no. 28, vol. 55, 13 August 2003, p. 20.

The NATO-Russia Council

Furthermore, pursuing pragmatic cooperation with the US after the disagreement over Iraq, Moscow eyed an enhanced role in the NATO-Russia Council amid ongoing debate about how the forum should work. In the original formulation, the Russian government supported the three co-chair system (Russia, the US, and the NATO Secretary General), given the status it entailed, but complained that NATO came into Council meetings with a unified position, diminishing Russia's leverage. Especially given its equivocal reaction to the Baltic states joining NATO, Russia hoped to be treated as an equal on the Council subsequently. Although Russia would give up on the endeavour by 2005, at the time of the Iraq invasion there was still hope of getting NATO to cooperate with Russia in a way which appealed to its status sentiments.

Russian expectations for a sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space

Since *Operation Iraqi Freedom* preceded the 'colour revolutions' in Georgia and Ukraine, Moscow also hoped Washington would grant it a sphere of influence over its neighbourhood and calculated that its cooperation in post-invasion Iraq would heighten the chance of such US magnanimity. There was a strong desire among Russian elites for Moscow to play the role of regional mediator in the post-Soviet space and it sought a mandate for such a role from the US: "We were willing to support the US at a global level, but at the regional level, we wanted to be a sort of supervisor."²¹⁶ While Russia never made such expectations explicit, US officials interviewed sensed a Russian linkage, a thinking that if Moscow let the US "get away" with the Iraq invasion, it could in return expect US support on issues crucial to Russia. However, there was little debate within the Bush administration on how to respond to such expectations, which could not be met as a matter of principled policy.²¹⁷ At the same time, a reluctance to accommodate Russia's aspirations was not explicitly communicated to Moscow since: "it was not

²¹⁶ Interview with a Russian expert.

²¹⁷ Interviews with US sources.

worth rocking the boat with Russia, at a time when we did not want to have another problem on Iraq.”²¹⁸

Russian expectations of diffuse reciprocity

While the preceding analysis fails to produce clear evidence of explicit Russian linkage diplomacy over Moscow’s support for Resolution 1483, interviewees’ testimonies point to a Russian expectation of what is termed ‘diffuse reciprocity’ in this study. Rather than asking for quid pro quos, Russian officials hoped for continued pragmatic cooperation, eager to work with the US on counterterrorism, the Middle East, in the NATO-Russia Council, but also energy and economic interests, not letting the disagreement over Iraq stand in the way. Although Russia’s principled readiness to cooperate on Iraq was chiefly driven by the various considerations discussed in this chapter – protecting commercial opportunities with Baghdad and returning the Iraq file to the UN Security Council – expectations of diffuse US reciprocity were an important additional factor explaining Russian cooperation. In this case study, the sum total of evidence therefore suggests that propositions 1 and 2 equally hold true.

A mutual signalling of diffuse reciprocity played out especially during the weeks leading up to Resolution 1483. On 8 May, Powell dispatched Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs, Kim Holmes, to Moscow for consultations on the resolution. While Holmes’ meeting with Igor Ivanov was “mostly for the cameras” rather than entailing substantive discussions, it was explicitly intended as a show of US-Russian cooperation, especially since the visit *preceded* Holmes’ stop-over in Berlin for consultations with America’s traditional allies Germany, the UK, and France.²¹⁹ In a subsequent flurry of diplomatic engagement preceding the St. Petersburg Summit in June, senior officials, while working out the details of Resolution 1483,

²¹⁸ Interview with a US source.

²¹⁹ Interview with Holmes.

simultaneously addressed other aspects of the bilateral relationship, including economic cooperation, Russian accession to the WTO, and the abrogation of the Jackson-Vanik amendment.²²⁰ After the summit, President Putin laid out his expectations for American cooperation in an interview, listing arms control and WMD proliferation, counterterrorism, bilateral trade, space technology, and concluding that the disagreement over Iraq was hopefully becoming: “a thing of the past.”²²¹

4.3) Explaining the sparse evidence of linkage diplomacy

Explaining the sparsity of linkage: principled policy and institutional factors

While diffuse reciprocity was thus at play, Russian and US officials denied exercising, or being receptive to, direct linkage over the Iraq issue. Russian observers stressed that Moscow’s policy after the invasion was driven by an interest in building relations with the new Iraqi authorities and settling the crisis, as well as normalizing relations with Washington, but that there was no hope of any specific US concessions.²²² US officials, in turn, rejected the notion of linkage in principle. Those interviewed stressed that the issues on which Russia expected US concessions – a free hand in Chechnya or a sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space – were not up for trading as a matter of fundamental policy.²²³

I argue in the introduction that we would expect institutional-contextual factors to partially account for the presence or absence of linkage in cooperation. These factors relate to, for instance, the time-frame within which negotiations play out (the longer, the more room

²²⁰ ‘Igor Ivanov at Joint Press Conference with Colin Powell’, 15 May 2003.

²²¹ V. Putin, ‘Interview with *The New York Times*’.

²²² Interviews with Russian sources. However, the notion of linkage pervaded Russian press coverage. See ‘Antiirakskie Sanktsii Otmenyat Segodnya?’ (“Lifting the Sanctions Against Iraq Today?”), *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 21 May 2003, http://www.ng.ru/world/2003-05-21/5_iraq.html.

²²³ Interviews with US sources.

theoretically for linkages to be made), or the level of seniority at which the substance of cooperation is negotiated (the more high-level the officials involved, the more likely they have the authority to pursue linkage). Russian-US negotiations towards resolutions 1483, 1511, and 1546 extended over many weeks and involved high-level officials on both sides, thus providing a ripe context for linkage diplomacy. Furthermore, since multilateral engagement²²⁴ – at the UN in New York, the Madrid donor conference, or the Paris Club meetings – was always complemented by high-level bilateral exchanges, opportunities for linkage existed in theory. Its rare occurrence in practice thus defies expectations, formulated in the literature on linkage, that specific institutional-contextual factors are conducive to the pursuit of quid pro quos.

Explaining the sparsity of linkage: US perceptions of Russian cooperation as non-costly and little relevant

Rather, sparse evidence of linkage is better explained by how Russian cooperation on Iraq was perceived. I argue in the introduction that linkage is most likely to occur when Russian support for US policy is considered relevant or costly, meaning the US could not have achieved its desired outcome without such support, or understood that Moscow incurred significant economic or political costs by aligning with Washington. However, the Kremlin's cooperation in this case study did not register as pivotal with US officials. Overall, Russian diplomacy on the Iraq file after March 2003 was perceived as little costly to the Kremlin and of limited relevance to the Bush administration.

Indeed, even though the Russian leadership had been less vocal in its opposition to the Iraq War than Germany or France, there was a widespread perception among US officials that Russia was being 'unhelpful' in the immediate aftermath of the invasion. Within days of the beginning of

²²⁴ US officials tackling Iraq's political settlement and economic recovery with Russian counterparts in multilateral settings did not recall Russian requests for reciprocity. Interviews with Cunningham, Wayne, Larson, and Negroponte.

Operation Iraqi Freedom, the US government publicly levelled accusations that Russian companies had supplied military hardware to Iraq – GPS jamming equipment, night-vision goggles, and anti-tank guide missiles. Whilst US officials acknowledged that the sale of the equipment was unlikely a matter of official Russian policy, but rather pursued by individual firms evading export controls, Washington took issue with the perceived slow response from the Kremlin to US concerns.²²⁵ The scandal reinforced a perception among US officials that Russia was obstructionist during the initial invasion and engaged in activities likely costing American lives.²²⁶

Another episode which was characterized in terms of Russia being ‘unhelpful’ related to the attack on the Russian diplomatic convoy leaving Baghdad on 6 April, 2003. A group of 23 Russian journalists and diplomats, including Ambassador Vladimir Titorenko, had come under fire only eight kilometres outside Baghdad and several were injured. While the Russian Foreign Ministry summoned both the Iraqi and US ambassadors to demand an investigation into the incident, US officials argued in private that the Russian side had acted unprofessionally, since its convoy deviated from a route that had been coordinated with the US military.²²⁷ Finally, there was a US perception of initial Russian obstructionism at the UN. As Ambassador Cunningham recalled the atmosphere in April 2003: “there was a period when the Russians were basically denying any cooperation or contact with us at all. At the beginning, they did not want to be part of a campaign solving the problem that we had created. It also became clear over time that even as the atmosphere became more cooperative, the Russians were intent on making the American experience in Iraq as costly and difficult as possible.”²²⁸

²²⁵ P. J. Saunders, ‘Jamming the Russian-American Relationship (1)’, *The National Interest*, 26 March 2003, <http://nationalinterest.org/article/jamming-the-russian-american-relationship1-2286>.

²²⁶ Interview with Bryza.

²²⁷ Interviews with US sources.

²²⁸ Interview with Cunningham.

Given these early frictions, one US observer concluded by June 2003 that Russia's initial opposition to the Iraq War "has only been worsened by Moscow's thus-far obstructionist post-war conduct",²²⁹ an impression shared by some US officials interviewed. Others, including National Security Advisor Rice, instead argued that relations with Moscow should quickly be normalized. In that spirit, Rice went to Moscow as soon as 6 April – the day the Russian diplomatic convoy was attacked near Baghdad – to assure Vladimir Putin that President Bush: "wanted to get relations back on track."²³⁰ To those officials who remained concerned with the overarching US-Russian relationship – Graham, Hadley and others – hope for continued pragmatic cooperation outweighed frustrations in managing daily challenges in a post-invasion Iraq.

Within the broader administration, however, the overarching impression was one of Russian opportunism. In the eyes of many US officials, Moscow was simply trying to save its status as a Security Council permanent member and accrue economic gains in Iraq. Even more importantly, there was a perception that Russia did not have much of a choice, other than to cooperate after the invasion. And while Russian support for Resolution 1483 was considered important, Moscow was not seen as pivotal to a US administration devising its military and political strategy for a post-invasion Iraq. As one US source summarized the widespread feeling:

"when it came to Iraq in 2003, Russia was by no means central to US policy, it was marginal. The idea was to minimize the disruption in relations, but having opposed going into Iraq, Russia was then not able to rehabilitate its image in the US as a partner on Iraq. But I would not say that Russia was viewed as a major obstacle either – there just wasn't a lot of thinking about Russia when it came to Iraq."²³¹

The Russian government's role in passing 1483, or tackling Iraq's debt burden: "was seen as helpful but not critical – Russia itself feels it is important on everything, but in the US, the sense

²²⁹ P. J. Saunders, 'The US and Russia after Iraq', *Hoover Institution Policy Review*, 1 June 2003, <http://www.hoover.org/research/us-and-russia-after-iraq>.

²³⁰ Rice, *No Higher Honour*, pp. 212-214.

²³¹ Interview with David Kramer, Washington DC, 21 June 2016.

was more akin to ‘Well, we are glad you join in.’”²³² Once the situation in Iraq deteriorated from 2004, this perception of Russia as an opportunistic yet marginal collaborator on Iraq, was further compounded by a sense among some US officials that Moscow ‘enjoyed’ the growing US quagmire and looked at instability in the Middle East with a zero-sum mentality. This will be discussed in the next chapter. Thus the sparse evidence of direct Russian linkage diplomacy in this case study is not so much a function of institutional-contextual factors, or the trajectory of the bilateral relationship in 2003 and 2004, but clearly driven by a US perception that Russia was a marginal factor on Iraq and that Moscow’s late and limited cooperation on Iraq did not warrant American reciprocity.

5) Conclusion

This chapter argues that Moscow’s cooperation with the US in settling the crisis in Iraq after *Operation Iraqi Freedom* was, first and foremost, driven by Russia’s economic interests in post-war Iraq, as well as a concern to protect the UN Security Council against the background of US unilateralism and perceived foreign policy unpredictability. Having opposed the March 2003 invasion, Russian officials were taken by surprise witnessing the coalition forces’ swift capture of Baghdad in April, decided to accept the *fait accompli*, and swiftly returned to cooperation at the UN in pursuit of Russian economic and political goals.

While Russia’s concerns with commercial opportunities in Iraq, and the stability and territorial integrity of the country, dictated its pre-war stance, there was a recognition that Iraq, although important, was not vital to Russian national interests at a time of relative economic weakness and continued hope for pragmatic cooperation with the US. Whilst Moscow continued to stress that the Iraq War was a legal affront and political mistake, the Russian leadership balanced such

²³² Interview with Volker.

rhetoric by mending ties with Washington, hoping for continued cooperation on counterterrorism, the Middle East, arms control and economic issues, careful overall to cater to various domestic elite constituencies, most notably the business community and the *siloviki*. Concerns with the Russian-US bilateral relationship were thus an important additional driver of Russian cooperation.

Since Russia's cooperation was a pragmatic play to extract maximum gains from dealing with a reality it had sought to prevent, Moscow pursued economic and political leverage in supporting resolutions 1483, 1511, and 1546. Efforts to increase the UN Security Council's involvement – whilst instrumentalizing a discourse about self-determination for the Iraqi people – reflected a quest for Russian status. They were also driven by a growing realization that the coalition forces would fail in dealing in a sustainable way with the growing quagmire in Iraq. At the same time, there was a constant effort to build economic leverage in Iraq, with Russian diplomats lobbying the US and UN to honour existing Russian contracts under the 'Oil-for-Food' programme, eyeing further Russian involvement in the economic reconstruction effort, protecting LUKoil's long-term investments in the Iraqi oil sector, while using Iraq's Soviet-era debt as a bargaining chip.

While economic and political leverage building was an integral part of Russia's diplomacy, there is limited evidence that Moscow exercised linkage diplomacy vis-à-vis Washington, in the sense of making its cooperation conditional upon receiving US concessions on other bilateral issues. At best, since there was a stated desire on both sides to continue pragmatic cooperation in areas of mutual interest, Moscow hoped for diffuse reciprocity over its pliant stance on Iraq: "We let the US 'get away' with the Iraq invasion and in turn expect US support on issues crucial to us"²³³. Whilst the Kremlin justified its Chechnya policy and quest for an enhanced role in Middle

²³³ Interview with a Russian source.

Eastern diplomacy with direct reference to the Iraq War, there was no explicit Russian quid pro quo seeking.

This fact is explained by US perceptions of Russian actions. From the Bush administration's point of view, there could be no linkage since Russia, having opposed military action against Iraq, then cooperated from a position of weakness. Neither did Russia's initial opposition to war give way to a perception of cooperation, nor did Russian support register as meaningful or costly to the Bush administration, whose Iraq policy accounted for Moscow as a marginal factor at best. Finally, those issues on which Moscow was believed to expect US reciprocity were not up for 'trading' according to the US government.

Chapter 3: “Being on the right side of history”: explaining Russia’s role in eliciting Syria’s 2005 troop withdrawal from Lebanon

1) Introduction

This chapter looks at Russian cooperation with the US in eliciting the departure of Syrian troops from Lebanon in the first half of 2005. The Russian government had merely abstained from UN Security Council Resolution 1559 in September 2004, which called on remaining foreign forces to withdraw from Lebanon.¹ However, it shifted towards publicly calling for Syrian compliance with the resolution following the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in Beirut on 14 February, 2005. The chapter argues that Russia’s diplomacy in the Syrian-Lebanese theatre, which was formulated against the backdrop of growing bilateral tensions with the US, was chiefly driven by its interests in the Middle East, as opposed to expectations of US quid pro quos in return for cooperation.

Seeking to maximize gains from cooperation with the US over enforcing Resolution 1559, Russia defended its economic, political, and security interests vis-à-vis Syria and Lebanon. Moscow sought leverage in stalling the Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon to avoid weakening the Assad regime and other anticipated repercussions of a speedy departure of Syrian forces. It also negotiated the sale of defensive weapon systems to Damascus, while shielding Syria from UN sanctions amid an international investigation into Rafik Hariri’s murder. Finally, Moscow pursued a greater profile in Middle East diplomacy, as well as enhanced economic cooperation with Syria, although opportunities for commercial gain remained limited at the time.

The escalation of tensions in the Levant occurred during what was also a period of deteriorating relations between Russia and the US. Following their 2003 disagreement over the Iraq War,

¹ ‘UN SC Resolution 1559 (2004)’, 2 September 2004, https://www.un.int/lebanon/sites/www.un.int/files/Lebanon/resolution_1559.pdf.

contacts soured from early 2004 due to NATO's eastward expansion and 'colour revolutions' in Georgia and Ukraine. The Bush administration repeatedly reprimanded the state of Russian democracy, including the Kremlin's pressure on journalists, irregularities in the December 2003 Duma election, the detention of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, as well as counterterrorism practices in Chechnya. From Moscow's perspective, the 'Rose Revolution' in Georgia in late 2003 and the 'Orange Revolution' in Ukraine approximately a year later added to a sense of encirclement from the West. While personal relations between presidents Bush and Putin remained amicable, and while both sides continued to emphasize their desire for cooperation, the state of the Russian-US relationship – a contextual variable in this study – was characterized by a deteriorating trajectory, unlike around the time of the Iraq invasion, discussed in the previous chapter.

Against the backdrop of cooling relations between Russia and the US, Moscow's support for Syria's compliance with UN Resolution 1559 evolved through three distinct phases.

During the first phase, comprising the period between August 2004 and 14 February, 2005 the Kremlin did not obstruct international efforts to end Syria's military presence in Lebanon outright, yet did nothing to support them. Moscow abstained from UN Resolution 1559, which represented the culmination of joint US-French endeavours to create momentum towards implementation of the 1989 Taif Agreement, which had ended the Lebanese Civil War and stipulated that foreign forces were to leave Lebanon.² The passing of UN Resolution 1559 also coincided with the Syrian regime extending the pro-Syrian Lebanese President Emile Lahoud's term beyond constitutional entitlement, a move which elicited Western concern but which Moscow failed to criticize.³ The first phase was thus characterized by Russia's abstention from US-sponsored diplomacy towards the Levant.

² 'The Taif Agreement', 22 October 1989, https://www.un.int/lebanon/sites/www.un.int/files/Lebanon/the_tauf_agreement_english_version_.pdf.

³ J-M. De La Sablière, *Dans Les Couloirs Du Monde* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2013), p. 264.

Following the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in Beirut on 14 February, 2005, heralding the second phase, international pressure on the Assad regime to withdraw its troops from Lebanon mounted quickly and widely. As a result, a crucial shift in the Russian position vis-à-vis active support for Syrian compliance with Resolution 1559 transpired sometime between mid February and early March 2005. The change in the Russian stance was first publicly mentioned following a bilateral Russian-US presidential summit in Bratislava on 24 February. By 5 March, caving in to international pressure, the Assad regime announced its intention to end its military presence in neighbouring Lebanon.

During the third phase, lasting from early March 2005 until the end of the year, the Russian government continued to call on Damascus to carry out the stipulations of Resolution 1559. Moscow also supported the adoption of Security Council Resolution 1595 on 7 April, which endorsed an Independent International Investigation Commission (IIIC), mandated to establish guilt for the Hariri murder. Even though Russia subsequently voted in favour of resolutions 1636 and 1644, which called for greater Syrian collaboration with the IIIC, it opposed international sanctions against the Assad regime. Simultaneously, Russian officials took additional steps to ensure that Syria's declining military presence in Lebanon would not result in internal or regional weakening of the Assad regime. To that end, Moscow advocated for a gradual, rather than an immediate, withdrawal of Syrian forces and negotiated the sale of defensive weapons to Damascus.

The rest of this chapter will provide an in-depth empirical account of Russian cooperation and its drivers. Rather than proceeding chronologically, the chapter will critically engage with different Russian interests in cooperation, assessing their relative explanatory value, and refer to particular phases before, during, and after the Syrian troop withdrawal from Lebanon as relevant. The first part will answer this study's guiding research question and focus upon Moscow's principal

objectives in supporting Syrian compliance with Resolution 1559. I will show that Russian policy was driven by fear of regional escalation, possibly including US military action intended at regime change in Syria. A discussion of different examples of Russian leverage building in cooperation will follow. The chapter will conclude by probing whether Moscow pursued linkage diplomacy in cooperating with the US. Evidence of both explicit linkage attempts, as well as more latent expectations of diffuse reciprocity, will be assessed. The chapter argues that Russian cooperation in the Lebanese case study was not driven by expectations of US reciprocity and that Proposition 2 holds very limited explanatory value, unlike in the previous chapter on Iraq.

2) The key drivers of Russian cooperation

This study argues that Russia's security and economic interests in the Middle East are the key driver of its cooperation with the US in the region, as stipulated in Proposition 1. This holds true in the Lebanese case study. Having abstained from the vote on Resolution 1559, the Russian government joined international calls for Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon in late February to prevent escalation in the region. Following *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, Moscow was worried about the crystallization of an Iraq-type scenario against Syria. Such fears intensified with the mounting international indignation against Assad, following the assassination of Rafik Hariri in Beirut in February 2005, since his regime was widely suspected to have been implicated in the murder. Russian diplomacy thus sought to forestall an escalation in the Levant generally, and any US measures supporting regime change in Damascus narrowly.

Calling for the Resolution's enforcement was also not conceived by Moscow to be a significant concession, considering its limited stakes in Syria's continued presence in Lebanon. Russian pressure on Syria was then framed by Moscow as an essentially unchanged position in support of existing Security Council resolutions, as well as crafted such as to avoid overly offending its

Syrian ally. Overall, the key drivers of Russian cooperation in this case study were, as in the previous case study, a concern with regional stability and the authority of the UN Security Council. However, Russian expectations of US reciprocity in return for Russian ‘non-obstructionism’ regarding an issue Washington considered important could not be confirmed. Proposition 2, therefore, does not explain Russian cooperation in this instance.

2.1) The Bashar Al-Assad regime – a thorn in the side of the Bush administration

Threats directed at Syria permeated American official rhetoric long before the Hariri murder. The US nurtured various grievances against Damascus, accusing it of enabling insurgents in Iraq, including providing safe havens in Syria and failing to control the Syrian-Iraqi border, meddling in Lebanese affairs, as well as developing WMD. Throughout 2003 and 2004, senior US officials recited this list of lamentations repeatedly, calling on the Assad regime to “change its behaviour” or “be held responsible.”⁴ While Powell vowed in April 2003 that “there is no war plan on anyone's desk right now to go marching on Syria”⁵, neoconservatives and Pentagon officials continued the sabre-rattling, as well as propagating the promotion of democracy in the Middle East.⁶ In May 2004, the Bush administration implemented the Syria Accountability Act (SAA), which had been passed by Congress in December 2003, imposing economic sanctions on Damascus: “because of Syria's continued support for terrorism, pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, occupation of Lebanon, and actions undermining US and international efforts with respect to Iraq.”⁷ The hostile mood against Syria was additionally fuelled by speculations that the

⁴ ‘Rumsfeld Warns Syria, Iran Against Aiding Iraqi Forces’, *Los Angeles Times*, 29 March 2003, <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/mar/29/news/war-warning29>.

⁵ ‘Next Stop: Syria?’, *Time*, 23 April 2003, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,444988-1,00.html>.

⁶ For a key speech on democracy promotion, see George W. Bush, ‘Remarks on the Freedom Agenda’, 6 November 2003, <http://www.ned.org/george-w-bush/remarks-by-president-george-w-bush-at-the-20th-anniversary>.

⁷ G. W. Bush, ‘Sanctions on Syria: President's Statement on Implementation’, 11 May 2004, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/32393.htm>. ‘Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act of 2003’, 12 December 2003, <https://www.congress.gov/108/plaws/publ175/PLAW-108publ175.pdf>.

Assad regime had hidden Iraqi WMD in order to undermine the American rationale for the March 2003 invasion.⁸

Russian officials shielded Damascus from US warnings about the porous Syrian-Iraqi border. Deputy Foreign Minister Trubnikov noted in January 2004 that “the Syrian leadership has already taken some important and concrete steps in the context of the claims presented to it by the US”,⁹ while Foreign Minister Ivanov affirmed that the Russian government had been assured by Damascus that Syria did not support terrorists.¹⁰ Paying his last visit to Damascus as Deputy Secretary of State on New Year’s Day, 2005, Richard Armitage raised the issue of terrorist infiltration across the Syrian-Iraqi border with Bashar Al-Assad personally, warning him: “that the Bush administration does not do shades of grey, that he [Assad] needs to close the access to Iraq from his country, needs to be *seen* as closing it.” To Assad’s claims that the regime was incapable of controlling the border, Armitage responded: “I am just telling you, Americans are dying in Iraq, if we are going to judge you on this ...”¹¹

Syria’s alleged support for Iraqi insurgents, as well as the latter’s use of Syrian territory to cross into Iraq, was also a priority in Margaret Scobey’s discussions with Damascus in her capacity as US Ambassador to Syria. Especially as the situation in Iraq deteriorated throughout 2004, this issue assumed greater immediacy and required greater focus from the Bush administration, which also engaged Damascus on other questions detailed in the Syria Accountability Act.¹²

⁸ ‘Press Briefing by Scott McClellan’, 2 March 2004, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=73965>.

⁹ ‘Interview with V. I. Trubnikov’, 26 January 2004, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/crime/-/asset_publisher/3F51ZsLVSx4R/content/id/489096?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_3F51ZsLVSx4R&_101_INSTANCE_3F51ZsLVSx4R_languageId=en_GB.

¹⁰ ‘Stenogramma Interv’yu I. S. Ivanova’ (“Transcript of S. Ivanov’s Interview”), 26 February 2004, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/crime/-/asset_publisher/3F51ZsLVSx4R/content/id/483318.

¹¹ Interview with Armitage. Emphasis added.

¹² Phone interview with Margaret Scobey, 11 July 2016.

In light of these US frustrations with Syria, the press regularly asked officials to elaborate what concrete actions the Bush administration would take if its various demands were not met. Yet White House spokesman Scott McClellan carefully avoided confirming any plans for military measures, instead routinely publishing statements such as the Syrians: “know very clearly where we stand and what we believe needs to happen.”¹³ Whenever pressed by journalists specifically on the possible use of force against Assad, McClellan avoided denying or confirming such a possibility, merely referring the media back to previous statements.¹⁴ Importantly, US officials did not seek their Russian counterparts’ support for dealing with the Syrian-Iraqi border problem, confirming that Washington viewed Moscow as a player with little leverage in the Levant.¹⁵

Amid such ambiguity permeating American official rhetoric, the Bush administration notably stepped up its pressure on Syria following Hariri’s assassination on 14 February, 2005, immediately recalling Ambassador Scobey from Damascus. Already following President Bush’s second inauguration, at which he promulgated the ‘Freedom Agenda’, pledging that “it is the policy of the United States to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions in every nation and culture, with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world”,¹⁶ the new Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice supported new financial sanctions against Syria, given the regime’s intransigence.¹⁷

Ambassador Scobey recalled that Hariri's assassination in February was then the final straw for those in the administration who, even in late 2003, had been inclined to punish Syria for its

¹³ ‘Press Briefing by Scott McClellan’, 10 November 2004, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=66094>.

¹⁴ ‘Press Briefing by Scott McClellan’, 8 March 2005, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=66153>.

¹⁵ Interview with an unnamed US official.

¹⁶ G. W. Bush, ‘Inaugural Address’, 20 January 2005, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=58745>.

¹⁷ Rice was hosted by French President Chirac in Paris for consultations on this issue on 8 February, 2005. J. Chirac, *Memoires - Le Temps Présidentiel* (Paris: Nil Editions, 2011), p. 508.

unhelpful behaviour by not dispatching a new American ambassador to Damascus. Throughout 2004, officials such as Powell and Armitage continued to argue for engagement with Syria, but when they left office at the beginning of President Bush's second term, desire to work with the Assad regime receded, especially after Hariri's assassination.¹⁸

The Bush administration further escalated its pressure after Hariri's death. In its 15 February press briefing, the White House called Hariri's assassination "a disturbing development", adding that it expected immediate Syrian compliance with Resolution 1559.¹⁹ Assistant Secretary of State Burns, who attended Hariri's funeral,²⁰ reiterated this demand. After Syria publicly agreed to a partial withdrawal by the end of March, the US administration insisted on a complete and immediate pull-out. Pressed by a journalist to explain American leverage in enforcing this demand, spokesman McClellan merely noted that: "the President never takes any actions off the table."²¹

2.2) Russia's original stance on UN SC Resolution 1559

Prior to the adoption of UN Resolution 1559, Russia's stance on Syria's military presence in Lebanon had been somewhat equivocal. The Soviet leadership had not been consulted when Hafez Al-Assad, Bashar's father, deployed troops in April 1976 during the Lebanese Civil War and was angered by its unruly ally's unilateralism.²² The USSR was also not among the architects of the 1989 Taif Agreement, which set a time frame for Syria's troop withdrawal. Throughout the

¹⁸ Interview with Scobey. Rabil argues that the Lebanese-American lobby in Washington DC also played an important role in generating the changed position at the official level. R. Rabil, *Syria, the United States, and the War on Terror in the Middle East* (Westport: Praeger, 2006), pp. 164ff.

¹⁹ 'Press Briefing by Scott McClellan', 15 February 2005, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=66143>.

²⁰ W. J. Burns, 'On the Death of the Former Prime Minister of Lebanon', 16 February 2005, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/42344.htm>.

²¹ 'Press Briefing by Scott McClellan', 7 March 2005, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=66152>.

²² Primakov, *Russia and the Arabs*. Interview with Robert Markaryan, Moscow, 27 April 2016.

1990s, Syrian influence over Lebanon was viewed in Moscow as supporting stability and was, therefore, not equated with Israel's pre 2000 military presence in South Lebanon. Moscow took the position that Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon had to be dealt with in the context of a comprehensive Middle East peace agreement.²³ Until early 2005, the Russian government essentially supported Lebanon in its territorial and security disputes with Israel, but tacitly accepted Syria's special influence and military presence in the country.

When France and the US jointly pushed in 2004 for a UN Resolution to end Syria's presence in Lebanon, most Russian analysts with expertise on the Levant voiced apprehensions, fearing for the internal stability of both Lebanon and Syria. Suponina recalled that she was isolated as: "one of the few Russian experts publicly supporting the idea that Syria should withdraw from Lebanon."²⁴ Russian experts warned that Syria would lose access to Lebanese ports and resources, the possibility to conduct economic activity in circumvention of international sanctions, an employment venue for a million Syrian workers, as well as strategic depth.²⁵ They further noted that a withdrawal from Lebanon might be interpreted by Syrian opposition as a sign of Assad's weakness, diminishing the regime's chances of carrying out necessary constitutional and economic reform.²⁶ Some even warned that withdrawal could lead to a revolt against the Assad regime.²⁷ Others emphasized the negative consequences of a Syrian military retreat for Lebanon's internal and external security – a growing risk of weapons proliferation and Islamist

²³ 'On the Adoption by UN Security Council of a Resolution on Lebanon', 3 September 2004, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/461346?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&_101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA_languageId=en_GB.

²⁴ Interview with Suponina.

²⁵ P. Rassadin, 'Vozmozhnye posledstviya vyvoda siriiskogo voinskogo kontingenta iz Livana' ("The Possible Ramifications of Syria's Troop Withdrawal from Lebanon"), *Analiticheskie Zapiski Nauchnogo-Koordinatsionnogo Soveta Po Mezhdunarodnym Issledovaniyam MGIMO MID Rossii*, June 2005, http://imi-mgimo.ru/images/pdf/Analiticheskie_zapisky/az8-10.pdf.

²⁶ V. Akhmedov, 'Nekotorye problemy evolyutsii sovremennoi voenno-politicheskoi elity Sirii' ("Problems in the Evolution of the Modern Military-Political Syrian Elite"), *Analiticheskie Zapiski*, June 2005.

²⁷ E. Satanovsky, 'Novyi Blizhnii Vostok' ("The New Middle East"), *Russia In Global Affairs*, 20 April 2005, http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_4834.

activity in, especially, Lebanon's North and the Bekaa Valley, as well as a growing intra-Shia conflict between Hezbollah and Amal – all of which would heighten regional instability and ultimately constitute a risk to Russia itself.²⁸

Thus it was out of concern for regional stability that the Russian delegation decided to withhold support for Resolution 1559 in September 2004. Russia also argued that the text dealt with the constitutional system of a sovereign country, which exceeded the UN's authority. That said, Moscow was not ready to block the Security Council. Recalling the Council's internal deliberations, a Lebanese diplomat to the UN in New York noted that: "Russia did not use the veto against the Security Council Resolution 1559, but it abstained on the text because its amendments were not accepted, so this was like a *laissez passer*." The diplomat stated that the Russian Federation Mission, which presided over the Security Council in August 2004, was keen not to pass the Resolution during its presidency and was pushing adoption of the text to September, when the Council was presided over by Spain.²⁹

Essentially, Moscow gave a green light to the Resolution, yet could not vote in favour of it, considering its relationship with Damascus and convinced that Syria had for a long time played an important role in stabilizing Lebanon.³⁰ The Russian position was that "it would be better if Lebanon and Syria themselves sort it out", since this was a "delicate question" which should not be "dictated by external actors."³¹ It was not until after the Hariri assassination and concomitant mounting international pressure on Syria that Moscow would actively support the enforcement of Resolution 1559. The key reason for this subtle shift in the Russian position was a growing fear in Moscow of regional escalation, captured by Proposition 1 in the research design.

²⁸ Rassadin, 'Vozmozhnye posledstviya'.

²⁹ Interview with a Lebanese diplomat.

³⁰ Interview with Morozov.

³¹ Interview with a Russian diplomat.

2.3) Fearing an ‘Iraq-type scenario’ in Syria

The possibility of a US military strike against Syria was seriously considered in Moscow in 2004 and 2005, even as the US became increasingly “bogged down” in Iraq. One month into *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, President Putin warned that: “even if there are people who do not like the regime in this country [Syria], it should not be changed under pressure from outside.”³² Moscow also criticized the US Congress passing the SAA and reassured Syria of continued Russian support. The Russian leadership’s apprehensions about US intentions intensified after the Hariri assassination. Meeting Syria’s Deputy Foreign Minister Muallem in Moscow in early March 2005, Sergey Lavrov stressed the need to: “normalize the situation in the region and [respond, sic.] to the unhealthy atmosphere which is being whipped up around Syria.”³³ Months later, Lavrov would comment that Russia had perceived the “complication” in the regional situation following the Hariri assassination “with great concern.”³⁴

After May 2005, when international pressure on Syria persisted given its lack of cooperation with the Hariri murder investigation, the risk of military escalation remained on Russian officials’ minds. As explained in the previous chapter, these apprehensions were driven by a perception of US foreign policy as unpredictable and adventurist, in light of the Iraq War and promulgation of the ‘Freedom Agenda’, but also given prior US military action in Kosovo. Reflecting on Russia’s foreign policy achievements in 2005, Lavrov warned:

³² ‘Russia: Putin Says Similar Situation over Iraqi Regime Could Arise with Syria’, *Itar-Tass*, 11 April 2003.

³³ ‘Remarks and Replies to Media Questions by Sergey Lavrov’, 4 March 2005, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/447056.

³⁴ ‘Interv'yu S.V. Lavrova kuveitskomu informatsionnomu agentstvu “KUNA”’ (“S. Lavrov’s Interview with the Kuwaiti Agency ‘KUNA’”), 30 May 2005, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news//asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/437252.

“If we take the Greater Middle East region [...] should its zone of instability really be expanded by destabilizing Iran, Syria and Lebanon? Before embarking on escalation, thoughts should be given to the [consequences, sic] of this mode of action. NATO’s action in Kosovo, where the quandary resulting from unilateral moves had to be tackled with Russia’s help, is an insightful example in this context.”³⁵

Robert Markaryan, who served as Russia’s Ambassador to Syria in 2004 and 2005, confirmed that Moscow was “highly worried” about US intervention against Syria: “In our contact with the Americans, we said that if they tried to create a situation in which it would seem there was no alternative but to strike on Syria, and to engage in regime change, that would be a catastrophic mistake.”³⁶ Other Russian officials interviewed did not recall Moscow anticipating an imminent US strike against Syria following Hariri’s assassination but, also given the other Arab states’ positions, certainly remembered the growing fears of regional escalation.

In Russia’s Middle East-oriented expert community, the risk of an Iraq-type scenario in Syria was also given due consideration. The Russian Academy of Sciences’ Vladimir Akhmedov, who organized a conference on Syria in early 2005, remembered a difficulty in finding participants: “because many expected a US blow against Syria.”³⁷ Following President Bush’s inauguration address in January 2005, the possibility of US military action against Iran and Syria was vividly discussed in the Russian press, with headlines mentioning that an “American storm clouds over Syria”,³⁸ that “Bush is scaring people with freedom”,³⁹ and authors warning that: “nothing about US foreign policy for the next four years is particularly clear.”⁴⁰ Other papers lamented that

³⁵ ‘Article of Sergey Lavrov for Diplomatic Yearbook 2005’, 5 December 2005, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/418498?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw&_101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw_languageId=en_GB.

³⁶ Interview with Markaryan.

³⁷ Interview with Vladimir Akhmedov, Moscow, 14 April 2016.

³⁸ ‘American Storm Clouds Over Syria’, *Vremya Novostei*, 18 February 2005, in CDRP, no. 7, vol. 57, 16 March 2005, pp. 2-3.

³⁹ ‘Bush Is Scaring People with Freedom’, *Noviye Izvestia*, 24 January 2005, in CDRP, no. 4, vol. 57, 23 February 2005, pp. 19-20.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Hariri's assassination was being "internationalized"⁴¹ and that an "axis of outcasts is emerging", causing Russia to: "expand its contacts with countries threatened with American invasion."⁴² Amid the uncertainty in March 2005 as to whether Syria would heed US demands and comply with Resolution 1559, *Kommersant* newspaper commented that: "if Damascus decides to up the ante and tries to keep forces loyal to it in power in Lebanon, the result could be another war."⁴³

The Russian government's anxiety about regional escalation was also partially sustained by a frustration with the Assad regime, which was perceived in Moscow to have overstepped. A perception that the Syrian regime was a difficult ally and did not always listen to advice from Moscow appeared to influence Russian policy in 2004 and 2005. Russian irritation with Syrian behaviour had historical precedents. When Hafez, Bashar's father, deployed Syrian troops in Lebanon in 1976, the Soviet leadership was not consulted, let alone given advance notice, even though Soviet premier Kosygin was on a visit to Syria at that time. As Evgeny Primakov recalls: "Kosygin was sickened to see the Soviet Union cast in the role of the driving force behind its Middle Eastern allies, who were often confident that circumstances would compel Moscow to go along with actions that were entirely of their own making and which they had never discussed."⁴⁴

When Hafez was replaced by his son in 2000, Moscow anticipated that the Syrian ally would become even harder to control, since Bashar felt no emotional or ideological affinity with Russia. The new Syrian leader waited for almost five years before paying his first official visit to the Kremlin, travelling to Paris and London instead. This proclivity was duly noted in Moscow.⁴⁵

⁴¹ 'Internationalizing an Assassination', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 16 February 2005, in CDRP, no. 7, vol. 57, 16 March 2005, p. 1.

⁴² "'Axis of Outcasts' Is Emerging", *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 18 February 2005, in CDRP, no. 7, vol. 57, 16 March 2005, p. 5.

⁴³ 'On the Square in Lebanon', *Kommersant*, 1 March 2005, in CDRP, no. 9, vol. 57, 30 March 2005, pp. 18-19.

⁴⁴ Primakov, *Russia and the Arabs*, p. 182.

⁴⁵ Interviews with Russian officials.

During the period investigated in this chapter, Russian officials continued to view Syria as an “uneasy partner”.⁴⁶ De La Sablière, the French representative to the UN intimately involved with negotiating Resolution 1559, goes as far as to argue that Russian abstention from the Resolution was precipitated by what Moscow viewed as a “Hitlerian” pressure, exercised by Assad on Hariri in August 2004, when the Syrian leader demanded the latter’s consent to the extension of Emile Lahoud’s presidency.⁴⁷

An impression that Russian diplomats sometimes became “deeply frustrated” with Assad and “his tendency to overreach” was echoed by US and other sources interviewed. According to Dmitry Trenin, unlike his father Hafez, Bashar did not enjoy a special relationship with Moscow, was not seen as *nash chelovek* (“our guy”), further explaining why Russia’s position on Resolution 1559 was initially one of “inertia”.⁴⁸

President Putin had personally met Hariri three times and was aware of the Prime Minister’s stature, thanking him during their last encounter for Lebanon’s efforts to secure Russian observer status at the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).⁴⁹ Hariri’s assassination was condemned in the sharpest terms by the Russian government. A Russian diplomat casually acquainted with Hariri recalled that his assassination could only have “produced great anger” amongst Russia’s elites,⁵⁰ which also maintained business ties with the Hariri family.⁵¹ Still, Evgeny Primakov argued that the Syrian regime’s implication in Hariri’s death was highly unlikely, since the

⁴⁶ ‘Interv'yu S. V. Lavrova v gazete “Izvestia”’ (“S. Lavrov’s Interview with *Izvestia*”), 26 December 2005, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news//asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/416826.

⁴⁷ ‘Russia Supported Resolution 1559 after the “Hitlerian” Behaviour of Assad towards Rafik Hariri’, *Al Hayat* (in Arabic), 10 April 2013, <http://www.alhayat.com/Details/501537>.

⁴⁸ Interview with Dmitry Trenin, Moscow, 19 April 2016.

⁴⁹ ‘On the Meeting Between President Putin and Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri’, 17 October 2003, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/29566>.

⁵⁰ Interview with a Russian diplomat.

⁵¹ Interview with Akhmedov.

Syrians understood the international consequences of such action, while Hariri had many enemies inside Lebanon that might have wanted him dead.⁵²

Such official shielding of Damascus notwithstanding, Moscow sensed the international mood tilting sharply against the Assad regime and: “wanted to get ahead of that and be on the right side of it.”⁵³ David Welch recalled that: “when the assassination happened, we knew that it would be a cataclysmic event in the Arab world [...] the entire world was lined up, especially the Egyptians and the Saudis, so if I were Russia I would have said: ‘How am I going to stand in front of this train?’”⁵⁴ Hariri’s assassination generated unprecedented international momentum that was difficult to withstand. Moscow understood that an openly pro-Syrian stance after Hariri’s death, for instance in supporting Damascus’ outright refusal to withdraw its forces from Lebanon, would have left the Russian regime internationally isolated and would have damaged its status by placing it: “on the wrong side of history.”

2.4) February 2005 and the subtle shift in Russia’s position – what transpired after Rafik Hariri’s death?

Against the background of mounting international pressure on Syria which, as argued, was taken seriously by the Russian leadership and elicited fears of regional escalation, the latter shifted towards active support for Syrian compliance with Resolution 1559 sometime between mid February and early March 2005. Official Russian statements on Hariri’s assassination were professions of condolence that remained silent on the question of whether Resolution 1559 should be enforced. When presidents Putin and Bush met in Bratislava on 24 February, Resolution 1559 was not put on the official agenda by Thomas Graham who prepared the bilateral summit.⁵⁵

⁵² Primakov, *Russia and the Arabs*, p. 207.

⁵³ Interview with Burns.

⁵⁴ Phone interview with David Welch, 12 July 2016.

⁵⁵ Interview with Graham.

However, a senior US official briefing journalists after the summit confirmed that there had been some discussion of Resolution 1559: “I think it’s clear that, even though the Russians abstained from the vote on that resolution [...] both countries believe [it] should be enforced.”⁵⁶ This suggests that presidents Bush and Putin, in their first face-to-face meeting following the Hariri assassination, reached an understanding about the desirability of Syria’s withdrawal from Lebanon.

By 1 March, the Lebanese government had resigned amid mounting turmoil and public demonstrations over Hariri’s death, events which the US government began to refer to as the ‘Cedar Revolution’. On the same day, David Satterfield, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs, concluded a trip to Lebanon, which further underscored intensifying American pressure on Syria.⁵⁷ The Russian government, in turn, began to voice public support for the Resolution’s enforcement. Its Foreign Ministry stated that “this resolution, just like all the other decisions of the Security Council, should be complied with.”⁵⁸ Following a London conference on the Palestinian Authority the same day, Sergey Lavrov also demanded Syria’s withdrawal from Lebanon, though using more cautious vocabulary than his Western counterparts. Lavrov urged that the troops be withdrawn in such a way as to avoid disturbing the “fragile balance in Lebanon.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ ‘Background Briefing by a Senior Administration Official’, 24 February 2005, <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2005/02/20050224165958esnamfuak0.8894312.html#ixzz4a60u2JYI>.

⁵⁷ ‘US Skeptical Syria Will Leave Lebanon’, *UPI News*, 2 March 2005, <http://www.upi.com/Defense-News/2005/03/02/US-skeptical-Syria-will-leave-Lebanon/99581109803412/>.

⁵⁸ ‘Alexander Yakovenko Answers a Media Question’, 1 March 2005, http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/447328.

⁵⁹ ‘Saudi Ruler Urges Syrian Pullout’, *BBC*, 3 March 2005, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4315917.stm.

A few days later, he received Walid Muallem in Moscow for urgent consultations.⁶⁰ This occurred just one day after an Arab League meeting in Cairo, at which the Arab states reportedly advised Damascus: “in no uncertain terms to withdraw its troops from Lebanon as soon as possible.”⁶¹ By 5 March, the Russian Foreign Ministry officially “welcomed” Syria’s decision to withdraw from Lebanon, all the while referring to its own position of “supporting the political independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon, and [maintaining] traditionally friendly ties with Syria and Lebanon”, as “unchanged”.⁶² Other Russian sources also stressed the voluntary nature of Syria’s compliance with Resolution 1559 in our discussions.

I note in the introduction that ‘tacit’ US-Soviet cooperation in the Middle East during the Cold War was frequent and entailed the fortuitous pursuit of a shared objective. In his seminal essay *The Strategy of Conflict*, Schelling explains that tacit (as opposed to explicit) coordination occurs in situations in which communication is incomplete or impossible, although both sides have identical interests but do not coordinate their actions.⁶³ In instances of explicit coordination, on the other hand, positions and actions are deliberately communicated and adjusted. Russian cooperation with the US in enforcing Resolution 1559 approximates the type of tacit cooperation that was characteristic of the Cold War, since it entailed the fortuitous pursuit of a shared objective (regional stability) without any close coordination of positions. Leaving aside a possible discussion of the topic at the Bratislava Summit, the Russian and US governments did not explicitly coordinate their policies vis-à-vis the Assad regime in February and March 2005, but lobbied for Syria’s troop withdrawal from Lebanon largely independently of each other.

⁶⁰ ‘Remarks and Replies to Media Questions by Sergey Lavrov’, 4 March 2005.

⁶¹ ‘A Friend In Need’, *Kommersant*, 4 March 2005, in CDRP, no. 9, vol. 57, 30 March 2005, pp. 19-20.

⁶² ‘O Reshenii Rukovodstva Sirii O Peredislokatsii Voinskogo Kontingenta V Livane’ (“On the Decision of the Syrian Leadership to Relocate the Military Contingent in Lebanon”), 5 March 2005, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/446840.

⁶³ Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, pp. 53-57.

2.5) Russia and the authority of UN SC resolutions

The Russian government's diplomatic manoeuvring betrayed a desire to retain all relevant international decision-making within the remit of the UN Security Council, on which Russia's permanent seat was seen as a sign of international status. This was especially the case since the US had invaded Iraq in March 2003 without Council approval, heightening fears among Russian elites that the UN was becoming sidelined – and Russia's veto right had depreciated in value. Following Hariri's assassination and Russia's subtle shift to advocating for Syria's compliance with Resolution 1559, the government stressed that the Resolution constituted international law and therefore should be enforced, just like other UN Security Council resolutions. Russia's subsequent diplomacy to shield Damascus from US pressure in the Hariri murder probe, while also seeking to 'discipline' the Assad regime's behaviour such that the US would see no grounds to embark on unilateral action, was also aimed at keeping the Syria issue firmly under the auspices of the UN Security Council.

In sum, a clear interest in averting regional escalation in February 2005 prompted the Kremlin to cooperate with the US on an issue it had not been ready to support six months earlier. The Russian decision to call for Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon transpired sometime between the assassination of Hariri on 14 February and 1 March, 2005, against the backdrop of mounting pressure on Damascus from the US and the wider international community. Even if Moscow was not anxious about an all-out US invasion of Syria, it was at least concerned about upheaval in the Levant, especially considering the Arab states' position on Resolution 1559.

Regional escalation, Moscow feared, could destabilize Syria and Lebanon internally, undermining Russia's own security and economic interests vis-à-vis these states. Furthermore, getting behind international support for the Resolution's enforcement was also not conceived of by Moscow as a significant concession, considering its limited stakes in Syria's continued

presence in Lebanon. Russian pressure on Syria was then framed by Moscow as an essentially unchanged position in support of existing Security Council resolutions. Thus the Russian government's concern with the authority of the UN Security Council was an additional driver of its policy. Finally, the latter was crafted such as to avoid overly offending its Syrian ally.⁶⁴

3) On Russian leverage building in cooperation: deflecting excessive pressure on Bashar Al-Assad

Notwithstanding Russia's cooperation in eliciting Damascus' compliance with UN Resolution 1559, Moscow simultaneously pursued leverage building. To that end, Russian diplomats argued for a phased Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon to avoid weakening the Assad regime, justified the sale of defensive weapons to Damascus, while shielding Syria from UN sanctions amid an international investigation into Hariri's murder. Moscow also pursued a greater profile in Middle East diplomacy, as well as enhanced economic cooperation with Syria, although opportunities for commercial gain remained limited at the time.

3.1) Russia's historical interests vis-à-vis Syria and Lebanon

Russia's historical interests in Syria and Lebanon set the stage for understanding why Moscow sought to balance its acceptance of a Syrian military retreat from Lebanon by building additional leverage for Damascus. The USSR enjoyed good relations with Syria since the 1950s, when the latter became the largest non-communist buyer of Soviet weapons.⁶⁵ The Soviets considered Syria important, since Turkey and Iraq were firmly within the West's orbit in the nascent Cold War struggle. Moscow concluded a trade agreement with Damascus in 1955 and promoted its

⁶⁴ The Russian diplomats interviewed took great pains to emphasize that Russian support for enforcement of Resolution 1559 did not mean that Russia turned against its ally Syria, and did not constitute Russian cooperation with the United States against Syria.

⁶⁵ Nizameddin, *Putin's New Order*, p. 176.

diplomatic presence in the Syrian capital to ambassadorial level.⁶⁶ The Arabs' overwhelming defeat in the 1967 war with Israel further increased Syrian reliance upon the USSR, which in turn remained interested in close relations despite Hafez Al-Assad's shrewd *realpolitik* of maintaining channels of communication with the US.

Hafez first visited Moscow in 1971, signing a USD700 million arms deal with the Soviets, and a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was concluded in 1980. Yet, while Anwar Sadat's turn towards the West, precipitating a break in Soviet-Egyptian relations in the 1970s, further increased Damascus' importance to the USSR,⁶⁷ Moscow never proved able to fully control its client. Soviet disagreements with Syrian policy arose, for instance, following Hafez' deployment of troops in Lebanon in 1976. That year, the Syrian leader also expelled a number of Soviet military advisers and instructed the Soviet Navy to remove its submarines and support craft from the port of Tartus, angered by KGB support for the Lebanese Communist Party which opposed the Syrian intervention.⁶⁸ During the 1980s, relations soured over Syria's quest for military parity with Israel at a time when Soviet-Israeli ties were gradually warming.

Following the end of the Cold War, Syria sided with the US during the First Gulf War, heralding a brief period of Syrian-American regional collusion, while its ties with the substantially weakened Russian Federation were hampered by disputes over its repayment of Soviet-era debts and the continuation of arms supplies. Russian-Syrian cooperation during the 1990s was a shadow of that during Soviet times, with significantly reduced arms trade and Moscow's failure

⁶⁶ Kreutz, *Russia and the Middle East*, p. 13.

⁶⁷ Vassiliev, *Russian Policy in the Middle East*, p. 124.

⁶⁸ R. Allison, 'Russia and Syria: Explaining Alignment With a Regime in Crisis', *International Affairs*, vol. 89, no. 4, 2013, p. 801.

to carve out a mediator role in the Arab-Israeli peace process.⁶⁹ Yet Evgeny Primakov, who became Foreign Minister in 1996, lobbied for a revival of relations.

When Hafez's son Bashar and Vladimir Putin both ascended to their respective presidencies in 2000, the Kremlin began to exercise self-interested pragmatism in its relations with Syria. Between 2000 and 2005, Putin cautiously expanded Russian-Syrian relations in order to preserve the remnants of Soviet influence in the Arab world and in the Arab-Israeli peace process, balance US hegemony, and retain a market for the Russian military-industrial complex.⁷⁰ Russia was also grateful that Damascus viewed the Second Chechen War as a strictly internal Russian affair. Finally, it is plausible that the close association between the USSR and Syria continued to resonate in the early 2000s, considering the extensive human ties, mixed marriages, and impressive number of Syrian officers who had received training at Soviet and Russian military academies.⁷¹

While Russian diplomacy in 2005 needs to be understood against this backdrop of decades-long relations with Syria, which by 2005 epitomized the remnants of Soviet influence in the Levant, ties with Lebanon had been historically more modest. The USSR had been among the first players to recognize Lebanon as an independent state in 1943, and until the outbreak of civil war in the mid 1970s: "although firmly anti-communist in its ideology and political orientation, the Lebanese government maintained uneasy though cordial ties with Moscow."⁷² Having invested in contacts with Marxist Palestinian groups based in Lebanon, especially after the 1970 expulsion of the PLO from Jordan,⁷³ Moscow was naturally sympathetic to the Lebanese National Movement

⁶⁹ Katz, *Russia and the Middle East*.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-29.

⁷¹ Allison, 'Russia and Syria', p. 802.

⁷² Kreutz, *Russia and the Middle East*, p. 33.

⁷³ Nizameddin, *Putin's New Order*, p. 157.

once civil war broke out.⁷⁴ But even though it provided some financial and military support for the left-wing coalition and dispatched Primakov as a mediator, the USSR did not overall pursue an ambitious agenda towards Lebanon during the 1970s and 1980s.⁷⁵

Following the end of the Cold War, the Kremlin was interested in maintaining a role in the Middle East peace process and securing a share of the Lebanese market. Foreign Minister Kozyrev travelled to Beirut in 1995 to sign a treaty on trade and economic cooperation. Hariri, who had excellent personal relations with Primakov and was recognized as a potential enabler of Russian influence in the Middle East, visited Moscow in 1997 to sign further agreements. Nevertheless, the overarching Russian view of Lebanon was that “it is not a country which can conduct its foreign policy independently”⁷⁶ and Moscow tacitly accepted Syria’s special role and military presence in the country.

3.2) The implementation of UN SC Resolution 1559 – shielding the Assad regime from excessive outside pressure in cooperation

From March 2005, Russian efforts to mitigate negative repercussions for the Syrian regime – resulting from its compliance with Resolution 1559 – need to be understood against the historical backdrop discussed above. Russian officials resisted US calls for an immediate pullout, instead advocating for a conservative timetable that would soften the blow to the Assad regime of losing its decade-long presence in Lebanon.

⁷⁴ The Lebanese National Movement, headed by Kamal Joumblatt, a prominent Druze leader of the Progressive Socialist Party, comprised leftist, pan-Arabist, and Syrian nationalist parties and organizations. It was active during the early years of the Lebanese Civil War and supported the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

⁷⁵ Primakov, *Russia and the Arabs*.

⁷⁶ Vitaly Naumkin, in an interview in 1996, quoted in Nizameddin, *Putin’s New Order*, p. 160.

When Assad stated on 1 March, 2005 that the “[withdrawal] should be very soon and maybe in the next few months”,⁷⁷ the White House commented that “we’ve seen words, what we want to see is action”, pointing to the upcoming Lebanese parliamentary elections and arguing that it was crucial that the Syrians vacate Lebanon by then.⁷⁸ On 4 March, the White House reiterated that “the time line that the President has set is that they need to leave now”,⁷⁹ three days later calling the Syrian offer of a partial withdrawal by the end of March a: “half measure that does not go far enough.”⁸⁰ The French staunchly supported the US insistence on a timely and full withdrawal.

The Russian government argued for a more relaxed timetable. On 9 March the Foreign Ministry stated that “it would be counterproductive to demand of Damascus an ‘immediate’ withdrawal”, further noting that: “an overnight cessation of the Syrian military presence [...] could cause destabilization in Lebanon.”⁸¹ Foreign Minister Lavrov warned that: “we all have to make sure that this withdrawal does not violate the very fragile balance which we still have in Lebanon, which is a very difficult country ethnically.”⁸² Another Russian official added that: “if the withdrawal is rushed [...] a misbalance of forces may emerge in Lebanon [and] the Syrians’ place may be taken by absolutely uncontrollable armed formations, which could lead to new chaos in Lebanon and the region as a whole.”⁸³ Consistent with its predominant interest in averting regional escalation, whether precipitated by US pressure or developments on the ground, Moscow

⁷⁷ ‘Q&A: Leaving Lebanon?’, *Excerpt from Bashar Al-Assad’s Interview with Time Magazine*, 1 March 2005, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1032860,00.html>.

⁷⁸ ‘Press Briefing by Scott McClellan’, 2 March 2005, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=66149>.

⁷⁹ ‘Press Gaggle with Scott McClellan’, 4 March 2005, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=66151>.

⁸⁰ ‘Press Briefing by Scott McClellan’, 7 March 2005.

⁸¹ ‘Statement by Alexander Yakovenko’, 9 March 2005, http://www.mid.ru/ru/press_service/spokesman/official_statement/-/asset_publisher/t2GCdmD8RNlr/content/id/446728?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_t2GCdmD8RNlr&_101_INSTANCE_t2GCdmD8RNlr_languageId=en_GB.

⁸² ‘Saudi Ruler Urges Syrian Pullout’.

⁸³ M. Margelov, ‘Russia Reinvigorates Middle Eastern Policy’, *Sputnik News*, 25 April 2005, <https://sputniknews.com/analysis/2005042539737224/>.

observed the evolving political crisis inside Lebanon with great concern and feared that an abrupt departure of Syrian forces could exacerbate tension.⁸⁴

Moscow's call for a phased withdrawal was also driven by fears that the Assad regime itself might not survive a sudden loss of influence in Lebanon. One Russian observer expressed the prevailing mood in Moscow:

“Let us imagine what happens if Damascus gives in to the unprecedented US pressure and withdraws its troops within twenty-four hours. The internal implosion of the Syrian regime will be inevitable. Lebanon, with its successful economy, has always been a cash cow for Syria and Syrian political elites will not accept the disappearance of this udder. Even though Bashar Al-Assad enjoys the authority inherited from his father, he would be unable to tackle this challenge. As a result, the international community would be confronted by an embittered Syria that is ready for everything.”⁸⁵

In late March 2005 *Kommersant* reported that an attempted mutiny had occurred in Damascus, led by Interior Minister Ghazi Kanaan, all while the US was allegedly fostering contacts with the Syrian opposition.⁸⁶ While Russian support for Syrian compliance with Resolution 1559 had been intended to thwart US regime change in Damascus, Moscow was subsequently worried that rushed enforcement of the Resolution might weaken the Syrian regime to such an extent that US intentions would, ironically, be further enabled. In advocating for a phased withdrawal, Moscow hoped to buy the Assad regime time and enable it to maintain control. Pursuing leverage for Damascus regarding the withdrawal, Moscow was ultimately concerned with its chief objective of thwarting regional instability, consistent with Proposition 1.

⁸⁴ ‘Press Release on the Situation in Lebanon’, 30 March 2005, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/lb/-/asset_publisher/YIYV5tIrcKpw/content/id/444648?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_YIYV5tIrcKpw&_101_INSTANCE_YIYV5tIrcKpw_languageId=en_GB.

⁸⁵ “‘Kedrovaya revolyutsiya’ s litsom ‘Hizbally’” (“A Cedar Revolution with Hezbollah’s Face”), *Arabeski*, 10 March 2005, http://arabeski.globalrus.ru/print_this/133448/.

⁸⁶ ‘Vyvod siriiskikh voisk iz Livana soprovozhdaetsya vzryvami i mozhet privesti k padeniyu rezhima Bashara Asada’ (“The Withdrawal of Syrian Forces from Lebanon is Accompanied by Challenges and Could Lead to the Collapse of the Bashar Al-Assad Regime”), *Kommersant*, 28 March 2005, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/558251?stamp=636228653577763630>.

3.3) The *Strelets* dispute – Russia sells defensive weapons to Syria

The Kremlin also sought to provide its client Syria with additional leverage by selling it defensive weapons. On the eve of Assad's first visit to Moscow in late January 2005, news circulated about a possible Russian sale of shoulder-fired SA-18 Iгла man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS) and SS-26 Iskander-E operational-tactical missile systems, which alarmed the Israeli government.⁸⁷ The State Department echoed opposition to the prospective deal and even signalled that the US might sanction Russia over its planned transactions.⁸⁸ At a hearing before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (US Helsinki Commission) on 9 March, Congress Democrat Cardin warned that, whilst Russia had called for a withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon: "President Vladimir Putin's recent behaviour has undermined these demands [since] reports indicate that Russia and Syria are negotiating a military alliance."⁸⁹

In mid January 2005 Lavrov dismissed the media uproar about alleged Iskander and MANPAD sales to Syria as "ballyhoo" and professed that: "we have never supplied weapons that are either banned by our international commitments or could [...] destabilize the situation in conflict-ridden regions."⁹⁰ Russian officials denied the Iskander sale, Defence Minister Ivanov professing that there were no negotiations under way with Syria.⁹¹ When Bashar visited Moscow a few days

⁸⁷ 'Eastern Dances on the Needle', *Vremya Novostei*, 14 January 2005, in CDRP, no. 1, vol. 57, pp. 18-19.

⁸⁸ 'US Opposes Russian Arms Sale to Syria', *UPI News*, 12 January 2005, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/2005/01/12/US-opposes-Russian-arms-sale-to-Syria/UPI-53161105580344/?st_rec=7332720939600.

⁸⁹ 'The Russian-Syrian Connection', 9 March 2005, <https://www.csce.gov/sites/helsinkicommission.house.gov/files/The%20Russian-Syrian%20Connection%20Thwarting%20Democracy%20in%20the%20Middle%20East%20and%20the%20Greater%20OSCE%20Region.pdf>.

⁹⁰ 'Sergei V. Lavrov on the Foreign Policy Results of 2004', 19 January 2005, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/451196?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw&_101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw_languageId=en_GB.

⁹¹ 'Eastern Dances on the Needle'.

later, the Russian and Syrian sides were careful to emphasize that no deals on offensive weapons were being discussed.⁹²

Speaking at the Munich Security Conference days before Hariri's assassination, Ivanov reiterated that: "Moscow is not holding any talks with Damascus on this subject [the sale of Iskander-E missile systems, sic.], nor is there any truth to rumours about negotiations involving deliveries of MANPADS to Syria."⁹³ However, amid the international uproar following Hariri's death shortly thereafter, the Russian Defence Ministry announced its intention to sell *Strelets* air defence systems to Syria.⁹⁴ The Israeli Prime Minister was informed on 15 February and expressed his dissatisfaction to the press.⁹⁵

Over subsequent weeks, Russian officials took great pains to emphasize that the *Strelets* was a vehicle-mounted launcher for Igla-type air defence missiles which, unlike MANPADS,⁹⁶ could not be portably used or fired from the shoulder, and is not a weapon that can easily proliferate to non-state actors such as Hezbollah. These reassurances were reiterated to US officials at the Bratislava Summit in late February.⁹⁷ As Maksim Shepovalenko at Russia's Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (CAST) recalled: "the main point of contention with the US was about the mobility and possibility of deconstructing the system, so ultimately about proliferation

⁹² '\$10 Billion Gift To Bashar Assad', *Vremya Novostei*, 26 January 2005, in CDRP, no. 4, vol. 57, 23 February 2005, pp. 18-19.

⁹³ 'Israel Pricked By a Needle', *Kommersant*, 17 February 2005, in CDRP, no. 7, vol. 57, 16 March 2005, pp. 3-4.

⁹⁴ 'V Minoborony Rossii ofisial'no podtverdili, chto v Siriiu planiruetsya postavit' komplekсы "Strelets"' ("The Russian Defence Ministry Officially Confirmed that Syria Intends to Install the *Strelets* System"), *Interfax*, 16 February 2005.

⁹⁵ 'Israel Pricked By a Needle'.

⁹⁶ Indeed, at the Bratislava Summit, Rice and Ivanov signed a US-Russian Arrangement on Cooperation in Enhancing Control of MANPADS.

⁹⁷ 'Sergey Lavrov and Sergey Ivanov Following Russia-US Summit', 25 February 2005, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/us/-/asset_publisher/unVXBbj4Z6e8/content/id/447818?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_unVXBbj4Z6e8&_101_INSTANCE_unVXBbj4Z6e8_languageId=en_GB.

and controllability.”⁹⁸ Moscow also confirmed that Russian military officers would be entitled to monitor and inspect Syrian installations, and maintained that adding the *Strelets* to Syria’s arsenal would not alter the military balance in the region to Israel’s detriment.⁹⁹ At the same time, Moscow promised that the Iskander-E system would not be supplied to Syria.¹⁰⁰

Moscow had good reasons to be considerate of Israeli security concerns in advancing any weapons trade with Syria. Vladimir Morozov, attaché at the Russian Embassy in Israel, recalled that the arms delivery dispute heightened anti-Russian sentiments in the Israeli press, while the Israeli government lodged its protest with the Russian Ambassador.¹⁰¹ At that time the Russian government was interested in expanding military-technological cooperation with Israel, which had followed a promising trajectory since Putin’s ascent to the presidency. Other factors of concern to Moscow were the large number of Soviet emigrés who Russia wanted to see “live in safety” in Israel,¹⁰² as well as its desire to play a prominent role in the Middle East peace process.¹⁰³

Was Russia’s diplomacy on the *Strelets* file driven by Russian pursuit of security or economic leverage? To what extent was Moscow simply moved by commercial gain for Russian businesses, as opposed to considerations of building leverage for its ally Damascus? To the Russian military-industrial complex, starved of domestic demand and eager to sell abroad, the prospect of Syrian cash payments for weapons following the settlement of Syria’s debt in January 2005 must have

⁹⁸ Interview with Maksim Shepovalenko, Moscow, 15 April 2016.

⁹⁹ ‘Rossiya budet proveryat’, kuda tseliatsya Siriiskie “Strel’tsy” (“Russia Will Control Who the Syrian *Strelets* Target”), *Lenta.ru*, 25 February 2005, <https://lenta.ru/news/2005/02/25/strelets/>.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Putin Gives Interview to Israeli First Channel’, 20 April 2005, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22928>.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Morozov.

¹⁰² ‘Not Allowed to Wail’, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 29 April 2005, in CDRP, no. 17, vol. 57, 25 May 2005, p. 7.

¹⁰³ Following the *Strelets* controversy, Washington and Tel Aviv reacted coolly to a Russian proposal to convene an international conference on the Middle East. ‘Lacking a Role of its Own in the Middle East’, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 29 April 2005, in CDRP, no. 17, vol. 57, 25 May 2005, pp. 7-8.

appeared attractive. According to a *Kommersant* review in early 2004, Russian arms exporter *Rosoboronexport* was eager to increase exports and diversify its geographic reach.¹⁰⁴ Yet it is difficult to quantify the influence of the military-industrial complex on specific foreign policy decisions, such as the *Strelets* deal. Considering that Sergey Prikhodko, foreign policy advisor to President Putin, was also chairman of the board of Tactical Missiles Corporation, a weapons manufacturer, probably meant that the consequences of discrete policy decisions for military sales were at least taken into consideration by the Kremlin.¹⁰⁵

The Russian government also eyed additional economic interests for its businesses in Syria. At their first meeting in Moscow in January 2005, presidents Putin and Assad not only settled Syria's Soviet-era debt, but announced increased contact between Russia's *Soyuzneftegaz* and the Syrian oil and natural resources ministry. Russia was also interested in investing in irrigation, energy transport and storage, as well as rail and the metal industry in Syria. Ambassador Markaryan, who personally prepared Assad's visit to Moscow, remembered the Kremlin's desire to strengthen economic cooperation:

“Do you know how much pain I had to go through in these debt negotiations? Some Russian experts were against writing off any Syrian debt, arguing that ‘a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush’. But my position, which was that if we want to develop economic relations, we have to make some concessions to our partners, was actively supported by the President.”¹⁰⁶

However, there is reason to argue that pursuing commercial leverage was not the primary driver of Russian policy. The scale of Russian investment in Syria was not that significant and Russian arms provisions really just “a drop in the ocean”, especially compared to what would be delivered

¹⁰⁴ ‘Rosoboronexport Sold \$5 Billion Worth of Arms’, *Kommersant*, 27 January 2004, in CDRP, no. 4, vol. 56, 25 February 2004, p. 20.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with an unnamed Russian source.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Markaryan. *Vremya Novostei* also reported that Russian Finance Minister Aleksei Kudrin had received orders “from the very top” to solve the debt issue: ‘\$10 Billion Gift To Bashar Assad’.

after the start of the Syrian uprising in 2011.¹⁰⁷ As Ambassador Scobey recalled, “the Russians were not too much in a position to just give the stuff to the Syrians and Syria did not have any money”,¹⁰⁸ while David Welch commented that: “even back then, investing in Syria was like pouring money down a black hole for Russia.”¹⁰⁹ Rather, economic deals were primarily intended to reinforce Russian strategic interests in Syria, and were interpreted as such in Washington.

The Russian press might have enthusiastically promulgated “Syria's rather rapid transformation into Russia's principal trading and economic partner in the Middle East”, lamenting that: “the only thing that stands in the way of this idyll is the American fist raised over Syria.”¹¹⁰ But in fact, rather than bringing great commercial dividends, Russian weapon sales were, above all, a balancing act, intended to provide the Assad regime with leverage at a time when the Kremlin also supported the US policy of depriving Syria of its long-standing military presence in Lebanon. While the previous chapter argues that pursuit of Russian leverage in post-war Iraq was both about Russian commercial interests, as well as the UN Security Council’s prerogative in regulating an Iraqi settlement, Russian leverage building in the Lebanese case study was about political and security considerations far more than economic gain.

In sum, politico-security leverage came first in the Russian government’s calculations, the pursuit of economic gain second. In this context, it is important to note that, passing on the sale of Iskander-E missiles and contenting itself with providing the *Strelets*, Russia did not necessarily forgo leverage. As will be fleshed out in the next chapter on Russian-Iranian relations in 2009-2010, a period when Moscow decided to ban the sale of the S-300 missile defence system to Tehran, the Kremlin at times calculates that depriving Middle Eastern clients of more serious

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Akhmedov.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Scobey. The sentiment that the economic dimension of the Russian-Syrian relationship was not particularly promising in 2005 was confirmed by Russian sources.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Welch.

¹¹⁰ ‘A Friend In Need’.

weapons increases their perceived vulnerability, which in turn makes US or Israeli pressure on them appear less justified. The net result, so the probable Russian calculation, is de-escalation, which is fully consonant with Moscow's overarching security interests in the region.

3.4) The International Independent Investigation Commission (IIIC)

After February 2005, Russian officials' efforts to mitigate pressure on the Syrian regime also extended to the proceedings of the international investigation into the Hariri assassination. Following the adoption of UN Resolution 1595, which created the IIIC, led by German prosecutor Detlev Mehlis, Moscow did not overtly block the investigation, but diluted UN efforts by easing pressure on Damascus. When Mehlis issued his first report in October 2005,¹¹¹ bemoaning the lack of Syrian collaboration with the investigation, the US pushed for a strong Security Council resolution, but feared that Russia's right to veto might deter other permanent members from supporting any draft imposing punitive measures against Damascus. John Bolton met Terje Rod-Larsen, UN Special Representative for the implementation of Resolution 1559, in August just after being appointed US Permanent Representative to the UN. Rod-Larsen, Bolton recalled: "wanted to use the upcoming IIIC report to get very tough with Syria, which was certainly fine with me."¹¹² On August 25, almost two months before the release of the Mehlis report, the Security Council was briefed by the Undersecretary General for Political Affairs, who raised Syria's lack of cooperation with the IIIC, but a proposed Council statement was rejected by Russia and Algeria because it criticized Syria explicitly.¹¹³

During Security Council deliberations in late October, following the distribution of Mehlis' report, Bolton lamented that: "France was adamantly against imposing sanctions, worried that

¹¹¹ 'Report of the International Independent Investigation Commission', 19 October 2005, <https://www.globalpolicy.org/images/pdfs/1021mehlisreport.pdf>.

¹¹² Bolton, *Surrender Is Not An Option*, p. 373.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

Russia, Syria's protector, would react negatively, thus splitting the Council."¹¹⁴ On a visit to Moscow, Rice and Steve Hadley took up the IIC with Russian officials, trying to convince them of the necessity to make Syria more tractable.¹¹⁵ Yet Russian diplomats opposed any sanctions and requested a favourable mention in the draft resolution of Syria's cooperation with Mehlis.¹¹⁶ US officials remained uncertain as to whether Russia would actually support the text, which was eventually passed unanimously as Resolution 1636 on 31 October.¹¹⁷ Russia and Algeria played for time until the very last moment before the vote. Russian efforts to soften Resolution 1636 did not remain confined to its requests for changes to the draft text, but extended to influence over the Algerian position on the Council as well.¹¹⁸

Russian diplomats justified their objection to sanctions by charging that other Council members politicized the IIC, labelling Syria guilty before the Commission had concluded its work. This position echoed Moscow's objections to the corruption probe into the 'Oil-for-Food' programme for Iraq. As early as 19 September, Lavov stressed in a meeting with Lebanese Prime Minister Signora: "the importance of the impartial and objective activities of the IIC."¹¹⁹ The Russian UN delegation called for a "depoliticized" resolution that should not go beyond "assisting" the investigation and should not contain "unjustified threats" vis-à-vis Damascus. Russia's objection against sanctioning Syria was justified with the argument that, if the IIC "had been able to introduce sanctions at its own discretion", this would constitute: "an unprecedented idea [that]

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 377.

¹¹⁵ 'An Accusation that Cannot Be Denied', *Kommersant*, 27 October 2005, in CDRP, no. 43, vol. 57, 23 November 2005, pp. 2-3.

¹¹⁶ Bolton, *Surrender Is Not An Option*.

¹¹⁷ 'UN SC Resolution 1636 (2005)', 31 October 2005, <https://www.globalpolicy.org/images/pdfs/res1636.pdf>.

¹¹⁸ Interview with an unnamed diplomatic source.

¹¹⁹ 'Sergey Lavrov Meets with Fouad Signora', 19 September 2005, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/lb/-/asset_publisher/YIYV5tIrcKpw/content/id/427192?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_YIYV5tIrcKpw&_101_INSTANCE_YIYV5tIrcKpw_languageId=en_GB.

virtually strips the UN Security Council of prerogatives it has in line with the UN Charter.”¹²⁰As with the Volcker Commission’s ‘Oil-for-Food’ corruption probe, which is discussed in the preceding chapter, the Russian government was concerned that a commission created by the Security Council would transgress its mandate and claim authority that Moscow believed should reside solely with the Council itself.

Russia’s concern with protecting its status as permanent member of the Council was visible in the procedural realm too. In December 2005, Mehlis submitted his second report on the IIC’s progress, which said that new interviews had provided further “probable cause” to conclude that senior Syrian and Lebanese officials plotted and carried out the Hariri assassination.¹²¹ France then prepared a draft resolution accusing Syria of not providing full and unconditional cooperation to investigators, but stopped short of threatening new sanctions. Meanwhile, the US pressed Council members to endorse punitive measures against Syria. In this context, John Bolton recalled that Russia was concerned not just with averting sanctions: “Baali [the Algerian representative] had told me that Russia was not as upset about pressuring Syria or extending the IIC’s mandate, as about feeling left out of the drafting process, and was instead asserting its prerogative as a Permanent Five member.”¹²²

Thus Russian objections were partially driven by concerns with its permanent seat on the UN Security Council. However, it is also conceivable that officials in Moscow remained alert to the possibility of unilateral US measures against Damascus, including military action. President Bush hinted that the military option against Syria always remained on the table in the event of Syrian

¹²⁰ ‘Transcript of Interview with Sergey Lavrov with *Vesti Podrobnosti*’, 31 October 2005, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/422428?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw&_101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw_languageId=en_GB.

¹²¹ ‘Second Report Of The IIC’, 10 December 2005, <https://www.globalpolicy.org/images/pdfs/1210secondreport.pdf>.

¹²² Bolton, *Surrender Is Not An Option*, p. 386.

non-cooperation, if only as a last resort.¹²³ That the US might use the report as a pretext to justify punitive measures against Damascus constituted a risk that Lavrov admitted Russia could not rule out.¹²⁴

Importantly, while seeking a softening of Resolution 1636, Russian officials played down differences on the Security Council, admitting that Syria had hitherto cooperated insufficiently with the IIC and calling upon the regime to step up its collaboration.¹²⁵ Following the adoption of Resolution 1636, Moscow also stated that: “the disagreements between Security Council members that arose during the work on the text must not be regarded as a pretext for non-compliance with its principal requirement: the need for full and fair cooperation with the Commission by all countries.”¹²⁶ A day later, the Foreign Ministry assured that Russia was: “working vigorously with the Syrian leadership to make sure not only that such cooperation [with the IIC] should be merely promised, but also that such promises should be translated into practice.”¹²⁷

When the Security Council requested that a number of senior Syrian officials be interviewed by the IIC, the demand was staunchly rejected by Damascus. Russian diplomats then played a

¹²³ G. W. Bush, ‘Interview with *Al Arabiya*’, 24 October 2005, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/55509.htm>.

¹²⁴ ‘Transcript of Interview with Sergey Lavrov with *Vesti Podrobnosti*’.

¹²⁵ ‘Interv’yu A. I. Denisova po siriiskoi problematike’ (“A. Denisov’s Interview on the Syrian Issue”), 31 October 2005, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/un/-/asset_publisher/UIStPbE8y3al/content/id/422532. The fact that President Putin spoke with Assad twice on the phone about the IIC, on 25 October and 25 November, also suggests that Russia sought to increase Syria’s cooperation with the Commission.

¹²⁶ ‘Sergey Lavrov’s at a UN Security Council Meeting on the Situation in the Middle East’, 31 October 2005, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/422444?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&_101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA_languageId=en_GB.

¹²⁷ ‘Transcript of Sergey Lavrov’s Reply to First Channel’s Question’, 31 October 2005, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/422300?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&_101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA_languageId=en_GB.

crucial role in obtaining Assad's consent to the interrogation, which was to take place in Vienna.

Ambassador Markaryan, the official tasked with convincing the Syrians, recalled that:

“it was clear that if they do not comply, the Security Council would have to adopt sanctions. And we [Russia] understood that in these circumstances it would be very hard for us to oppose sanctions, since we had from the beginning supported the idea that the truth about Hariri's murder should be found. One day before the deadline that had been set for Syria, I had a multi-hour, nightly conversation with Bashar Al-Assad, in which I explained the Russian position and we had a verbal guarantee from Mehlis' commission that the Syrian officers would not be arrested in Vienna. The Syrians asked for a written guarantee from Russia, but we could not give them that. I explained this to Assad, I explained for a long time that he just did not have any other choice.”¹²⁸

In the end, both the US and Russian sides claimed that their interests had prevailed in Resolution 1636, Rice emphasizing that it had been passed in the spirit of Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, whereas Minister Lavrov retorted: “Don't focus on Chapter 7, read the entire resolution as a whole.”¹²⁹ While the Russian narrative emphasized that the Resolution ended up being “drastically different” from the original draft, stripped of its “politicized provisions totally unrelated to the investigation of the Hariri assassination”,¹³⁰ the alternative view cast any changes made to the draft as merely “cosmetic”.¹³¹

One US official compared Russia's watering down of the IIC-related resolutions to “Rumble in the Jungle”, the famous 1974 boxing match between George Foreman and Muhammad Ali. During the fight, Ali's strategy of so-called “Rope-A-Dope”, in which he retreated to the ropes and let Foreman strike him at will while deflecting and counterpunching, gradually letting his opponent exhaust himself, yielded Ali's eventual victory by knockout. Like Foreman, the US was

¹²⁸ Interview with Markaryan.

¹²⁹ ‘Veto Stays in Pocket - Moscow Saves Damascus From Economic Sanctions’, *Vremya Novosti*, 1 November 2005, p. 2, in CDRP, no. 43, vol. 57, 23 November 2005, p. 5.

¹³⁰ ‘Sergei Lavrov Attends UN Security Council Meeting on Relations Between Syria and Mehlis Commission’, 1 November 2005,

http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/422308?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA&_101_INSTANCE_xIEMTQ3OvzcA_languageId=en_GB.

¹³¹ Kreutz, *Russia and the Middle East*, p. 32.

so adamant on “winning”, on pushing the Hariri inquiry forward, that Russia quietly focused on diluting US efforts, rather than “getting in the way.”¹³²

In sum, while it is true that Moscow exerted great efforts to avert sanctions against the Syrian regime, it also accompanied these efforts with continuous pressure on Damascus. Moscow realized that its diplomatic attempts on behalf of the Assad regime would ultimately prove futile if Syria’s attitude towards the IIC did not change. As *Ria Novosti* commented after the adoption of Resolution 1636: “if not for a firm stance of Russian diplomacy, Syria would have barely avoided international sanctions. However [...] Russian diplomacy is not omnipotent and it is sometimes very difficult for it to take the side of Damascus.”¹³³ That Russia would, on the one hand, increase Syrian leverage by shielding it from international pressure, while simultaneously tightening the screws on Damascus, might seem counterintuitive, but both plays served the Russian government’s overarching interest in preventing regional escalation, as well as protecting the Security Council’s authority.

3.5) Stepping up as mediator in the Middle East

Finally, Russian diplomacy betrayed a desire to cast Moscow as an indispensable and effective mediator in the Syrian-Lebanese crisis and the Arab-Israeli peace process. In late 2004 and 2005, Russian diplomats held an unprecedented number of meetings with different actors from across the Lebanese political spectrum, showing that Moscow sought influence with all players in the rapidly shifting political landscape in Beirut. Intensive contacts with different parties were maintained after the Syrian withdrawal, particularly amid the Lebanese parliamentary elections

¹³² Interview with a US diplomat.

¹³³ ‘Russia’s Middle East Policy to Gather Momentum in 2006’, *RIA Novosti*, 26 December 2005, <https://sputniknews.com/analysis/2005122642714199/>.

held in the summer of 2005.¹³⁴ Asked to comment on the possibility of Russia playing the function of a mediator in intra-Lebanese affairs, Russian diplomats were modest in their assessments, admitting that Moscow did not have the means to play chief referee. At the same time, since both the Russian Federation and Lebanon understood the challenges of “multi-confessional” societies,¹³⁵ there was a sense that Moscow was well-placed to support the Lebanese people. Above all, Moscow was reluctant to cede the Lebanese arena solely to the US government which, through its active contacts with Lebanese opposition, was perceived to steer developments in Beirut into its preferred direction.

Russia’s diplomacy vis-à-vis Lebanon was also cast by the Russian press as: “underscoring the seriousness of the Russian authorities’ intentions to return to the Middle East.”¹³⁶ Indeed, Moscow was eager to re-invigorate Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts, maintaining intensive working contacts with its Quartet counterparts throughout 2004 and 2005. The day after the adoption of Resolution 1559, Lavrov commenced an official tour to Egypt, Lebanon, Israel, and Syria, lobbying for the resumption of negotiations towards an Arab-Israeli settlement. President Putin visited Cairo in the spring of 2005, suggesting that a Moscow conference be convened on the Middle East.¹³⁷ It appears that, following the diffusion of regional escalation following the Hariri assassination, Moscow saw an opportunity to step up its Middle East diplomacy more broadly. These efforts must be understood as a continuation of Russia’s prior lobbying for a regional conference on Iraq, at a time when the press lamented that Russia was still: “lacking a role of its own in the Middle East.”¹³⁸

¹³⁴ ‘O Vstreche V Beirute A.V. Saltanova’ (“On A. Saltanov’s Meeting in Beirut”), 27 May 2005, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/lb/-/asset_publisher/YIYV5IrcKpw/content/id/437476.

¹³⁵ “‘Kedrovaya revolyutsiya” s litsom "Hizbally”’.

¹³⁶ ‘Lebanon on the Agenda’, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 11 March 2005, in CDRP, no. 10, vol. 57, 6 April 2005, pp. 17-18.

¹³⁷ ‘Putin Addresses LAS, Points Out Mideast Peace Chances’, *RIA Novosti*, 27 April 2005, <https://sputniknews.com/russia/2005042739750341/>.

¹³⁸ ‘Lacking a Role of its Own in the Middle East’.

While Russia anticipated status gains from carving out such a role, it also pursued economic and security interests. For instance, seeking observer status at the OIC at that time was partially about status, partially about securing Muslim countries' support for Russian policy in the North Caucasus and minimizing their aid to Chechen separatists.¹³⁹ Observers of Russia's Middle East policy routinely mark Moscow's 'return' to the region as a serious player from 2006 at best, while other pundits pinpoint it a decade later, starting with Russia's military intervention in Syria in September 2015. I argue that the Russian leadership's efforts to build leverage in the Levant in 2005 signalled Moscow's early intention to carve out a more ambitious role in the Middle East.

Forgiving Iraq's and Syria's debts to pursue more ambitious commercial interests, or lobbying for a phased US withdrawal from Iraq, Russia indicated a new activism in the Middle East, beginning in 2004-2005. This activism was driven by a reassessment of relations with the US amid nascent bilateral tension, but also by a growing sense that American policy was destabilizing the region south to Russia's "soft underbelly". Whilst Russia did not yet have the economic and military wherewithal to step up the game in the Middle East, Moscow pursued a more activist policy.

To summarize the discussion on leverage building in cooperation, whether it was Moscow's lobbying for gradual implementation of Resolution 1559, its defensive weapons sales to Damascus, its shielding of Assad amid the IIC probe, or its pursuit of a more ambitious Levant diplomacy, the Russian leadership pursued regional leverage. Worried about an implosion of the Assad regime and a concomitant regional escalation, Moscow was keen to provide Damascus with additional leverage, to outbalance its loss in power caused by vacating neighbouring Lebanon. Thus Russian-US cooperation over a discrete issue – the implementation of Resolution 1559 – was accompanied by multiple countervailing steps intended to strengthen Assad's hand.

¹³⁹ To that end, the Kremlin also dispatched Chechen President Alkhanov on a four-day visit to the Middle East in September 2005.

4) Russian expectations of reciprocity as a driver of cooperation

4.1) NATO enlargement and the ‘colour revolutions’ – a tale of deteriorating Russian-US relations

Although the Russian government built leverage for its Syrian client in 2005, there is no evidence that Russia pursued linkage diplomacy with the US over other issues in their bilateral relationship. That said, Moscow hoped for an atmospheric change in bilateral relations with the US, eager to put them back on track amid deterioration over the Iraq War, NATO’s eastward expansion, ‘colour revolutions’ in Georgia and Ukraine, as well as persistent US criticism of the trajectory of Russian democracy. Such a hope, however, was not so much a driver of Russia’s cooperation, as that it reflected an anticipation of additional side-benefits from supporting the enforcement of Resolution 1559. Therefore, Proposition 2 holds marginal explanatory value in this case study.

The escalation of events related to Syria’s continued troop presence in Lebanon in late 2004 and early 2005 occurred against the backdrop of nascent deterioration in the Russian-US relationship. Whilst the Baltic states’ accession to NATO did not provoke a serious confrontation, the Kremlin clearly watched the alliance’s eastward expansion with concern.¹⁴⁰ In particular, the Kremlin complained that outstanding disputes with the Baltics over the rights of their ethnic Russian populations remained unresolved. Furthermore, the stated US intention to set up new military bases in post-Soviet countries heightened a sense in Moscow that: “America is at the gates.”¹⁴¹ At the Munich Security Conference in February 2004, Russian Defence Minister Ivanov argued that Russia should obtain monitoring rights of NATO’s planned new bases in Romania and Bulgaria

¹⁴⁰ ‘Alexander Yakovenko Concerning the NATO Expansion’, 29 March 2004, http://www.mid.ru/ru/press_service/spokesman/official_statement/-/asset_publisher/t2GCdmD8RNlr/content/id/479692.

¹⁴¹ ‘America at the Gates’, *Vremya Novostei*, 17 August 2004, in CDRP, no. 33, vol. 56, 15 September 2004, p. 1.

to ensure that they posed no security threat to Russia.¹⁴² Throughout 2004, the Russian press covered the anticipated security implications of NATO's expansion extensively.¹⁴³ To many Russian elites, NATO increasingly appeared like a "vicious dog", which: "runs around wherever it likes."¹⁴⁴

This sense of encirclement prevailed, even strengthened, in the first half of 2005 as events in the Levant also reached a new tipping point. Ongoing US criticisms of Russia's democracy, as well as a perception that the Bush administration supported 'colour revolutions' in the post-Soviet space, further heightened Russia's concerns. Starting with Powell's visit to Moscow in January 2004, the Bush administration had slowly but surely stepped up its rhetoric bemoaning the state of Russian democracy, including the Kremlin's pressure on journalists, irregularities in the December 2003 Duma election, the detention of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, as well as counterterrorism practices in Chechnya.¹⁴⁵ Such perceived US lecturing irritated the Russian side. In his annual address to the Russian Federal Assembly in April 2005, President Putin rejected a US *diktat* on how Russia was to democratize, stating that: "as a sovereign nation, Russia can and will decide for itself the timeframe and conditions for its progress along this road."¹⁴⁶

Despite such verbal rebuttals, US rhetoric generated a distinct worry in Moscow that, going forward: "the number of 'carrots' offered by the American side would clearly be contingent on

¹⁴² 'Sergei Ivanov Demands NATO Give Him the Right to Inspect Military Bases in Poland and the Baltic Countries', 10 February 2004, in CDRP, no. 6, vol. 56, 10 March 2004, p. 23.

¹⁴³ For example, 'Ukraine Opens up to NATO', *Russky Kuryer*, 18 March 2004, in CDRP, no. 11, vol. 56, 14 April 2004, p. 23.

¹⁴⁴ 'Ona nam NATO? General Baluevskii uveren, chto bezopasnost' svoei strany vazhnee samogo vygodnogo partnerstva' ("Is NATO For Us? General Baluevsky Is Sure that the Security of His Country Is More Important than the Most Preferential Partnership"), *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 15 April 2004, <https://rg.ru/2004/04/15/Baluyevsky.html>.

¹⁴⁵ C. L. Powell, 'Partnership, Under Construction', *Izvestia*, 26 January 2004, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/28495.htm>; 'U.S.-Russia Relations in Putin's Second Term', 18 March 2004, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/30556.htm>.

¹⁴⁶ V. Putin, 'Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation', 25 April 2005, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22931>.

Washington's assessment of Moscow's behaviour with respect to a whole series of issues [regarding democracy and the near-abroad]."¹⁴⁷ Concerns that Russian internal affairs might have an impact on the trajectory of Russian-US relations intensified on both sides following the Beslan hostage crisis in September 2004. Putin afterwards announced his intention to appoint governors from the top, a move characterized by US officials as pulling back on some of the democratic reforms of the past.

A string of 'colour revolutions' in the post-Soviet space further exacerbated estrangement between Moscow and Washington. As Angela Stent notes, these revolutions all occurred in response to elections deemed fraudulent, pitting a leader with limited public support against an opposition capable of organizing the masses and supported by international NGOs.¹⁴⁸ Since senior officials in the Bush administration viewed the post-Soviet space as a litmus test for the Freedom Agenda, Russian apprehensions over these revolutions were not to dictate US policy; instead, Russia was to play by the same rules as everyone else and was not entitled to a sphere of influence in its 'near-abroad'.¹⁴⁹

From the Russians' perspective, the Rose Revolution in Georgia in late 2003 and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine approximately one year later added to the sense of Western encirclement. *Russky Kuryer* labelled the Rose Revolution an "unprecedented systemic challenge to the Russian elite and its little sisters"¹⁵⁰, while Russian pundits characterized the Orange Revolution as a continuation of the West's strategic line of staging a political takeover of the post-Soviet space. The outcome of the March 2005 parliamentary elections in Moldova were also cast as a setback

¹⁴⁷ 'In America, Powell Praised for Toughness', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 28 January 2004, in CDRP, no. 4, vol. 56, 25 February 2004, pp. 6-7.

¹⁴⁸ A. Stent, *The Limits Of Partnership* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), p. 100.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

¹⁵⁰ 'Tbilisi Leaves Moscow with No Prospects', *Russkiy Kuryer*, 26 January 2004, in CDRP, no. 4, vol. 56, 25 February 2004, p. 4.

for Russian influence in the region, as was the ‘Tulip Revolution’ in Kyrgyzstan, which led *Kommersant* to forecast that it: “will trigger another round of debate on how to stop the wave of velvet revolutions in the post-Soviet space.”¹⁵¹

By April 2005, the Russian press had turned its attention towards Minsk, speculating that increased contacts between the US government and the Belarussian opposition indicated that Belarus was next in line for US-backed regime change in Russia’s backyard.¹⁵² The Russian leadership interpreted these events as deliberately aimed at weakening Russia’s influence. It pointed to US funding for NGOs operating in the post-Soviet space as evidence that America was directly interfering to produce outcomes detrimental to Russian objectives.¹⁵³ In addition to NATO expansion, sparring over democracy, and the proliferation of ‘colour revolutions’, other irritants in Russian-US relations included perceived insufficient US support for Russia’s counterterrorist campaign in Chechnya.

4.2) “Nobody wants confrontation” – Russia hopes for improved bilateral relations during Bush’s second term

Despite these frictions, in 2004 and 2005 the US remained careful to emphasize its common interests with the Russian Federation. Washington applauded Moscow for its cooperation in the Middle East Quartet, on nuclear non-proliferation, counterterrorism, and other issues. Senior administration officials still assessed the overall relationship as: “so broad and so deep [that] the Presidents could talk about just anything on the map.”¹⁵⁴ Into early 2005, Washington continued

¹⁵¹ ‘Celebration of Spring and the Iron Rod’, *Kommersant*, 22 March 2005, in CDRP, no. 12, vol. 57, 20 April 2005, pp. 8-9.

¹⁵² ‘Four Steps Towards Revolution in Minsk’, *Vremya Novostei*, 22 April 2005, in CDRP, no. 16, vol. 57, 18 May 2005, p. 4.

¹⁵³ ‘They’ve Received Accurate Intelligence Reports’, *Kommersant*, 13 May 2005, in CDRP, no. 18, vol. 57, 1 June 2005, p. 19.

¹⁵⁴ ‘Press Briefing by Condoleezza Rice’, 7 June 2004, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=81010>.

to emphasize that there was a constructive relationship with Russia.¹⁵⁵ A desire to “not only preserve continuity and momentum in [bilateral] relations, but also to move further” was shared by the Russian side.¹⁵⁶ While NATO enlargement was seen as a problem, there was still the desire to reach a compromise on any further NATO policy, and avoid a new confrontation with the US. In late 2004, Russian experts such as Dmitry Suslov and Viktor Kremenyuk anticipated that Bush’s presidential re-election would facilitate continued pragmatic cooperation from 2005.¹⁵⁷

Russia’s national interests in 2004-2005: greater assertiveness amid continued pragmatic cooperation

The nascent deterioration in Russian-US relations in 2004 and 2005 had an impact on how the leadership intended to pursue Russia’s national interests.¹⁵⁸ The intensification of terrorist activities in the North Caucasus, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, as well as perceived Western attempts to influence developments in the post-Soviet region generated criticism of pragmatic cooperation at home. While Statists bemoaned that cooperation with the West was not paying off and argued that the Russian government needed to be more assertive in defending its interests, Westernizers called for even greater economic and political liberalization.

Although President Putin, under domestic attack after the Beslan hostage crisis, responded by further centralizing political decision-making, he also continued efforts to engage the West. Whilst the Russian President provided support for Yanukovich’s election in Ukraine, he was not

¹⁵⁵ ‘Press Briefing by Stephen Hadley’, 23 February 2005, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=66146>.

¹⁵⁶ ‘Statement by Alexander Yakovenko’, 4 February 2005, http://www.mid.ru/ru/press_service/spokesman/answers/-/asset_publisher/OyrhusXGz9Lz/content/id/449778?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_OyrhusXGz9Lz&_101_INSTANCE_OyrhusXGz9Lz_languageId=en_GB.

¹⁵⁷ ‘The Unsuccessful Hegemon’, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 15 November 2004, in CDRP, no. 47, vol. 56, 22 December 2004, pp. 19-20; ‘Russia Will Work With Hard-Line American Team’, *RIA Novosti*, 17 November 2004, <http://sputniknews.com/analysis/20041117/39773472.html>.

¹⁵⁸ Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy*, pp. 160-165.

willing to sacrifice his relations with the West over the Orange Revolution.¹⁵⁹ Russia's response to the Central Asian crises in the spring of 2005 equally remained within the overall framework of pragmatic cooperation with the West, in that Russia looked out for its regional interests while pursuing dialogue with Washington in areas of mutual concern. In sum, pragmatic cooperation with the US, the components of which were expounded in the previous chapter, continued to dominate Russia's national interests until mid 2005.

At the same time, the means by which the Kremlin pursued the national interest of economic modernization, political stability, and enhanced security became more assertive. Putin's famous speech at the Munich Security Conference in February 2007 would mark the high point of Russia's new assertiveness.¹⁶⁰ However, such boldness evolved from 2004, driven by a growing sense of Russian vulnerability amid the spread of political instability in its periphery on the one hand, but also improved economic conditions on the other. Russia benefitted from impressive economic growth between 2000 and 2005, the average citizen seeing ca. 26% annual growth in income, while Foreign Direct Investment in Russia skyrocketed. Although the continued perception of a terrorist threat strengthened the *siloviki*, liberals such as Alexei Kudrin and German Gref remained in the government, where they made their case for liberal policies.

Against the dual backdrop of security vulnerabilities and greater economic strength, a shift towards greater assertiveness in pursuing pragmatic cooperation with the West could be discerned. Such assertiveness was reflected in the promulgation of Russia's own path towards 'sovereign democracy', but also in a new foreign policy consensus favouring more confident pursuit of stability and security. Importantly, the new assertiveness, supported in particular by the Statists and wider society, was seen as conducive to fostering multipolarity in international

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ V. Putin, 'Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy', 10 February 2007.

politics. Going forward, Russia was to challenge unilateral actions of others and defend the notions of collective leadership and multilateral diplomacy more actively.¹⁶¹

This greater assertiveness amid continued pragmatic cooperation with the West provides an important backdrop for understanding Russia's Levant diplomacy in 2004 and 2005. Whilst Moscow showed early eagerness to carve out a more prominent role in the Middle East, viewing it as both necessary to thwart the destructive implications of US policy, as well as a legitimate reflection of multilateral diplomacy, the Kremlin continued to operate in the overarching framework of pursuing cooperation with the US and Europe. Its decision to yield to US preferences over Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, while simultaneously protecting Syria's leverage to the greatest extent possible, was fully consonant with these overarching interests. Against this backdrop, Russia's cooperation over eliciting Syrian compliance with Resolution 1559 entailed a hope for US diffuse reciprocity.

4.3) Looking for evidence of linkage diplomacy: the Bratislava Summit

Russia's support for Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon materialized in late February 2005 at a time when presidents Bush and Putin also met in Bratislava to discuss a spectrum of bilateral issues. Given this concurrence, did linkage diplomacy, a "trading" of the Russian position on Resolution 1559 with US concessions on other Russian interests, occur in Bratislava? As noted earlier, a US official briefing journalists after the summit admitted that "there had been some discussion on Resolution 1559" and that Russia now supported the Syrian withdrawal.¹⁶² The Russian press, in turn, speculated about a possible deal, *Izvestia* writing that: "perhaps, at the Bratislava Summit, the US President said something that made Vladimir Putin back the US position in a hot spot to which the White House pays close attention. Perhaps, in response, Mr.

¹⁶¹ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, pp. 175-187.

¹⁶² 'Background Briefing by a Senior Administration Official', 24 February 2005.

Putin was given a promise that Moscow's interests in some CIS countries would be taken into account?"¹⁶³

Such media rumours aside, however, there is no evidence of a Russian linkage over Resolution 1559, whether at the Bratislava Summit or afterwards. None of the senior US officials interviewed, bearing responsibility either for US policy towards the Levant or Russia, could confirm a deal. Ambassador Markaryan equally denied any Russian quid pro quo seeking, insisting "that the situation in the Middle East was important in itself, in its own right", therefore not to be linked to other issues.¹⁶⁴ Thus Proposition 2, which stipulates that "Russia's cooperation with the United States in the Middle East is driven by expectations of linkage to other issues in the Russian-US bilateral agenda", could not be confirmed.

4.4) Looking for evidence of linkage diplomacy: Russian expectations of diffuse reciprocity

That said, the Russian leadership hoped for diffuse reciprocity in getting behind international pressure on Syria. Bill Burns, for instance, sensed that, while the: "basis for Russian cooperation over the troop withdrawal was the narrow concern with the regional situation, Putin assumed this might buy some space for him on other issues."¹⁶⁵ Thomas Graham, one of the architects of the Bratislava Summit, equally believed that:

"part of what influenced Putin's decision [to support the troop withdrawal] was a general expectation on the Russian side that the relationship is improving if they are doing things to help the US. Russia's position in the former Soviet Union was a high priority and even without saying it explicitly, I think there was a sense on the Russian side that if we help the US deal with its most challenging national security issues, it is going to cut us some slack dealing with our interests."¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ 'Why Did Lavrov Demand Syrian Withdrawal From Lebanon?', *Izvestia*, 4 March 2005, <https://sputniknews.com/analysis/2005030439698757/>.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Markaryan.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Burns.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Graham.

The sentiment that Russia's support for Syrian compliance with Resolution 1559 was driven by a calculation of "we help you here, you help us there", was echoed by Russian sources. One termed it "not an explicit deal", but: "an attempt from our side [Russia] to get along."¹⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the predominant narrative on Russia's policy was that it was driven by regional concerns and "just happened to coincide with what the US also wanted", confirming the notion of tacit cooperation.¹⁶⁸

While linkage in the sense of seeking quid pro quos does not explain Russian diplomacy in this case study, a different kind of linkage was at play. Evidence suggests that Moscow made a rudimentary link between upheavals in the Levant – the 'Cedar Revolution' and Western calls for regime change in Damascus – and the 'colour revolutions' in the post-Soviet space. Cooperating with the US to end the Syrian presence in Lebanon was also a policy intended to prevent another success story for the Freedom Agenda, because such success might have emboldened the Bush administration to support democratization in Russia's own neighborhood more actively.

Indeed, having labelled the Freedom Agenda an explicit cornerstone of its foreign policy for the second term, the Bush administration saw the public demonstrations in Beirut following the Hariri assassination as evidence that the Lebanese people, "like all people": "aspire for greater freedom and a democratic future."¹⁶⁹ Two years into the Iraq War, the 'Cedar Revolution' allowed the Bush administration to recast *Operation Iraqi Freedom* as a catalyst for democracy in the Middle East.¹⁷⁰ After Iraq, Lebanon appeared to be an "easy case" for supporting democracy.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with a Russian source.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Suponina.

¹⁶⁹ 'Press Briefing by Scott McClellan', 1 March 2005, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=66148>.

¹⁷⁰ 'Press Briefing by Scott McClellan', 8 March 2005.

French President Chirac, nurturing the idea of Resolution 1559 in a speech to US senators in March 2004, urged that: “we have to be realists and support democracy where it already exists, even if imperfectly, such as in Lebanon.”¹⁷¹ And indeed, US officials made explicit links between the Lebanese theatre and uprisings in the post-Soviet space, with CSCE Chairman Brownback characterizing the: “popular pressure by the people of Lebanon [as] reminiscent of what happened in Kiev.”¹⁷² At the May 2005 ceremony where he received the International Republican Institute’s Freedom Award for advancing democracy, President Bush listed the popular revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, Iraq, Kyrgyzstan, and Lebanon in the same breath, as representing successful contributions to the Freedom Agenda.¹⁷³

The Russian leadership worried that the Middle East and the post-Soviet space had become increasingly merged in the US outlook on the Freedom Agenda. This fear became much more pronounced in later years, especially after the 2011 Arab Spring and the Libyan and Syrian crises.¹⁷⁴ Yet it had early roots amid the ‘Cedar Revolution’, which followed shortly after the Rose and Orange revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, respectively. Ambassador Aksenyonok accused neoconservatives of looking at the Middle East and the post-Soviet space through the same lens: “Even a superficial glance at the Greater Middle East Initiative gives the impression that its main provisions have been copied from the broad and generally successful reforms carried out over the past decade in the postcommunist countries of Central and Eastern Europe.”¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Nouzille, *Dans Le Secret Des Présidents*, p. 455.

¹⁷² ‘The Russian-Syrian Connection’.

¹⁷³ ‘Remarks By The President At The International Republican Institute Dinner’, 18 May 2005, <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2005/05/20050519133230tjkc0llub0.1176264.html>.

¹⁷⁴ See Vladimir Putin’s 2012 article in *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*: V. Putin, ‘Byt’ sil’nymi: garantii natsional’noi bezopasnosti dlya Rossii’ (“Being Strong: The Guarantees of Russia’s National Security”), *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 20 February 2012, <https://rg.ru/2012/02/20/putin-armiya.html>.

¹⁷⁵ A. Aksenyonok, ‘Greater Middle East: Do No Harm’, *Vremya Novostei*, 26 May 2004, in CDRP, no. 21, vol. 56, 23 June 2004, pp. 20-21.

Russian allegations that the US was directly steering events in Beirut in early 2005 were reminiscent of accusations emanating from Moscow during the Rose and Orange revolutions.¹⁷⁶ Following the assassination of Hariri, Moscow feared “that the downfall of the Syrian regime would initiate a domino effect that would transform the Middle East into a US-dominated zone”¹⁷⁷, just as the Rose, Orange, and Tulip revolutions threatened to produce the same result in Russia’s neighbourhood.

Although a Russian linkage between fears of regime change in the Middle East and post-Soviet space became more robust following the Arab Spring, that it originated around 2005 is also confirmed by the fact that the Kremlin began to promote its own understanding of democratization around that time. This understanding placed primacy on gradual and state-led change at the expense of the more pluralist role played by civil society inherent in the liberal democratic model.¹⁷⁸ The concept of ‘sovereign democracy’, first promulgated by Putin’s Deputy Chief of Staff Vladislav Surkov in 2006, entailed the idea that: “the form of democracy appropriate to Russian society, and by extension to other modernizing societies, is one where the state has the primary role in managing the transition to democracy, ensuring that the resulting societal transformation does not lead to disorder and conflict but preserves social stability and economic reform.”¹⁷⁹

Thus the Kremlin’s eagerness to thwart another success for the Freedom Agenda in Lebanon was in the final instance intended to prevent ‘color revolutions’ elsewhere, whether in the Arab world or in former Soviet states. Hence Moscow’s decision to support the Syrian troop withdrawal from

¹⁷⁶ ‘Parlamentskie vybory i perspektivy razvitiya politicheskoi situatsii v Livane’.

¹⁷⁷ Nizameddin, *Putin’s New Order*, p. 183.

¹⁷⁸ Roland Dannreuther, ‘Russia and the Arab Spring: Supporting the Counter-Revolution’, *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2015, p. 79.

¹⁷⁹ V. Surkov, ‘Sovereignty: It Is a Political Synonym For Competitiveness’, in N. Garadzha (ed.), *Suverenitet* (Evropa: Moscow, 2006), quoted in Dannreuther, ‘Russia and the Arab Spring’, pp. 89-90.

Lebanon was not so much driven by linkage in the conventional sense of demanding American quid pro quos, nor were there ambitious expectations of diffuse US reciprocity. Rather, Russia's carefully calibrated policy of both pressuring and protecting the Syrian regime was seen as essential to halt the advance of the Freedom Agenda, not just in the Middle East but also in the post-Soviet space.

4.5) Explaining the sparse evidence of linkage diplomacy

Of all cases discussed in this study, Russian cooperation over enforcing Resolution 1559 shows the least evidence of linkage diplomacy or expectations of diffuse reciprocity vis-à-vis the US. As shown, Proposition 1 heavily outweighs Proposition 2 in accounting for Russian policy. Institutional-contextual factors, such as the time-frame within which enforcement of Resolution 1559 occurred, or the level of seniority at which linkage could have institutionally materialized, can partially account for this lack of evidence, but are not decisive factors. Just as in the previous discussion on Iraq, the crucial reason for the sparse evidence of linkage lies in US perceptions of Russian leverage at the time.

Recalling the theoretical discussion of the implications of institutional-contextual factors for linkage, it appears that the speediness with which diplomacy unfolded following the Hariri assassination greatly curtailed prospects for Russian linkage diplomacy. Following Hariri's death, when international pressure on Syria mounted within a matter of days, the Russian government's stance needed to change quite rapidly, all while channels to seek reciprocity from the US were less obviously available, since the issue of Resolution 1559 did not return to the UN Security Council. That said, it is conceivable that conversations about linkage occurred at the highest levels of government and were, therefore, not revealed in interviews conducted with senior officials on both sides. Indeed, given the closed-door discussions between presidents Bush and

Putin in Bratislava, sources interviewed merely confirmed that, “to the best of their knowledge”, there had been no deal.

A far more convincing reason why Russian officials likely refrained from pursuing linkage was that Moscow realized it was in no position to make demands. After Hariri’s assassination, the international mood against Assad shifted so powerfully that Russia was mainly concerned not to end up: “on the wrong side of history”. In this context, officials did not have any cards to play in seeking quid pro quos from Washington. Indeed, international actors assessed the meaningfulness and costliness of Russian cooperation as being rather modest. As pressure built on Syria to withdraw its troops from Lebanon, the US thought that French and Saudi leverage on the Assad regime was particularly crucial. Russian statements directed at Damascus were “welcomed” by White House officials, but not especially emphasized.¹⁸⁰ The memoirs of senior actors involved in shaping policy towards the Levant at the time hardly mention Russia in their accounts of events following Hariri’s assassination.¹⁸¹

Among US officials interviewed, there was also a perception that Russia’s subtle change from viewing Resolution 1559 as a merely hortatory demand on the Assad regime, to perceiving Syrian compliance with it as necessary, came at little cost to the Kremlin. Some senior diplomats believed Russia’s changing position was still valuable in practical terms, although not essential.¹⁸² Thomas Graham remembered it being a “side note”, also because many officials doubted the degree of Russian leverage over the Assad regime.¹⁸³ Scobey and Welsh argued that Saudi pressure on Assad was far more essential. What really counted was that the: “the emotion in the

¹⁸⁰ ‘Press Gaggle with Scott McClellan’, 4 March 2005.

¹⁸¹ Bush, *Decision Points*; Rice, *No Higher Honor*; Annan, *Interventions*; De La Sablière, *Dans les coulisses*.

¹⁸² Interviews with Burns, Welsh.

¹⁸³ Interview with Graham.

Arab world was galvanized against Assad in a way he had never seen before.”¹⁸⁴ Russia’s support was then merely viewed as “in line with the international mood”,¹⁸⁵ which was so clearly opposed to continued Syrian presence in Lebanon that Moscow had no alternative but to align with the prevailing consensus. American officials’ perceptions of Russia as a marginal player in the Middle East, with limited means to steer developments, were consonant with their reception of the Kremlin’s post-invasion cooperation on Iraq in 2003 and 2004.

Russian officials’ accounts of events cast Moscow’s role as more important. Speaking to the media following Walid Jumblatt’s visit to Moscow in early March 2005, Lavrov offered the opinion that: “Russia can help by being in contact with the Lebanese friends and the Syrian friends, the US, the Europeans, and the countries of the region and by advocating a well-balanced, comprehensive and just implementation.”¹⁸⁶ In a later interview, the Foreign Minister emphasized the important and constructive role Russia had played in ensuring progress in the implementation of 1559.¹⁸⁷ To this day, Ambassador Markaryan holds that US pressure on Assad following the Hariri assassination would not have been sufficient, since Russia could have given Damascus a green light to be defiant:

“Hypothetically, you could imagine a situation in which we [Russia] had said to the Syrians: ‘Do not make concessions, do not listen to the Americans. And if you get into trouble, you can count on our help’. But of course, we never said this, because we understood it would create a risk of direct confrontation with the US, which we never wanted.”¹⁸⁸

Markaryan’s counterfactual would also have radically contradicted Russia’s own stated view on the authority of existing UN Security Council resolutions, at a time when Moscow sought to

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Welsh.

¹⁸⁵ Interviews with Scobey, Welsh.

¹⁸⁶ ‘Remarks and Replies to Media Questions by Sergey Lavrov Following Talks with Walid Jumblatt’, 11 March 2005.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Interv’yu S.V. Lavrova kuveitskomu informatsionnomu agentstvu “KUNA”’.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Markaryan. Markaryan also suggested that Russian leverage over Syria was not indefinite: “They were always very difficult negotiating partners. They never succumb to pressure. They are not some Russian marionettes.”

prove that authority to the US. Finally, the Russian government would have been unlikely to have had the leverage to enforce its interests in the Levant should it have chosen to confront the US over Resolution 1559, given its relative economic and military weakness. As discussed in subsequent chapters, Russia's leverage significantly increased over time, and by the point at which Moscow cooperated in the demilitarization of Syria's chemical weapons, the Kremlin was able to go much further in shielding the Assad regime against outside pressure.

To conclude reflections on the sparse evidence of Russian linkage diplomacy in this case study, it appears that the sum total of an abrupt and speedy escalation of international pressure on the Assad regime, the fact that the Russian leadership did not have the leverage to change the course of events to Syria's benefit, but also the reality that Syria's continued presence in Lebanon was not seen as vital to Russia itself, explain why there was neither a perceived *possibility* nor *necessity* to pursue linkage vis-à-vis the US.

5) Conclusion

Based on the sum total of primary evidence studied, this chapter argues that Moscow's cooperation with the US in putting pressure on the Syrian regime to end its military presence in Lebanon was narrowly driven by Russia's interests in the Middle East. Thus the case study confirms the explanatory value of Proposition 1 over Proposition 2. Following the assassination of Rafik Hariri, the possibility that Syrian non-compliance with international demands would, at a minimum, increase tensions in the region, possibly even lead to US military action against Damascus, dictated Russian policy. Russia was also keen to be cast as standing 'on the right side of history' amid the mounting accusations against Bashar Al-Assad, and was keen to stress its position was firmly in support of existing UN resolutions.

Having decided to cooperate to end Syria's presence in Lebanon, Russian officials pursued a strategy of building leverage for its Syrian client. Trying to stall the Syrian forces' withdrawal from Lebanon, negotiating defensive weapon sales to Damascus, as well as shielding Syria from international sanctions amid the Hariri murder investigation, the Russian regime sought a balanced course between, on the one hand, disciplining Syrian behaviour to deprive the US of any pretext for enforcing unilateral punitive measures, and on the other hand, shielding Syria to signal that it would not tolerate US-orchestrated regime change in the Levant.

While regional leverage building was an integral part of Russia's strategy, there is no evidence that Moscow sought *quid pro quo*s in return for yielding on Resolution 1559. Against the backdrop of deteriorating Russian-US relations, the Kremlin, at most, hoped for diffuse reciprocity from the White House, expecting that its Syria diplomacy might help put the bilateral relationship back on track, possibly 'buying Russia some space' on other issues. Since both Russia and the US understood that Moscow had little choice but to endorse Syria's troop withdrawal, and since Russia was still viewed as a marginal player in the Levant, Russian officials would have had limited leverage to conduct linkage diplomacy, even if the institutional-contextual factors had been more conducive following Hariri's death.

Importantly, the 'Cedar Revolution' generated early concerns in Moscow that the US administration, anxious to point to successful democratization results amid a growing quagmire in Iraq, would feel emboldened to seek further regime change in Russia's neighbourhood, should the upheaval in the Levant turn out to its liking. Calibrating its diplomacy towards Syria and Lebanon such that there would be no perceived need for US-backed regime change, the Kremlin in the final instance sought to enforce a 'red line' over future American democracy promotion, both in the Middle East and the post-Soviet space. While a Russian linkage between 'colour revolutions' in the Middle East and the post-Soviet space did not fully form until after the Arab Spring, its

roots can be detected in officials' statements and assessments related to the 'Cedar Revolution' in 2005. To that extent, in this case study Russian cooperation was not just narrowly driven by Russia's interests in the Middle East, but by extension those in its own neighbourhood.

Finally, the deteriorating trajectory of the Russian-US relationship – a contextual variable in this study – had an impact on cooperation – the dependent variable – only to the extent that it made Moscow particularly attuned to the dangers of an unabated encroachment of the Freedom Agenda upon Russian power. Bilateral Russian-US tension, in other words, heightened the Russian government's cooperative impulses, because it brought into sharp contrast any detrimental consequences that would have resulted from Russian non-cooperation over ending Syria's presence in Lebanon. From Moscow's perspective, supporting the enforcement of Resolution 1559 was seen as the lesser evil in a situation of exclusively bad policy options and at a time when the Russian leadership was anxious not to embark on a course of confrontation with Washington over its unruly Syrian ally.

Chapter 4: “The Russians came a long way” – understanding Russian support for UN SC Resolution 1929 in 2010

1) Introduction

This chapter looks at Russian cooperation with the US in passing UN SC Resolution 1929 on Iran’s nuclear programme in June 2010, and in banning delivery of the S-300 missile defence system to Tehran in September. Having resisted the imposition of new international sanctions against the Islamic Republic throughout 2009, the Russian government’s position shifted towards support for the American “pressure track” with Iran, driven by concerns over non-proliferation and military escalation, but also by the Ahmadinejad regime’s diplomatic intransigence in defying US diplomatic overtures. Tehran’s failure to disclose the construction of a secret enrichment facility near Qom and its decision to reject the US-Russian co-sponsored Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) proposal had a particular impact on Russian officials.

Whilst Moscow decided to cooperate with Washington in disciplining Tehran, the Kremlin was careful to shield Iran from excessive pressure in negotiating Resolution 1929, eager to protect its own commercial interests and sensitive political relationship with the Islamic Republic. Russian diplomats negotiated qualified language and carve-outs in 1929, especially related to Iran’s military, energy and financial sectors. However, the Kremlin did not try to abort the multilateral sanctions effort altogether, adamant to preserve the UN Security Council as the chief venue for negotiations on Iran. Consequently, Moscow reacted negatively when the US Congress augmented Resolution 1929 with harsher unilateral restrictions, passing the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act (CISADA) within weeks of the Security Council vote.

The Russian government’s cooperation on Iran occurred during a period of warming relations with the US. The Medvedev and Obama governments ‘reset’ the Russian-US relationship, which

had gradually deteriorated during President Bush's second term, in early 2009. Eager to pursue a 'multidimensional' and 'win-win' relationship with Russia, the Obama administration worked with its Russian counterpart on a new arms control treaty, the nuclear non-proliferation agenda, as well as the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) for its operations in Afghanistan. Responding to a severe recession in 2008 by reorienting its national interest towards economic modernization, Russia in turn hoped the 'reset' would contribute to its domestic agenda, while also facilitating accommodation with the US over other issues. The state of the Russian-US relationship – a contextual variable in this study – was clearly characterized by an improving trajectory in 2009 and 2010.

I argue that Russian diplomacy on the Iran nuclear issue, first and foremost, sought to elicit Tehran's compliance with existing UN resolutions and full cooperation with the IAEA. While Russian officials remained less concerned about the military dimension of Iran's nuclear programme than the US, Moscow feared that Washington or Tel Aviv might take unilateral measures, including the use of force, to resolve the dispute. Mindful that containing a nuclear Iran topped the Obama administration's foreign policy agenda, Russia also hoped its cooperation would elicit US reciprocity on other bilateral issues, especially missile defence, ratification of the 1-2-3 Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, and Russia's bid for WTO accession. While the Russian government expected cooperation on Iran to make an 'atmospheric' contribution to a more constructive relationship overall, there is less evidence that Russian officials sought direct *quid pro quos*.

Against the backdrop of improving relations between Russia and the US, Moscow's cooperation on Iran evolved through four distinct phases:

During the first phase, lasting from President Obama's inauguration in January to late September 2009, Russia warmed to the American 'dual-track' approach on Iran, which entailed diplomatic

engagement and a ‘pressure track’. In the summer, following Barack Obama’s first trip to Moscow, Russian and US officials began working on the TRR proposal, although the Kremlin remained opposed to sanctions. Following Iran’s revelation of its secret Fordow facility in September 2009, heralding the second phase of cooperation (September – December 2009), Russian officials grew progressively frustrated with the Iranian government. Iran’s deception over Fordow was compounded in November by Tehran’s failure to embrace the TRR proposal.

Once the Obama administration moved onto its ‘pressure track’ in early 2010, setting in motion the third phase, the Kremlin agreed to discuss multilateral sanctions against Iran, although pushing for restrictions narrowly targeting the Islamic Republic’s proliferation activities. By early April, which also saw the signing of the New START Treaty, the P5+1 talks on a draft resolution had moved to the UN Security Council. In May, a last-ditch diplomatic effort by Turkey and Brazil did not delay passage of Resolution 1929 in June 2010. The fourth phase saw a debate in Russia regarding the implications of 1929 for its prospective S-300 delivery to Tehran, which was resolved in September by a presidential decree banning the sale.

The rest of this chapter will provide an in-depth empirical account of Russian cooperation and its drivers. Rather than proceeding chronologically, the chapter will critically engage with different Russian interests in cooperation, assessing their relative explanatory value, and refer to the four phases outlined as relevant.

The first part will answer the research question and focus upon Moscow’s principal objectives in supporting Resolution 1929. I will argue that the Russian government sought to strengthen the nuclear non-proliferation regime, its principled stance against sanctions notwithstanding, in order to elicit a change in Iran’s behaviour, to prevent regional escalation, and protect the P5+1 as the exclusive arbiter of the Iranian nuclear dispute. A discussion of leverage building in cooperation,

driven by Russia's economic, political, and security interests with the Islamic Republic, will follow. The chapter will conclude by probing whether Russian officials pursued linkage diplomacy in cooperation to elicit quid pro quos from the Obama administration over contentious bilateral issues, during what was a period of 'reset' in Russian-US relations. Evidence of both direct linkage, as well as more latent expectations of diffuse reciprocity, will be assessed.

2) The key drivers of Russian cooperation

2.1) Strengthening the nuclear non-proliferation regime in the Middle East

Russian support for UN Security Council Resolution 1929 in June 2010 was driven by a confluence of factors. Chiefly, Russian policy on the Iran nuclear issue remained guided by concerns about nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, which falls within the remit of Proposition 1 in the research design. While Russian policy had been ambiguous in turning a blind eye to clandestine Iranian behaviour in the nuclear field during the 1990s, evidence of Iran violating its NPT obligations in 2002 strengthened the Kremlin's resolve to support international efforts to seek a diplomatic solution.¹ The Russian government consistently argued that Iran had the right to use nuclear energy, but that the international community needed to ensure the programme's peaceful nature, which could be achieved only under IAEA oversight.²

While Moscow was concerned about nuclear non-proliferation globally,³ it was especially worried about the Middle East. In 2006 Sergey Karaganov prophesied that: "If Iran goes nuclear,

¹ S. Blank, 'Beyond the Reset Policy', *Comparative Strategy*, vol. 29, issue 4, 2010, pp. 355ff.

² 'Interv'yu ital'yanskomu telekanalu "RAI" i gazete "Korr'ere della Sera"' ("Interview With the Italian TV Station RAI and the Newspaper *Corriere della Serra*"), 5 July 2009, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/4719>.

³ Russia's non-proliferation cooperation with the US under the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program will be discussed in the next chapter. For analysis on Russia and the NPT, see the works by William C. Potter.

Saudi Arabia and Egypt are likely to build the ‘Arab nuclear bomb.’”⁴ Speaking with Barack Obama in July 2009, Dmitry Medvedev warned that: “there are regions around the world where the presence of nuclear arms would create huge problems, and these are areas where we should concentrate our efforts together with our American partners.”⁵ Medvedev then named North Korea and the Middle East. Russia’s concern with arms control and non-proliferation in the Middle East has been institutionally reflected in that, within the Foreign Ministry, the *Departament Po Voprosam Nerasprostraneniya i Kontroliya Nad Vooruzheniyami* (Department for Non-proliferation and Arms Control, DNKV) has traditionally enjoyed a higher standing than regional departments. When it comes to policy on Iran, the DNKV’s priorities typically prevail over the Second Asia Department, which deals with Iran relations aside from the nuclear issue.⁶

The concern with nuclear non-proliferation notwithstanding, the Russian leadership has historically been less anxious about Iran than the US⁷ and continued to state that it had no evidence that Tehran’s programme was of a belligerent nature.⁸ Russia did not so much doubt the Iranian intention to develop capability in nuclear technology, but rather believed the Iranians did not have the expertise to weaponize their programme.⁹ Russian analysts published conflicting views, with arms control expert Vladimir Dvorkin warning in 2009 that the Russian General Staff

⁴ S. Karaganov, ‘Iran: Last Chance But One’, *Sputnik*, 7 February 2006, <https://sputniknews.com/analysis/2006020743404182/>.

⁵ B. Obama, ‘News Conference with President Dmitry A. Medvedev’, 6 July 2009, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=86378>.

⁶ Source in the Russian expert community.

⁷ See, for instance, the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service assessment in 1993: ‘Novyi vyzov posle “kholodnoi voiny”’: rasprostranenie oruzhiya massovogo unichtozheniya’ (“A New Challenge After the Cold War: The Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction”), 1993, <http://svr.gov.ru/material/2-13-9.htm>.

⁸ ‘Interv’yu S. A. Ryabkova po razoruzhencheskoi problematike’ (“S. Ryabkov’s Interview on the Disarmament Issue”), 22 April 2009, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/297402.

⁹ As one Russian non-proliferation expert told me, Iran’s ability to militarize its nuclear programme has been exaggerated by other actors in the international community, who conflate an ability to develop bomb fuel (such as HEU) with an ability to weaponize the fuel (build a bomb of a deliverable size). US nuclear scientist Siegfried Hecker: “never found the basic Russian view to change, which was that they did not consider the Iranian nuclear *weapon* threat as being very serious, and in addition stood to gain from allowing Iran’s *civilian* nuclear activities.” Email exchange with Siegfried S. Hecker, 23 June 2017.

underestimated Iran's nuclear weapons potential,¹⁰ while Middle East expert Alexey Malashenko argued that: “engineers are sure that the Iranians by themselves will not make a bomb.”¹¹ Throughout late 2009 and early 2010, Russian officials publicly emphasized that there was no evidence that Iran was militarizing its programme, thereby also justifying Russia's continued work on the Bushehr nuclear reactor.¹²

Against this background, it was the perception of growing Iranian intransigence against an Obama administration, which in 2009 constructively engaged Tehran in diplomacy (and was perceived as such by Moscow), that shifted Russian calculations regarding the necessity for greater pressure on Iran. But even when Moscow eventually supported UN sanctions, it was adamant that any restrictions be narrowly linked to Iran's nuclear programme. In sum, Russian support for 1929 did not signal any shift in long-term objectives vis-à-vis Iran, which consisted in preventing it from building an atomic weapon.

2.2) Russia's principled stance against sanctions

However, pursuing these objectives, the Russian government disagreed with other P5+1 members on the rationale to punish Iran. Its position consisted in supporting UN resolutions against Iran, while criticizing the use of sanctions as a tool of statecraft in principle. Before 2005, Russia partnered with the EU to elicit Iranian acceptance of the NPT's additional protocols, which would allow the IAEA to make unannounced visits to Iranian nuclear installations. In February 2005,

¹⁰ ‘Iran's Missile Programme Potential Greater than North Korea's – Expert’, *Sputnik*, 21 September 2009, <https://sputniknews.com/military/20090921156207542/>.

¹¹ ‘Malashenko: “Udar SShA po Iranu neveroyaten”’ (“Malashenko: A US Strike Against Iran Is Unlikely”), *Gazeta*, 30 March 2006, <https://gzt.ru/society/2006/03/30/211000.html>.

¹² ‘Interv'yu S. A. Ryabkova po problematike iranskoi yadernoi programmy’ (“S. Ryabkov's Interview Regarding the Iranian Nuclear Programme”), 26 October 2009, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/adernoenerasprostranenie/-/asset_publisher/JrcRGi5UdnBO/content/id/276114.

Russia signed an agreement according to which it would repatriate any spent fuel from the Bushehr reactor, such that it could not be diverted for non-peaceful purposes.

When Iran, following the presidential election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, rejected its agreement with the EU-3, the IAEA Board of Governors moved the Iran file to the UN Security Council in March 2006, which Russia supported. Yet Moscow continued to hope that its offers of enriching uranium to commercial grade for Tehran would solve the dispute. Consequently, Moscow softened, though never vetoed, UN SC resolutions against Iran. For instance, Moscow supported Resolution 1696 in the summer of 2006, which required Iran to freeze all nuclear enrichment-related and R&D activities by August 31. Subsequently, resolutions 1737, 1747, and 1803 – which blocked trade in sensitive nuclear material, froze financial assets of those involved in nuclear activities, banned Iran's arms exports and encouraged scrutiny of the dealings of Iranian banks – were equally endorsed by Russia, though its diplomats mitigated pressure on Iran.

At the same time, the Russian government cautioned against the use of punitive measures as a tool of diplomacy. It argued that sanctions never lead to positive results if they are intended to harm the target country, but instead need to comprise serious political incentives in order to stimulate Iran to dialogue. Furthermore, they can only be legitimate if adopted by the UN Security Council. Throughout 2009 and 2010, even once Russia had in principle agreed to work in the P5+1 towards a new resolution on Iran, Russian officials stuck to their somewhat ambivalent rhetoric that “sanctions are not very productive”,¹³ “as a rule result in nothing”, whilst they are “sometimes necessary.”¹⁴

¹³ ‘Interv'yu ital'yanskomu telekanalu “RAI” i gazete “Korr'ere della Sera”’.

¹⁴ D. Medvedev, ‘Interview with CNN’, 20 September 2009, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/5516>.

Within Russia's elite and expert community, a widespread scepticism about sanctioning Iran was underpinned by different arguments. The Statists' principled rejection of sanctions, especially of the unilateral variety, has been an extension of their opposition to any perceived outside interference in internal affairs of sovereign states, which they worry might set a precedent that could be used against Russia itself.¹⁵ Russia's Eurasianist elites, in contrast, opposed sanctions against the Islamic Republic since they viewed both Russia and Iran as part of the same geopolitical and geoeconomic space.¹⁶

As noted in Chapter 2 on Iraq, Eurasianism has represented a distinct strand in the Russian Civilizationist foreign policy tradition, which views Russian values as inherently different from those of the West. While Eurasianists have constituted a relatively weak lobby, especially during the 'reset', their argument that a proud Iran will not bow to outside pressure, just as the USSR under sanctions did not, still resonated among even the pro-Western oriented elites.¹⁷ Finally, the debate between Westernists, Statists, and Eurasianists was also complicated by experts' differing assessments of Iran's progress towards weaponizing its nuclear programme.

Since the Russian leadership, on the one hand, believed Iran should not acquire a nuclear weapon, recognizing that it would further destabilize the Middle East, but on the other hand rejected the use of economic sanctions as a legitimate and effective tool of diplomacy, the task in this chapter is to explain which developments in 2009 and 2010 led the Russian leadership to come down on the side of supporting sanctions. If it is the case that, as Clément Therme puts it, "in Russia, the

¹⁵ Statist scepticism of sanctions has been reflected most clearly in the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept, which calls for efforts to: "contribute to eliminating from international relations illegal, unilateral coercive measures adopted in violation of the UN Charter and other norms of international law." 'Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation', 2016, http://www.mid.ru/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2542248?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw&_101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw_languageId=en_GB.

¹⁶ D. Shlapentokh, 'Putin's Moscow approach to Iran: Between Pragmatism and Fear', *Journal of Balkan & Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 13, issue 2, 2011, pp. 189-213.

¹⁷ Ibid.

balance between, on the one hand, reinforcing [...] cooperation [with Iran] and, on the other hand, supporting the UN's objective of reducing the risk of nuclear proliferation, generally tilts towards the first",¹⁸ Russian support for Resolution 1929 represents an anomaly that requires explanation.

2.3) Explaining the shift in Russia's position – the relevance of Iranian actions

Throughout the autumn of 2009 and spring of 2010, Iran's actions and rhetoric played a significant role in shaping Russia's crystallizing position in support of UN sanctions. They heightened Russian fears of regional escalation and tested Russian status sentiments.

Fordow

In late September 2009, Iran revealed that it had been constructing a second uranium enrichment facility (Fordow) near the holy city of Qom. President Medvedev commented at the G20 summit held in Pittsburgh that these Iranian actions ran: "counter to the UN Security Council's repeated demands that Iran freeze its enrichment activities."¹⁹ According to the White House, the US intelligence community had been aware of Fordow's construction for years and had been collecting information in order to build up: "irrefutable evidence that the intent of this facility was as an enrichment plant."²⁰

However, the US only shared its intelligence with Russia just before the Pittsburgh Summit, during a bilateral meeting between presidents Medvedev and Obama on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York. American officials had learnt of a recent Iranian letter to the

¹⁸ C. Therme, 'Iran and Russia: A Tactical Entente', in S. Cronin (ed.), *Iranian-Russian Encounters: Empires and Revolutions Since 1800* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2013), p. 394.

¹⁹ 'Zayavlenie Prezidenta Rossii Dmitriia Medvedeva' ("Announcement by President D. Medvedev"), 25 September 2009, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/5575>.

²⁰ 'Background Briefing by Senior Administration Officials', 25 September 2009, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=86684>.

IAEA, which disclosed the construction of a “pilot-scale enrichment plant”. This letter was the tip-off that the enrichment facility would be made public by Tehran, which would allow the Ahmadinejad regime to control the narrative and argue its design was for peaceful purposes. Consequently, the US: “needed to beat the Iranians to the punch.”²¹

Information on Fordow came as a complete surprise to Russian officials and caused great consternation. President Medvedev stated that it was “unexpected by *all* countries”²², in what seemed like an attempt to downplay Russian embarrassment about having been left in the dark. However, Sergey Lavrov charged that “some of our Western partners knew about this” lamenting that: “it is not quite clear why the Iranians [...] did not tell us that they have another project under this program.”²³ US officials recalled their Russian interlocutors being “shocked” and “angry” when they learnt about Fordow. One source said that the information – “really sensitive information we do not often share with the Russians – took the wind out of them”, one senior Russian official commenting: “*Eto plokho*” (“This is bad”).²⁴

Following the Fordow revelation, Russian calculations regarding the need for increased economic pressure on Iran shifted, because it became harder for Moscow to defend Tehran’s behaviour. While this evolution in the Russian position took months to fully play out, there were early signs that the US might succeed in eliciting Moscow’s support for tougher sanctions. Ambassador Michael McFaul argues that, once the Russian government had learnt of Fordow, the US tried to elicit consensus on a joint P5+1 statement on the need for sanctions against Iran: “Though we could not quite get the language we wanted with the Russians, we made a lot of progress [...]

²¹ Phone interview with Robert Einhorn, 8 July 2016.

²² ‘Press-konferentsiya po itogam sammita “Gruppy dvadtsati”’ (“Press Conference on the Results of the G20 Summit”), 26 September 2009, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/5578>. Emphasis added.

²³ ‘Interview with Sergey Lavrov’, 16 October 2009, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/277018?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw&_101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw_languageId=en_GB.

²⁴ Interview with a US source.

from that meeting, we decided that we had an opportunity with Medvedev and that he was going to consider the pressure track on Iran.”²⁵

The Tehran Research Reactor (TRR)

Besides Fordow, Russian officials also grew frustrated over the Iranian government’s handling of the Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) proposal.²⁶ The TRR plan was conceived as part of a larger US ‘dual-track’ approach towards Iran. This approach envisioned both diplomatic engagement and a ‘pressure track’ and was driven by an overall recognition that previous US policy on Iran had failed. According to White House officials involved in the policy review on Iran at the National Security Council (NSC) in early 2009, the overall objective was to incentivize Iran to behave more constructively, thereby depriving Tehran of the argument that it had been “singled out for special punitive treatment” by the international community.²⁷ The Russian Foreign Ministry viewed the new US approach to Iran with optimism,²⁸ also applauding Barack Obama’s message for the Persian New Year to the Iranian people.²⁹ Indeed, the Obama administration’s public posture vis-à-vis Iran was markedly different from that of the Bush administration, which was duly noted in Moscow.

Ambassador McFaul explained that a conscious effort was made to promote engagement over the ‘pressure track’ with Moscow first. This was reflected in the TRR proposal, an idea generated by the NSC, in which Russia was to be a lead actor.³⁰ According to the TRR plan, Iran would send

²⁵ Phone interviews with Michael McFaul, 29 August and 26 September 2016.

²⁶ Russia’s frustration over the TRR had historical precedent. Russia’s proposal to ship Iranian enriched uranium to Russia was first rejected by Iran during President Ahmadinejad’s first term. Furthermore, in 2006 Iran rejected a Russian offer to produce nuclear fuel in its plants for Iran.

²⁷ Interview with a US source.

²⁸ S. Lavrov, ‘Interview with *The Financial Times*’, 25 March 2009, <http://www.acronym.org.uk/old/archive/docs/0903/doc09.htm>.

²⁹ ‘Obama Message to Iran’, *Washington Post Foreign Service*, 21 March 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/03/20/AR2009032000398.html>.

³⁰ Interview with McFaul.

70-80% of its low-enriched uranium (LEU) to Russia, which would further enrich it up to 19.75% and pass it on to France, which in turn would manufacture fuel rods for a research reactor in Tehran that produces medical isotopes. Robert Einhorn led a team to Moscow in early August 2009, where meetings were had with Sergey Ryabkov and *Rosatom*'s Nikolay Spassky to discuss the project. The Russians, so Einhorn recalls, "immediately liked it" – both its substance, according to which Iran would not be asked to stop enrichment, and its format, implying a "coequal US-Russian partnership."³¹

Once the TRR plan had been proposed to Iran by the IAEA in October 2009, Tehran took a "generally positive" view but made clear it sought: "several important technical and economic additions." Specifically, Tehran insisted on sending its uranium abroad in stages and pushed for a simultaneous exchange plan, such that the TRR would receive fuel at the same time as LEU left Iranian territory.³² While some Russian experts criticized what they saw as Iranian stalling, Russia's official position remained patient towards Iran.³³

Once Iran rejected the TRR plan in its existing form on 7 November, Russia continued to shield it from criticism, noting that Iran naturally sought the most advantageous conditions for itself.³⁴ In February 2010, reports that the Iranian government was reconsidering the TRR plan elicited cautious optimism in Moscow.³⁵ However, only days later, Iran notified the IAEA of its intention to produce higher enriched uranium (HEU) itself, which drew a sharp response from Russian officials. Lavrov warned that: "with the Iranian leaders not reacting to a number of constructive

³¹ Interview with Einhorn.

³² 'Uranium Recovery', *Vremya Novostei*, 30 October 2009, in CDRP, no. 43, vol. 61, 26 October 2009, pp. 6-8.

³³ 'Moscow Urges Iran Six For "Proper" Dialogue on Tehran', *Sputnik*, 2 November 2009, <https://sputniknews.com/russia/20091102156683051/>.

³⁴ 'Otvét A. A. Nesterenko na vopros SMI' ("A. Nesterenko's Answer to a Media Question"), 19 November 2009, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/ir/-/asset_publisher/HUPBmpXjn4Ob/content/id/272830.

³⁵ 'Turtles from Tehran', *Vremya Novostei*, 4 February 2010, in CDRP, no. 5, vol. 62, 1 February 2010, p. 16.

compromise agreements offered to them [...] I do not rule out that the UN Security Council will be compelled to reconsider this situation.”³⁶

In sum, frustration over the TRR plan falling through compounded Russian officials’ anger at the Fordow revelation, heightening a sense among Moscow officials that Iran had not only deceived its Russian ally, but was also unresponsive to constructive diplomatic efforts supported by the Kremlin.

Other irritants in the Russian-Iranian relationship

Additional irritants in the Russian-Iranian relationship exacerbated the growing Russian frustration with Iran’s diplomacy on the nuclear issue. First, President Ahmadinejad’s hostile rhetoric vis-à-vis Israel alarmed Moscow. Speaking with CNN’s Fareed Zakaria in September 2009, President Medvedev warned that Iran’s non-recognition of the existence of the state of Israel was: “unacceptable in the modern world.”³⁷ Second, Moscow criticized Iranian medium-range ballistic missile tests in September 2009, Lavrov commenting that the tests could not but cause concern given the unresolved situation around Iran’s nuclear programme.³⁸

Furthermore, in December President Ahmadinejad instructed his government to assess the damage done to Iran in the 1940s by members of the anti-Nazi coalition, which included the USSR.³⁹ On 19 January, 2010, Iran temporarily prohibited a Russian plane transporting an Su-27 SKM fighter from flying over its territory to the Bahrain International Airshow, although Tehran

³⁶ ‘Sergey Lavrov Interview’, 25 February 2010, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/261460?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw&_101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw_languageId=en_GB.

³⁷ D. Medvedev, ‘Interview with CNN’.

³⁸ ‘Russia Concerned Over Iran Missile Launches, Calls for Restraint’, *Sputnik*, 28 September 2009, <https://sputniknews.com/world/20090928156280511/>.

³⁹ ‘Cold Spell in Russian-Iranian Relations’, *Sputnik*, 21 January 2010, <https://sputniknews.com/analysis/20100121157638216/>.

revoked the ban hours later.⁴⁰ Finally, in early March 2010 the Iranian government ordered all Russian commercial pilots working in the country to leave within two months.⁴¹

Regarding the evolution of Russia's official rhetoric on the Iranian nuclear issue between the summer of 2009 and the spring of 2010, its persistent cautioning against sanctions notwithstanding, a subtle undertone of frustration with Iranian intransigence grew louder. Russian official statements increasingly emphasized that "the key to solving the crisis lies in the *responsible* behaviour of Iran itself"⁴² and expressed "regret" that Russian calls on Iran to work with the international community were not yielding results.⁴³ By June 2010, when Russia supported UN sanctions against Iran, President Medvedev put Russia's disappointment with Iran's conduct in perhaps the starkest terms, warning that: Iran "cannot continue constantly replicating its irresponsible behaviour."⁴⁴

However, this frustration notwithstanding, Russian sources criticized the Iranian leadership only to the extent that the IAEA had "serious questions" vis-à-vis Tehran, which the Russian government wanted to see clarified, while showing reluctance to scold Iran's behaviour otherwise. Lavrov brushed aside Ahmadinejad's threats that Russia could become one of Iran's worst historical enemies, should it support UN sanctions, as "emotional" and: "not properly

⁴⁰ 'Kommentarii Departamenta informatsii i pechati MID Rossii' ("Commentary by the Russian Foreign Ministry's Press Conference"), 19 January 2010, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/kommentarii_predstavatelya/-/asset_publisher/MCZ7HQuMdqBY/content/id/266490.

⁴¹ M. Katz, 'Russian-Iranian Relations in the Obama Era', *Middle East Policy*, vol. 17, no. 2, Summer 2010.

⁴² 'Interv'yu frantsuzskomu zhurnalu "Pari-match"' ("Interview for the French Journal *Paris-Match*"), 25 February 2010, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/6964>. Emphasis added.

⁴³ 'Press-konferentsiya po itogam rossiisko-frantsuzskikh peregovorov' ("Press Conference on the Results of the Russian-French Negotiations"), 1 March 2010, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/7006>.

⁴⁴ 'Sovmestnaya press-konferentsiya po itogam rossiisko-germanskikh peregovorov' ("Press Conference on the Results of the Russian-German Negotiations"), 5 June 2010, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/7973>.

translated into Russian.”⁴⁵ Representatives of the Russian government were also careful never to evoke the notion that Russia had taken the American side against Iran, instead stressing that Russian policy on the nuclear issue was exclusively guided by its own national interest and could, therefore, never be: “pro-American or pro-Iranian.”⁴⁶

In sum, although the Russian government remained less alarmed about Iran’s nuclear ambitions than the US, the Iranian behaviour produced a shift in Russian perceptions of Iran as more intransigent – and of Ahmadinejad: “as an unstable figure, adventurist, dangerous.”⁴⁷ These growing doubts regarding Iran’s reliability as a responsible interlocutor in turn shifted Russia’s stance in the nuclear dispute towards support for UN sanctions. The Iranian government increasingly appeared to undermine Russia’s core objectives of strengthening nuclear non-proliferation and thwarting regional escalation, which are consistent with Proposition 1. It was also important that Moscow perceived the Obama administration’s approach to Iran as far more constructive than that of George W. Bush, which made Ahmadinejad’s intransigence appear even more unreasonable.

2.4) Preventing escalation? The spectre of military force and regime change in Iran

The military option

Whilst sincere in seeking diplomatic engagement with Iran through its ‘dual-track’ approach, the Obama administration never took the military option against Iran off the table. As a White House spokesperson explained, the President believed: “we must use all elements of our national power

⁴⁵ ‘Sergey Lavrov at Press Conference with Moldovan Deputy Prime Minister’, 27 May 2010, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/md/-/asset_publisher/dfOotO3QvCij/content/id/248122?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_dfOotO3QvCij&_101_INSTANCE_dfOotO3QvCij_languageId=en_GB.

⁴⁶ ‘Russia Rejects Iran's Claims It Favours U.S. on Nuclear Issue’, *Sputnik*, 26 May 2010, <https://sputniknews.com/world/20100526159167373/>.

⁴⁷ Interview with Trenin.

to protect our interest as it relates to Iran [...] diplomacy where possible.” But when pressed to comment on the military option, he responded that: “the President hasn’t changed his viewpoint that he should preserve all his options.”⁴⁸ The ambiguous White House discourse on “not ruling out anything” and that “consequences will follow” if Iran does not live up to its responsibilities continued through 2009 and into 2010.⁴⁹

Commenting on the administration’s rationale, Celeste Wallander explained that, as a result of US officials never ruling out the military option, but also not directly threatening it in conversations with Russian officials, the Kremlin in turn became more willing to explore a political path of which sanctions would also be a part.⁵⁰ US officials drafting Resolution 1929 with their Russian counterparts equally used ambiguity concerning the military option as a point of leverage: “We kept saying we need *real pressure* to have a diplomatic path, and if that does not work, we will have to go down the military path.”⁵¹ That said, as a matter of official rhetoric, the Obama administration emphasized engagement over the ‘pressure track’ with Iran.

In fact, Israeli military action against Iranian nuclear facilities appeared more likely than a US strike.⁵² Prime Minister Netanyahu continually pressed both the Obama and Medvedev administrations to take more meaningful action against Iran and Israeli officials visited Washington and Moscow frequently to press the issue.⁵³ President Medvedev’s remarks in his CNN interview in September 2009 that Shimon Peres had assured him that “Israel was not going

⁴⁸ ‘Press Briefing by Robert Gibbs’, 29 January 2009, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=85701>.

⁴⁹ ‘Press Briefing by Robert Gibbs’, 16 February 2010, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=87552>.

⁵⁰ Interview with Celeste Wallander, Washington DC, 20 June 2016.

⁵¹ Phone interview with Richard Nephew, 20 July 2016. Emphasis added.

⁵² Note that Israel reportedly struck Syria’s nuclear reactor in 2007, though it never officially admitted to what came to be known as “Operation Orchard.”

⁵³ In June 2009 Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman visited Moscow. Israeli President Shimon Peres held talks with President Medvedev in Moscow on 18 August, 2009. On 15 February, 2010 Medvedev and Putin met with Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu in Moscow.

to deliver any blows on Iran” drew sharp criticism by the Israeli government, which responded that: “of course we are considering all possible courses of action.”⁵⁴ In March 2010 the Lebanese *Al Manar* newspaper reported that the Israeli air force had practiced simulated strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities.⁵⁵

Russian officials expressed concerns about the possible use of force against Iran. These apprehensions were not new in 2009 and 2010. Indeed, Russia had been more fearful of US military action against Iran particularly during Bush's second presidential term. In October 2007 President Putin stated at a Caspian Sea summit that: “we should not even think of making use of force in this region.”⁵⁶ Yet a Russian nervousness prevailed after the presidential transition in Washington. In his September 2009 conversation with Fareed Zakaria, Dmitry Medvedev warned that an attack on Iran would be:

“the worst thing that can be imagined [...] What will happen after that? Humanitarian disaster, a vast number of refugees, Iran's wish to take revenge and not only upon Israel, to be honest, but upon other countries as well. An absolutely unpredictable development of the situation in the region. I believe that the magnitude of this disaster can be weighted against almost nothing.”⁵⁷

An acute awareness that Iran was located close to Russia's borders and that military escalation would have grave implications for the entire region were borne out by Russian official statements over subsequent months.⁵⁸ There was also a fear that striking Iran – thereby “driving it into a corner” – would increase Tehran's determination to pursue a nuclear weapon, since Iranian

⁵⁴ ‘Israeli Foreign Ministry Refutes Russian President’, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 22 September 2009, in CDRP, no. 38, vol. 61, 21 September 2009, p. 18.

⁵⁵ ‘Israel Gets Ready to Strike at Iran's Nuclear Sites’, *Sputnik*, 29 March 2010, <https://sputniknews.com/world/20100329158340236/>.

⁵⁶ ‘In Iran, Putin Warns Against Military Action’, *The New York Times*, 17 October 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/17/world/middleeast/17iran.html>.

⁵⁷ Medvedev, ‘Interview with CNN’.

⁵⁸ Medvedev, ‘Interview with ABC News’, 12 April 2010, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/7435>.

hardliners would gain the upper hand.⁵⁹ While the threat of a US military strike receded from Obama's public rhetoric, it remained of concern to Moscow and was compounded by the worry that Israel might take unilateral action.

A "Velvet Revolution"? The 'Green Movement' and US policy on regime change in Iran

Related to this fear of regional escalation was an ongoing apprehension about American regime change intentions against non-friendly governments in the region, including Iran. Following Iran's presidential elections in June 2009, the US expressed procedural concerns and criticized the regime's crackdown on protesters in the aftermath of the polls.⁶⁰ Overall, however, US criticism was rather cautious and sporadic, and the administration was careful to emphasize that its pressure on Iran's nuclear policies did not pursue the goal of regime change.⁶¹

The Russian government's position on what came to be known as the 'Green Movement' protests, which followed Ahmadinejad's re-election, consisted in stressing that they were Iran's internal business and that Russia supported a stable government.⁶² In a clear hint to the US, Deputy Foreign Minister Denisov warned that: "behind certain calls for the protection of human rights in Iran, the naked eye can detect an intention to change the leadership in this country."⁶³ The idea that US sanctions were in the final instance intended to produce regime change in Tehran was also widespread amongst Russia's expert community. It was suspected that sanctions against Iran's energy sector, in particular, were aimed at stoking popular unrest. Hence the

⁵⁹ 'Interv'yu S. V. Lavrova amerikanskomu teledudshemu Charli Rouzu' ("S. Lavrov's Interview With American TV Presenter Charlie Rose"), 22 September 2010,

http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/235760.

⁶⁰ 'Press Briefing by Robert Gibbs', 15 June 2009,

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=86284>.

⁶¹ 'Press Briefing by Robert Gibbs, Ben Rhodes, and Michael McFaul', 8 April 2010,

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=87728>.

⁶² 'Interv'yu ital'yanskomu telekanalu "RAI" i gazete "Korr'ere della Sera".

⁶³ 'Interv'yu A. I. Denisova "Gazete.Ru"' ("A. Denisov's Interview for *Gazeta.Ru*"), 21 August 2009,

http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/282848.

Kremlin's own insistence on sanctions narrowly targeting proliferation activities.⁶⁴ Iran observer Nikolay Kozhanov, for instance, argued that the West intended Resolution 1929 to galvanize a qualitatively new level of domestic support for the Iranian opposition.⁶⁵

Whilst both the possible use of US or Israeli military force, as well as intentions to change the Iranian leadership, worried Russian officials during the period analysed in this chapter, these apprehensions were not the exclusive driving force behind Russian cooperation over Resolution 1929. Fear of regional escalation was only one important factor among others. Unlike in the Levant in early 2005, it was not the *imminence* of regional escalation, triggered by a specific crisis (the Hariri assassination) that catalysed Russia's readiness to cooperate with US policy. If anything, relative to President Bush's second term, the likelihood of military action against Iran had subsided during the Obama administration, given the Americans' explicit intent to engage Iran through diplomacy.

Rather, a concern with nuclear non-proliferation, Iranian intransigence, and fear of regional escalation together set the stage for Russia's support for UN sanctions. I argue that a fear of military escalation in itself was not a *sufficient* condition for Russian cooperation. Still, this set of drivers is consistent with Proposition 1, which holds that: "Russia's cooperation with the United States in the Middle East is driven by its narrow security, economic, and other interests in that region."

⁶⁴ N. Mamedova, 'Sanktsionnyi Rezhim V Otnoshenii Islamskoi Respubliki Iran I Ego Vliyanie Na Situatsiiu V Strane' ("The Sanctions Regime Against Iran and its Impact on the Situation in the Country"), in N. Mamedova (ed.), *Sanktsii i Ikh Vliyanie na Iran* (Moscow: IV RAN, 2012).

⁶⁵ N. Kozhanov, 'O Vliyanii Ekonomicheskikh Sanktsii Na Vnutripoliticheskuyu Situatsiiu V Irane' ("On the Impact of Economic Sanctions on the Domestic Political Situation in Iran"), in N. Mamedova (ed.), *Sanktsii i Ikh Vliyanie na Iran*.

2.5) Russia's status as permanent member of the UN Security Council

Finally, and confirming the findings on status in the previous two chapters, the Russian leadership was interested in preventing the US and its allies from imposing unilateral sanctions. Lavrov, in remarks on Iran in October 2009, reiterated that the 'pressure track': "does not imply any unilateral sanctions, apart from the UN Security Council, nor the creation of any other formats where the issue of sanctions would be discussed."⁶⁶ Yet a threat of the US moving unilaterally, should it have proven unfeasible to build consensus at the UN, emanated from official White House discourse.⁶⁷ And Moscow heard the message. "It happens on a lot of issues", Celeste Wallander argued, that: "if the US has unilateral or other multilateral options, the Russians are willing to work through the UN because they can then shape the contents."⁶⁸

Given a concern with its permanent seat on the UN Security Council, it was also vital to Russia that Resolution 1929 be passed before CISADA, a US Congress measure authorizing further unilateral sanctions against Iran:⁶⁹ "Russia did not want to see US legislation before UN action, or look like they were being compelled by US legislation."⁷⁰ When CISADA was eventually passed, the move was seen as "*ne po-partnerskii*" ("uncooperative").⁷¹ The Russian Foreign Ministry commented that those "considering additional sanctions against Iran, more stringent than those provided by the UNSC", engage in "attempts to place themselves above the Security Council", which is "unacceptable" to Russia.⁷² Regarding the 'Oil-for-Food' probe (Chapter 2) or

⁶⁶ 'Sergey Lavrov at Press Conference with Hillary Clinton', 13 October 2009,

http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/us/-/asset_publisher/unVXBbj4Z6e8/content/id/277730?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_unVXBbj4Z6e8&_101_INSTANCE_unVXBbj4Z6e8_languageId=en_GB.

⁶⁷ 'Press Briefing by Robert Gibbs', 19 April 2010,

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=87881>.

⁶⁸ Interview with Wallander. This was confirmed by Russian experts.

⁶⁹ 'Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010',

<https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Documents/hr2194.pdf>.

⁷⁰ Interview with Nephew.

⁷¹ Interview with a diplomat in the Russian Foreign Ministry familiar with the matter.

⁷² 'Russian MFA on UN Security Council's Adoption of Resolution Regarding Iran', 9 June 2010,

http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/kommentarii_predstavitelya/

the IIC (Chapter 3), the Kremlin had proven equally allergic to perceived attempts by other P5 states to undermine the prerogatives of the UN Security Council.

3) On Russian leverage building in cooperation: shielding Iran within the international sanctions effort

While Russian diplomats worked within the P5+1 to put pressure on Iran, they pursued *leverage* within cooperation, driven by Russian interests vis-à-vis the Islamic Republic. Moscow sought leverage mainly in restricting the sanctions effort to proliferation-related activities and shielding Russian commercial ties with Tehran. Unlike in the previous chapter, the Kremlin largely refrained from taking additional steps to bolster its regional client, deciding *not* to provide Tehran with the promised S-300 missile defence system, even though Moscow had negotiated for the deal to be exempt from Resolution 1929.

This Russian gesture suggests that a hope of generating US reciprocity in return for its cooperation on Iran outweighed concerns with supporting the Islamic Republic. That said, a desire to silence those arguing for military action against Iran might also have played into the Russian leadership's thinking on banning the S-300 sale, a decision that would keep Tehran vulnerable. In sum, Russia sought to build leverage for itself (in terms of protecting commercial interests), as well as to appease Tehran in negotiating Resolution 1929.

3.1) Russia's historical interests vis-à-vis Iran

Russia's historical interests in the Islamic Republic set the stage for understanding why Moscow sought to balance its support for UN sanctions by protecting a modicum of leverage for itself and Tehran. Developing against the backdrop of what had been antagonistic relations between Persia

and the Russian Empire, Soviet-Iranian relations were strained due to disparate ideologies and competing geo-strategic ambitions.⁷³ Especially following the Islamic Revolution of 1979, the Ayatollahs' espousal of militant expansionist ambitions and radical Islam was perceived as a serious challenge by the Soviet leadership.

The post-Cold War record of Russian-Iranian relations has represented a triumph of pragmatism over ideology. Tehran's restraint in relation to the Chechen wars, pragmatic support for Russia's post-1990 hegemony in Central Asia, as well as cooperation against the Afghan Taliban and in settling the Tajik Civil War were perceived as significant Iranian steps by Moscow in the 1990s. Russia's own efforts to build stronger ties with Iran, especially from the mid 1990s, were sustained by a broader reorientation in foreign policy towards multivector diplomacy. Moscow began to provide Tehran with weapons and agreed to complete construction of the Bushehr nuclear reactor.⁷⁴ Although the Yeltsin government signed the supposedly secret Gore-Chernomydin Agreement with the Clinton administration in 1995, pledging to end all sales of conventional weapons to Iran by the end of 2001, existing contracts for specified weaponry were not covered by the agreement, which was eventually repudiated in October 2000.

Limited economic interests: weapon sales and cooperation in the civil use of nuclear energy

Russia's economic interests vis-à-vis Iran have been mainly in the fields of arms sales and civil nuclear energy cooperation, whilst overall bilateral trade turnover has remained modest at best.

⁷³ For historical background on the Russian-Iranian relationship, see Cronin (ed.), *Iranian-Russian Encounters*; C. Therme, *Les relations entre Téhéran et Moscou depuis 1979* (The Graduate Institute: Geneva Publications, 2012); L. Fawcett, *Iran and the Cold War: the Azerbaijan Crisis of 1946* (Cambridge: Middle East Library, 1992), and E. Andreeva, *Russia and Iran in the Great Game: Travelogues and Orientalism* (Abingdon, UK & New York: Routledge, 2007).

⁷⁴ Construction of the Bushehr plant by German companies began in 1975, but the work ceased in 1979. A contract to finish the plant was eventually signed between Iran and Russia in 1995, with *Atomstroyexport* named as the main contractor. For further background see A. Klopov and A. Lutkova, 'The Bushehr NPP: Why Did It Take So Long?', *CENESS*, 8 September 2011, http://ceness-russia.org/data/doc/11-09-08-The_Bushehr_NPP_ENG.pdf.

In the early 1990s, Russian businesses delivered diesel submarines, MIG-29 fighters, and a T-72 tank production licence to Iran as part of a series of deals dating back to the 1980s.⁷⁵ At that time, post-Soviet elites were still overwhelmingly pro-West, but the sale of these weapons to Iran was seen as unlikely to arouse serious US concerns.⁷⁶ By 2000, Iran occupied third place in terms of weapons purchases from Russia, surpassed only by India and China. After President Putin's repudiation of the Gore-Chernomydin Agreement, Russia and Iran signed a treaty in October 2001 in which Moscow pledged to deliver USD300-400 million- worth of arms to Tehran each year.⁷⁷ At that time, Tehran began to express interest in Russian surface-to-air missile defence systems of the S-300 variety. Between 2002 and 2007, the Russian military-industrial complex supplied Iran with substantial military hardware,⁷⁸ its deliveries amounting to 85% of the Islamic Republic's weapons imports.

Turning to cooperation in the civil use of nuclear energy, when the Kremlin authorized work on the Bushehr reactor in the 1990s, the project was expected to create an estimated 20,000 jobs in the Russian Federation.⁷⁹ Delays in its execution, however, continued throughout the late 1990s and 2000s, caused by a shifting mix of Russian apprehensions regarding Iranian policy, financial problems, as well as a desire not to antagonize the US. While Russian procrastination caused occasional friction with Tehran, the work on Bushehr remained profitable to Russia.⁸⁰ Russia's

⁷⁵ Shlapentokh, 'Putin's Moscow Approach to Iran'. For further details on Russian-Iranian weapons deals in the early 1990s, see V. Kozyulin, 'Voenno-Tekhnicheskoe Sotrudnichestvo Rossii s Problemnymi Stranami' ("Russia's Military-Technological Cooperation With Problematic Countries"), *PIR Center - Voprosy Bezopasnosti*, vol. 5, no. 19, 2001, <http://www.pircenter.org/articles/1457-voennotekhnicheskoe-sotrudnichestvo-rossii-s-problemnymi-stranami>.

⁷⁶ Shlapentokh, 'Putin's Moscow Approach to Iran'.

⁷⁷ Kozyulin, 'Voenno-Tekhnicheskoe Sotrudnichestvo'.

⁷⁸ 'Voenno-Tekhnicheskoe Sotrudnichestvo Irana i Rossii. Dos'e' ("Iranian-Russian Military-Technological Cooperation. A Dossier"), *Tass*, 2015, <http://tass.ru/info/1707163>.

⁷⁹ Shlapentokh, 'Putin's Moscow Approach to Iran'.

⁸⁰ Ibid. For further Russian analysis on why the Bushehr project was considered profitable, see 'Does Russia Need Bushehr-2?', Roundtable, *CENESS and the Nuclear Club Journal*, Moscow, 1 September 2011, http://ceness-russia.org/data/doc/Bushehr%20Round%20Table_ENG.pdf.

civil nuclear energy business represented the only major player that stood to seriously benefit from economic cooperation with Iran in the 2000s, besides the military-industrial complex.

Indeed, whilst a 10-year programme for the development of bilateral economic relations was signed in 2002,⁸¹ the objectives formulated in the initiative were never implemented. This led Vladimir Sazhin to argue that “the 2000s turned out to have ‘zero’ positive impact on trade and economic relations between Russia and Iran”, with the sole exception of Bushehr.⁸² Thus when accounting for the role of Russia’s commercial interests in its diplomacy regarding the Iran nuclear programme, it is important to recognize that the majority of Russian elites, by 2009, held the view that economic cooperation with Iran was not all that significant and that there: “was no market to lose.”⁸³

Indeed, commenting on Iran’s negative reaction to Russian support for Resolution 1929, Nina Mamedova of the Russian Academy of Sciences retorted that a cold snap in relations would pose no economic threat to Russia, since the share of Russian exports to Iran amounted to only 0.4% of total Russian exports.⁸⁴ That said, continued cooperation in arms sales and civil nuclear energy was significant to Moscow, which explains why Russian officials sought leverage in protecting those sectors in the 1929 negotiations.

⁸¹ ‘Long-Term Programme for the Development of Trade, Economic, Industrial, Scientific and Technical Cooperation between Russia and Iran for the Period up to 2012’, 2002 (in Russian), http://www.pravo.gov.ru/proxy/ips/?doc_itself=&nd=102077143&page=1&rdk=1&intelsearch=+%D3%E A%E0%E7+%CF%F0%E5%E7%E8%E4%E5%ED%F2%E0+%D0%D4+%EE%F2+12.08.2002+%E3%E %E4%E0+%B9+885++&link_id=2#I0.

⁸² ‘Russia-Iran Partnership: An Overview and Prospects for the Future’, *Russian international Affairs Council and The Institute for Iran-Eurasia Studies*, 2016, <http://russiancouncil.ru/common/upload/RIAC-IRAS-Russia-Iran-Report29-en.pdf>, p. 12.

⁸³ Russian sources interviewed.

⁸⁴ ‘Iran Predicts Russia Will Go the Way of the USSR’, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 9 June 2010, in CDRP, no. 22, vol. 62, 31 May 2010.

The geostrategic imperative: Iran's role in the Caucasus and Central Asia

Moscow was also acutely aware of Iran's importance as a reliable partner in Russia's neighbourhood. Following the collapse of the USSR, Iran influenced developments in the newly independent Central Asian republics and played an important role in pacifying the situation in Tajikistan in the mid 1990s.⁸⁵ As a large Muslim neighbour located south of Russia's 'soft underbelly', Iran could also foment separatist agitations in the restive North Caucasus region. However, the Iranian leadership showed restraint during the First Chechen War, reassuring Moscow as early as 1993 that it had no official contacts with separatist forces.⁸⁶ However, throughout the 2000s, Moscow recognized the necessity to accommodate Tehran over regional issues. In early 2010, for instance, and against the backdrop of growing tension between Tehran and the international community, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* noted with concern that Iran has embarked on a course of re-establishing closer ties with Azerbaijan.⁸⁷

Although Moscow was somewhat wary of Iran's disruptive potential in response to Moscow supporting international sanctions in 2010, Russian experts considered it: "an unlikely and unprofitable possibility for Iran to use religion to destabilize the situation and fuel separatist sentiments in the Caucasus."⁸⁸ Certainly, the Iranian Ambassador's pointed remark that it would be "foolish" for Russia to distance itself from Iran, since the latter was helping to prevent the spread of terrorism in the Caucasus, was interpreted as a veiled threat by some in Russia's expert community. *MEMO's* Aleksey Arbatov characterized the statement as: "blackmail, pure and simple."⁸⁹ But overall, the Russian government's concerns with the economic ramifications of its

⁸⁵ M. Atkin, 'Iran, Russia and Tajikistan's Civil War', in S. Cronin (ed.), *Iranian-Russian Encounters*.

⁸⁶ John W. Parker, *Persian Dreams: Moscow and Tehran Since the Fall of the Shah* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2009), Chapter 14.

⁸⁷ 'Baku Wary of Tehran's Initiative', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 28 January 2010, in CDRP, no. 4, vol. 62, 25 January 2010, p. 15.

⁸⁸ 'Iran Predicts Russia Will Go the Way of the USSR'.

⁸⁹ 'Tehran Tries to Blackmail Moscow', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 27 October 2010, in CDRP, no. 42, vol. 62, 18 October 2010, pp. 18-19.

support for Resolution 1929, especially for its nuclear energy and arms export businesses, outweighed fears about destabilizing Iranian activities in the regional neighbourhood.

Iran's growing regional clout after the 2003 US invasion of Iraq: a view from Russia

In addition to minding its economic and regional security relationship with Iran, Moscow had grown sensitive to Iran's growing clout in the Middle East. Noting that US policies after the 2003 invasion of Iraq, specifically its campaign of de-Baathification, had paved the way for growing Iranian influence not just in Baghdad, but the wider region, Lavrov warned in early 2010 that Iranian influence should be used "constructively" in regional diplomacy, while attempts to isolate Iran: "clearly suffer from a lack of foresight."⁹⁰ The international community, so Russia argued, needed to recognize the Islamic Republic's leverage over developments in Iraq, Afghanistan, the Palestinian Territories, and Lebanon, and engage it comprehensively on all these issues.⁹¹ Perceptions of Iran's clout in what Russia saw as an increasingly volatile region also explain why Moscow remained worried about the consequences of diplomatic failure in addressing Iran's nuclear programme, fearing that the use of military force against a strengthening Iran would be catastrophic.

Some observers argue that the Putin government wholeheartedly welcomed Iran's ascendancy in the Middle East, since it allowed Russia to enhance its own status in the region and to benefit from the American quagmire in Iraq. A string of events in the mid 2000s – exacerbating sectarian tension in Iraq, Hezbollah's performance in the 2006 Lebanon war, as well as Hamas' parliamentary election victories in the Palestinian Territories in January 2006 – are viewed as

⁹⁰ 'Stenogramma interv'yu S. V. Lavrova "Ekho Moskvyy"' ("Transcript of S. Lavrov's Interview with *Echo of Moscow*"), 19 February 2010, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/262254.

⁹¹ 'Interv'yu S. V. Lavrova "Rossiiskaya Gazeta"' ("S. Lavrov's Interview for *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*"), 28 December 2009, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/267746.

evidence of growing Iranian influence. This influence, so the argument goes, harmed US interests and was, therefore, at least welcomed, if not enabled, by Russia.⁹²

This narrative, however, overlooks that Moscow continued to foster relations with states hostile to Iran, especially the GCC members, keen to avoid being perceived as enabling a “Shia crescent”. The Russian government also dissociated itself from the militant anti-Israeli rhetoric characteristic of Iran’s President Ahmadinejad. At the end of the day, whether Russia saw Iran’s enhanced Middle East influence as positive or sought to constrain it by forming other relationships in the region – Moscow was sensitive to the emerging trend and understood that it necessitated great diplomatic adroitness in the nuclear programme dispute.

The ideological factor and mutual perceptions in Russia-Iran relations: a legacy of mistrust

While the Russian leadership was mindful of its economic and regional relationship with Iran, ideological considerations mattered too. Especially from the mid 2000s, the Russia-Iran tandem has been partially sustained by a shared commitment to thwart US hegemony and Western-style democratization, as well as by a shared hostility to revisionist ambitions of ethnic minorities.⁹³ However, while a joint fear of ‘colour revolutions’ was the main ideological framework for the Moscow-Tehran connection after 2003, as Therme argues, the notion of a shared threat has been insufficient to compensate for a negative memory of mutual grievance.⁹⁴

⁹² Nizameddin is a strong advocate of this narrative. Nizameddin, *Putin’s New Order*.

⁹³ A. Zamirirad, ‘Iran und Russland: Perspektiven der bilateralen Beziehungen aus Sicht der Islamischen Republik’, *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, 2017, https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/studien/2017S07_zmd.pdf.

⁹⁴ Therme, ‘Iran and Russia: A Tactical Entente’.

Indeed, the Russian-Iranian relationship has been historically characterized by mistrust, which is key to understanding why it always fell short of qualifying as a “strategic partnership”.⁹⁵ On the nuclear issue, rather than appreciating Russia’s efforts to limit UN sanctions, Iran has professed disappointment, given Moscow’s reluctance to exercise its veto on the Security Council. Iran’s elites have also seen Moscow as an unreliable partner that seeks to benefit from Iran’s international isolation.⁹⁶ This perception is rooted in a set of historical grievances vis-à-vis Russia, ranging from the division of Iran into spheres of influence by the Russian and British empires, to Tsarist intervention to quell Iran’s constitutional revolution in the early twentieth century, to the occupation of Iran by the USSR during World War Two, to Soviet support for Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war.⁹⁷

Russian officials, in turn, have been anxious that Iran’s alignment with Moscow is purely opportunistic and will give way to rapprochement with the West once the moment appears ripe to Tehran. Russian and Iranian approaches to the Middle East have also diverged, given their different relationships with Israel and the GCC, Russia’s opposition to a regional hegemon, as well as its more cautious approach to confronting the US in the region.⁹⁸

However, the Russian elites’ disposition towards Iran has reflected a nuanced picture. While Westernists have been most wary of their neighbour to the south, those standing to gain financially from cooperation with Iran have advocated for closer ties, as have the Eurasianists. That said, Eurasianism consistently failed to resonate beyond a narrow elite circle. While one

⁹⁵ See contributions by Russian and Iranian experts in ‘Russia-Iran Partnership: An Overview and Prospects for the Future’.

⁹⁶ Therme, ‘Iran and Russia: A Tactical Entente’.

⁹⁷ M. Katz, ‘Russia and Iran’, *Middle East Policy*, vol. 19, no. 3, Fall 2012.

⁹⁸ N. Kozhanov and M. Shoori, ‘Iranian and Russian Views on the Situation in the Middle East’, in ‘Russia-Iran Partnership: An Overview and Prospects for the Future’. However, while Russian and Iranian approaches to the Middle East sometimes clashed before 2011, the Arab Spring catalysed greater convergence between the two players, especially in the perceived necessity to confront Sunni extremism.

Russian observer has applauded the cultural ties between Moscow and Tehran, noting the “Persian poetry evenings, Iranian film festivals and other cultural events” often held in Moscow,⁹⁹ the majority of analysts have been more subdued in their assessment of bilateral cultural and people-to-people ties.¹⁰⁰ The weak resonance of Eurasianism notwithstanding, elite attitudes on the Iranian nuclear dispute remained nuanced. While not pro-Eurasianist, they did not unreservedly support the West’s position either, given a principled scepticism of sanctions and fears that punitive measures were intended to seek regime change in Iran.

To conclude, Russian officials have sought to maintain a cooperative relationship with Tehran where it is mutually beneficial economically and where both sides share an interest in regional stability. Alexander Maryasov, Director of the Foreign Ministry’s Second Asia Department, in 2009 called Iran a “good neighbour and important regional partner”, highlighting President Putin’s historic 2007 visit to Tehran and referencing a long list of issues for Russian-Iranian cooperation, including opportunities for Russia’s LUKoil, the Bushehr reactor, and counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan.¹⁰¹ At the same time, differing views on the legal status of the Caspian Sea,¹⁰² the modest level of economic cooperation, as well as differing approaches to the Middle East have constituted impediments to a robust Russian-Iranian alliance. Finally, the Russian elite, largely free of pro-Eurasianist sentiments, has continued to mistrust Iran’s foreign policy objectives.

⁹⁹ L. Ravandi-Fadai, ‘Russo-Iranian Relations and the Vienna Nuclear Agreement’, *Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies*, November 2015.

¹⁰⁰ Interviews with Russian experts.

¹⁰¹ ‘Interv’yu A. G. Mar’yasova iranskomu agentstvu “IRNA”’ (“A. Maryasov’s Interview for the Iranian Agency IRNA”), 9 February 2009, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/ir/-/asset_publisher/HUPBmpXjn4Ob/content/id/307066.

¹⁰² The Caspian Sea has been the subject of a lengthy dispute between Tehran and Moscow. Its five littoral states – also including Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan – have argued about the water’s legal status, exploitation of its substantive mineral resources, as well as rules for shipping, fishing, pipeline projects, and modalities of securing the waters. Zamirirad, ‘Iran und Russland’.

3.2) ‘Horse-trading’ within the parameters of Resolution 1929

Once the US had decided that its diplomatic effort vis-à-vis Iran, which had centred around the TRR proposal, was failing, it moved into “sanctions mode” in late 2009. Susan Rice, lead US negotiator on the P5+1, was instructed to get “the toughest possible sanctions” in the UN, in terms of both breadth (the range of sectors targeted) and depth (the extent to which sanctions would “bite”). In the event of a tradeoff between these objectives, breadth was to take precedence over depth, since covering more sectors would give the US a ‘hook’ for subsequent unilateral sanctions, should the Obama administration consider them necessary.¹⁰³ However, given the economic and security interests outlined in the previous section, Moscow continued to resist the scope of Resolution 1929. It is in the context of this overarching tension that US-Russian ‘give and take’ in negotiations played out.

Since the Russian government was opposed to resolving the Iranian nuclear dispute militarily, its position that any Security Council resolution should clearly state that it cannot be used as the basis for the use of force against Iran¹⁰⁴ was non-negotiable. The reference to Article 41 of the UN Charter therefore constituted America’s most obvious concession to Russia. Beyond that, the following passage discusses those areas of the 1929 negotiations, in which Russian diplomats resisted the Americans’ preferred language and provisions in order to retain leverage for Moscow or Tehran.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Interviews with US sources.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Sanctions Against Iran Should Not Be Basis For Use of Force – Lavrov’, *Sputnik News*, 28 March 2010, <https://sputniknews.com/russia/20100328158333983/>.

¹⁰⁵ While other players were involved in the P5+1 negotiations, focusing upon the Russia-US dimension of the talks is both necessary given the purpose of this study, and warranted since the two actors were key to achieving consensus on Resolution 1929. Russian consent was considered crucial to obtaining China’s support.

Sanctions targeting Iran's energy, financial, and military sectors

Moscow focused upon the economic dimension of sanctions, partly given its awareness of Congress' impending CISADA legislation, which was "the elephant in the room" and the reason why "Russia was not ready to give so much" on Resolution 1929.¹⁰⁶ Russian concerns might also have reflected the fact that the Iran talks followed a deep recession in Russia. Moscow insisted, for instance, that any provisions addressing Iran's energy or financial sector be adopted using what US officials characterized as "qualified language" and be related only to proliferation activities.¹⁰⁷

Regarding the energy sector, the US insisted on a reference in the preamble to 1929, acknowledging: "the potential connection between Iran's revenues derived from its energy sector and the funding of Iran's proliferation-sensitive nuclear activities." Beyond this line, which was "the best language the US could get with Russia",¹⁰⁸ American officials failed to obtain Russian and Chinese support for including energy-related sanctions. While Chinese interests in Iran's energy sector were judged to be more significant than Russia's, Moscow stood to lose from restrictions. In March 2010, for instance, LUKoil announced that it had to abandon its Iranian Anaran oil project, in which it held a 25% stake, given US sanctions.¹⁰⁹ The Kremlin was concerned not just about current losses for Russian companies, but also thwarted future opportunities in Iran's energy sector. Drawing up an initial balance sheet of 1929's impact on the Iranian economy in December 2010, Vladimir Sazhin noted the potential for more extensive

¹⁰⁶ Interview with a former State Department official.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with a US official.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ 'Russia's LUKoil Says Iran Project Dropped Over Sanctions', *Sputnik*, 24 March 2010, <https://sputniknews.com/russia/20100324158299099/>. One reason why LUKoil willingly complied was the prospect of further cooperation with US companies during the 'reset.'

cooperation in the oil and gas sector, joint construction of power plants, as well as extraction of coal reserves in Iran's eastern regions.¹¹⁰

Pursuing economic leverage in negotiations, Moscow also lobbied for the lifting of US sanctions on Russian companies that had previously been targeted for their links to Iran. In March 2010 the US Federal Register announced that it would lift restrictions against the Russian space organization *Glavkosmos*.¹¹¹ Throughout the months leading up to Resolution 1929, Russian officials continued to press the Obama administration to lift sanctions against other Russian firms, for example, *Rosoboronexport* and its subsidiaries.¹¹² When the Obama administration, less than a month before the UN vote, removed restrictions against four Russian entities, the US press characterized the decision as a last-ditch effort to secure Russian support for Resolution 1929.¹¹³ This criticism was echoed by US senators.¹¹⁴ Russia's lobbying on sanctions relief for its own companies was clearly perceived as a leverage play in the 1929 negotiations.

The Russian negotiators in the P5+1 achieved a further "carve-out" concerning Russia's work on the Bushehr complex. Resolution 1929 makes multiple references to heavy water-related activities,¹¹⁵ but is silent on existing cooperation in light-water reactor technology, including Bushehr. Whilst Russia had stalled completion of the project, Putin's visit to Tehran in October 2007 generated new momentum and Russian officials confirmed the reactor would be operating

¹¹⁰ V. Sazhin, 'Iran: December 2010 – Economic Situation', *Institut Blizhnevo Vostoka*, 10 February 2011, <http://www.iimes.ru/?p=12123>.

¹¹¹ 'Lifting of Non-proliferation Measures Against One Russian Entity, Public Notice 6915', Department of State, Federal Register, vol. 75, no. 46, 10 March 2010, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2010-03-10/pdf/2010-5135.pdf>. The US also lifted sanctions against a second Russian company, Baltic State Technical University.

¹¹² 'Moscow to Press U.S. to End Sanctions on Russian Firms', *Sputnik News*, 7 May 2010, <https://sputniknews.com/russia/20100507158921789/>.

¹¹³ 'Moscow Makes Gain in Iran Deal as US Lifts Sanctions Against Russia', *Washington Post*, 22 May 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/21/AR2010052102590.html>.

¹¹⁴ 'Meeting The Challenge – When Time Runs Out', *Bipartisan Policy Center*, June 2010, <http://bipartisanpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/default/files/BPC%20IranReport%20fnl%20062210.pdf>.

¹¹⁵ Points 6, 7, and 13 of Resolution 1929.

by late 2008.¹¹⁶ But further delays followed in 2009, which *Rosatom* assured were exclusively due to technical reasons. Western media interpreted them as a ploy to put Russian pressure on Iran at a time when the latter was perceived as intransigent towards the P5+1.¹¹⁷ The Russian government, however, dismissed the notion that completion of Bushehr had become a bargaining chip with Iran. Indeed, although Russia jumped on the bandwagon of the international sanctions effort against Iran, Moscow made sure its cooperation in civil nuclear energy was not affected. In March 2010 President Putin stated that Bushehr's first unit would be launched in the summer, an *Atomstroyexport* spokesperson specifying that July would mark the physical launch.¹¹⁸

Two calculations determined Russia's position on Bushehr. On the one hand, since Russia stood to gain financially from continued cooperation, pushing for the project to be exempt from Resolution 1929 was part and parcel of Moscow's effort to protect its economic leverage in Iran. The Russian government also likely anticipated Iranian displeasure with Russia's 'dual stick' of supporting Resolution 1929 and subsequently banning the S-300 sale, and might have calculated that one 'carrot' among many 'sticks' would mollify Iran. A second reason was likely the low level of anticipated American resistance. Even though Hillary Clinton had publicly criticized Russia's intention to start Bushehr in July 2010 as "premature",¹¹⁹ she had "been speaking off an old set of talking points" at the press conference, since: "the US had dropped objection to Bushehr already under the Bush administration, realizing it was a fait accompli and that Russia had agreed to steps (like spent fuel return) that would lessen proliferation concerns."¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Katz, 'Russian-Iranian Relations in the Obama Era'.

¹¹⁷ 'Russia Delays Iran's Bushehr Nuclear Power Station', *Reuters*, 16 November 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-43978820091116>.

¹¹⁸ 'Iran's Bushehr Nuclear Plant to Be Launched This Summer – Putin', *Sputnik News*, 18 March 2010, <https://sputniknews.com/russia/20100318158242235/>.

¹¹⁹ 'Russia, US Disagree Over Iran Bushehr Start-Up', *Al Arabiya*, 18 March 2010, <https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/03/18/103429.html>.

¹²⁰ Phone interview with John Beyrle, 11 July 2016.

Furthermore, when it came to new sanctions designations – whether entities or individuals – to be included in Resolution 1929, Russian economic interests also dictated Moscow’s negotiating position. As a US negotiator recalled, the US team would “give a long list of targets, but Russian negotiators would cross out any names to which it had links” – its message was: “we will not pay a price.”¹²¹ The designation process was also complicated by the fact that the US and Russia did not share common data on Iran, such that: “the process of giving just enough intelligence to convince Russia that someone was worth designating was tedious.”¹²²

Finally, the restriction on weapons sales to Iran was specifically negotiated by Russian officials to exclude the S-300 missile defence system. Point 8 of the adopted text includes a ban on the sale of major conventional weapons as defined by the UN Register of Conventional Arms (UNRCA), but also calls on states to show restraint in the supply to Iran of arms not covered by the embargo.¹²³ When it came to the Security Council, as a legal matter, Russian officials were: “very resistant to the notion of any restrictions on arms, and right until the very end opposed any *formal* disruption of the S-300 sale. They agreed on the side to rip it up, but they wanted to be clear that they had no obligation under the resolution to do so.”¹²⁴

In sum, the Russian government pursued leverage in cooperation by insisting on qualified language and carve-outs in Resolution 1929, specifically related to aspects that concerned its commercial interests in Iran. This Russian strategy had been anticipated by US negotiators, who went into the talks pushing for tough economic sanctions on Iran, but had identified fall-back positions, given their prior negotiating experience with Russia. As a result, while Russia was able to protect its key interests, the US also ended up largely content.

¹²¹ Interview with a US source.

¹²² Interview with Nephew.

¹²³ Point 8. of Resolution 1929.

¹²⁴ Interview with Burns. Emphasis added.

I have noted in Chapter 2 on the Iraq War that the Putin government was vocal about its economic interests with Baghdad and that Russia's candour was appreciated by the Bush administration. Similarly, when it came to Iran, Moscow did not hide the commercial calculations in the 1929 talks: "Of course, Russia had important economic interests in Iran, and that was why we did not want economic pressure against it that was not immediately related to proliferation activities."¹²⁵

As a matter of public rhetoric, however, Russia's push-back against economic sanctions was again couched in a humanitarian discourse. Sergey Ryabkov warned that: "we cannot talk about sanctions that may be interpreted as punishment of an entire country and its people."¹²⁶ In Lavrov's words, Russia could not support an effort in which: "observance of the non-proliferation regime [would] be used as a pretext to push for any other aims, including the strangulation of Iran, adoption of measures that will actually worsen the humanitarian situation."¹²⁷ As in the Iraq case study, the Russian government's instrumentalization of a humanitarian discourse was partially intended to deflect attention from its commercial interests. It might also have been driven by a concern with Iran's domestic and regime stability, which has been an overarching driver of Russian policy.

Russia's negotiating strategy: 'watering down', not 'stalling'

While seeking to protect economic leverage in Resolution 1929, Russian diplomats did not push for significant delays in the P5+1 negotiations. When Iran, Turkey, and Brazil announced a last-ditch offer in mid May 2010, according to which Tehran would ship LEU to Turkey for storage and receive enriched uranium for its TRR in return, Moscow's reception was lukewarm. President Medvedev wished his Brazilian counterpart Lula Da Silva success in his impending talks with the

¹²⁵ Interview with a diplomat in the Russian Foreign Ministry familiar with the matter.

¹²⁶ 'Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov Interview with Interfax News Agency.'

¹²⁷ 'Sergey Lavrov Interview', 25 February 2010.

Iranian leadership, saying they might “constitute the last chance” for diplomacy before the UN adopted sanctions.¹²⁸ However, his reaction three days later to news of the Brazil-brokered deal was cautious. The Russian President commented that the work done by his Turkish and Brazilian colleagues should be “welcomed”, that Russia intended to study the agreement’s details, and that “a short pause” in international negotiations to determine whether the tripartite agreement might be sufficient, “won’t be superfluous.”¹²⁹

Such public rhetoric on the Turkish-Brazilian offer notwithstanding, Moscow did not push to stall the UN process.¹³⁰ While the US rejected the May proposal for falling short in a number of areas, according to an American diplomat: “Russia did not have as much of a viscerally negative reaction to the substance as we did, but it did not take us a lot of convincing in the P5+1 that Iran was playing games.”¹³¹ This sentiment was echoed in Moscow’s expert community, with IMEMO’s Aleksey Arbatov calling the initiative a: “diplomatic manoeuvre, aimed at dividing the UN Security Council.”¹³² According to another Russian official, Moscow was “offended that Iran accepted from Turkey and Brazil an option that it cast aside when it emanated from Russia”, which again highlights the importance of Russian status sentiments as a driver of its policy.¹³³

¹²⁸ ‘Sovmestnaya press-konferentsiya s Luloi da Silvoi’ (“Joint Press Conference with Lula Da Silva”), 14 May 2010, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/7751>.

¹²⁹ ‘Sovmestnaya press-konferentsiya po itogam rossiisko-ukrainskikh peregovorov’ (“Joint Press Conference on the Results of the Russian-Ukrainian Negotiations”), 17 May 2010, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/7781>.

¹³⁰ Phone interview with Gary Samore, 22 June 2016.

¹³¹ Interview with Nephew.

¹³² ‘Iran’s Nuclear Fuel Swap Aimed at Dividing UN’, *Sputnik*, 17 May 2010, <https://sputniknews.com/world/20100517159050413/>.

¹³³ ‘Russia: Iran’s Deal With Brazil, Turkey Seen as Challenging Global Hierarchy’, *Gazeta.Ru*, 20 May 2010. Quoted in C. Therme, ‘Le Triangle Géopolitique Entre la Turquie, l’Iran et la Russie: Entre Ruptures et Continuités’, in F. Nahavandi (ed.), *Turquie. Le Déploiement Stratégique* (Bruylant: Bruxelles, 2012), pp. 247-268.

3.3) The S-300 delivery dispute

The present discussion on the pursuit of Russian leverage in cooperation needs to be complemented by a more in-depth look at the S-300 file. While Russia's prospective delivery of the system to Iran featured in the negotiations towards Resolution 1929 and was resolved to Moscow's satisfaction, it also figured more broadly as a bargaining chip in Russian-US diplomacy during 2009 and 2010. In remaining vague about its intentions to proceed with delivering the S-300, Russia retained leverage with the US, even as its position was moving towards support for the 'pressure track' on Iran. Whether ambiguity on the S-300 delivery was deliberately conceived by Moscow as a bargaining chip or not, it was perceived as such by many officials in Washington. When the Russian government announced a ban on the sale in September 2010, US officials widely welcomed what they viewed as a 'nice gift', attributing it partially to the atmosphere of the 'reset'. However, some discerned calculated Russian leverage play to deprive those in the West who argued for the use of force against Iran of their rhetorical ammunition by keeping Iran militarily vulnerable.

Russia's stalling: to deliver, or not to deliver?

Tehran and Moscow had signed an USD800 million contract for the delivery of the S-300 in December 2007. Throughout the period investigated in this chapter, Russia stalled in fulfilling the contract and sent mixed signals regarding its future intentions. After *RIA Novosti* reported in mid December 2008 that S-300s had been delivered to Iran, Russia's Federal Service for Military-Technological Cooperation (FSMTC) denied the news.¹³⁴ In February 2009 a source in the Russian defence sector told *Kommersant* that: "the contract on the S-300s can be implemented at any time [...] but in order to take action a political decision has to be made, and that still hasn't

¹³⁴ 'Moscow Is Being Pressured To Cancel Contract With Iran', *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 24 December 2008, in CDRP, no. 51, vol. 60, 13 January 2009, pp. 18-19.

happened.”¹³⁵ Later in the year, a Russian official noted that, “the contract for delivering S-300 systems to Iran was indefinitely put on ice essentially the instant it was signed,” and “has ceased to be a simple commercial transaction”,¹³⁶ hinting at the mounting international pressure on Iran.

Russian perceptions of US and Israeli concerns

Moscow was very aware of Washington’s and Tel-Aviv’s apprehensions regarding the prospective S-300 sale. The issue featured in US-Russian conversations throughout 2009 and, as Ambassador McFaul recalled: “the US was obsessed with stopping that delivery, and at every meeting the President, the Vice President, or General Jones had in Moscow, we expressed our worries that if the transfer started, it would increase the probability of an Israeli preemptive attack and there would be no chance of negotiations with Iran.”¹³⁷ Indeed, Tel Aviv was vocal in warning the Kremlin not to provide Tehran with the system. Visiting Moscow in June 2009, Avigdor Lieberman reminded Moscow that Israel could at any time resume its own weapons deliveries to Georgia, a country with which Russia had fought a short war during August 2008.¹³⁸ Following the visit, *Haaretz* newspaper reported that “Israel had intensified its efforts to prevent deliveries of Russia’s S-300 air defence systems to Iran”, citing a phone conversation between Netanyahu and Putin, as well as a Paris meeting between Ehud Barak and Russia’s Chief of General Staff Makarov.¹³⁹ Israeli pressure on Russia continued through the autumn of 2009 and into 2010.

¹³⁵ ‘Russia Doesn’t Want to Supply Surface-to-Air Missile Systems Because of Barack Obama’, *Kommersant*, 17 February 2009, in CDRP, no. 7, vol. 61, 16 February 2009, p. 19.

¹³⁶ ‘Tehran Could End Up Without S-300s’, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 22 October 2009, in CDRP, no. 42, vol. 61, 19 October 2009, pp. 15-16.

¹³⁷ Interview with McFaul.

¹³⁸ ‘Russia, Israel Need Common Approach On Arms Exports – Lieberman’, *Sputnik*, 1 June 2009, <https://sputniknews.com/world/20090601155140532/>.

¹³⁹ ‘Netanyahu To Putin: Stop Selling Missiles To Iran’, *Haaretz*, 29 June 2009, <http://www.haaretz.com/netanyahu-to-putin-stop-selling-missiles-to-iran-1.279003>.

September 2010: Ban on the S-300 delivery by presidential decree and US interpretations

Although the Russian government had staunchly negotiated for the S-300 not to be covered by Resolution 1929, ambiguous statements as to the implications of the legislation emanated from Moscow after it was passed. While the Resolution did not prohibit the sale of missile defence systems, it contained an appeal for all countries to exercise caution and restraint in supplying Iran with any other arms or related material. Following its adoption, the FSMTC initially stated that: “naturally, the contract to supply Tehran with S-300 will be frozen.”¹⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the Foreign Ministry noted that missile defence systems of the S-300 type were “*not* covered by the UN Register of Conventional Arms that was cited in the Resolution on Iran”, a position that was then echoed by the FSMTC’s director.¹⁴¹ Providing clarity amid the cacophony of opinions, Lavrov said that a presidential decree would be prepared in order to resolve the issue. On 22 September, 2010, the Kremlin announced that President Medvedev had banned the delivery of S-300 missile systems, armoured vehicles, warplanes, helicopters, and ships to Iran. Russian sources confirmed that the President’s decision was “unpopular” among Russian elites,¹⁴² whilst likely condoned by then-Prime Minister Putin who agreed to what was perceived as a friendly gesture towards the West.

President Medvedev’s decision was received with surprise and elation by the Obama administration. Gary Samore recalls that he thought it was “a nice gift from Moscow”,¹⁴³ while Robert Einhorn remembers he was “baffled” reading the Kremlin’s explanation for the ban, which referred to a UN Resolution (1929) that had been specifically negotiated not to pertain to

¹⁴⁰ ‘Arms Freeze’, *Vremya Novostei*, 11 June 2010, in CDRP, no. 22, vol. 62, 31 May 2010, pp. 12-14. Emphasis added.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Alexey Arbatov noted the status risks (and possible loss of markets) to be considered in the event of non-delivery of weapon systems. While weapon sales only made up 2-3 % of all Russian exports at the time, they were still important reputationally. Interview with Alexey Arbatov, Moscow, 29 March 2016.

¹⁴³ Interview with Samore.

the S-300.¹⁴⁴ However, select US sources offered an alternative interpretation of Russian actions. In banning the S-300 delivery, Celeste Wallander argues, Russia kept Iran more vulnerable and could thus argue for military restraint by Iran's opponents: "They did not want Iran to be struck by military action in order to keep the focus on the political track." This calculation, Wallander concedes, was not inconsistent with America's own preferences.¹⁴⁵

Rather than discarding the S-300 ban as evidence for the Kremlin voluntarily foregoing regional leverage within cooperation, this more nuanced reading of President Medvedev's decision would suggest that, even if it was not primarily conceived of as regional leverage-building, but as a gesture to the US administration during the 'reset', it still entailed leverage-building implications. Signing the ban, Russia deterred Iran's enemies from considering the military option and kept the possibility of future delivery of the S-300 on the table.¹⁴⁶

Conclusion

While Moscow subscribed to the need to enhance economic pressure on Iran, believing that Tehran's engagement with the international community on the nuclear issue had to change, Russia sought to protect its existing economic ties and political relations with the Islamic Republic. To this end, Russian officials spoke: "loudly about what they were still doing with Iran and made very little noise about what they were not going to do as a result of sanctions."¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, Moscow temporarily took its prospective delivery of the S-300 system to Iran off the table in order to repel the spectre of regional escalation. Yet these Russian manoeuvres played out within a cooperative approach to the multilateral sanctions effort against Tehran. Moscow's concerns with nuclear non-proliferation and thwarting regional escalation outweighed

¹⁴⁴ Interview with Einhorn.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Wallander. Echoed by other US sources.

¹⁴⁶ The ban of the S-300 delivery could be undone by another presidential decree. Indeed, President Putin lifted the ban on 13 April, 2015.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with a former State Department official.

considerations about protecting Russian economic leverage. As will be discussed in the following section, Russian policy was further driven by higher interests in its 'reset' with the US, especially accommodation over arms control, missile defence, and WTO accession.

4) Russian expectations of reciprocity as a driver of cooperation

4.1) Hitting the 'reset' button – hope for a new chapter in Russian-US relations

While the Russian government, in cooperating with the US over the Iranian nuclear issue was, first and foremost, driven by regional concerns, there is evidence that Russian officials pursued limited linkage diplomacy with the US. In supporting US policy vis-à-vis an issue that was of vital interest to the Obama administration, Russia hoped at a minimum that its cooperation would sustain the atmospheric change in bilateral relations that had been generated by the 'reset'. At most, Moscow expected there would be progress with the US on arms control, European missile defence, Russia's WTO accession and the 1-2-3 Nuclear Cooperation Agreement (NCA). Rather than asking the US explicitly for quid pro quos on these issues, the evidence suggests that Moscow mainly hoped accommodation would materialize through US diffuse reciprocity. As in the case study on Iraq, the sum total of evidence studied for the present chapter confirms the explanatory value of Proposition 2 in complementing Proposition 1.

The Obama administration's 'dual track' approach towards Iran was embedded in a broader foreign policy strategy that sought to open a new chapter in relations with Russia. Speaking in February 2009 at the Munich Security Conference, Vice President Biden said Russia and the US should 'reset' their relationship.¹⁴⁸ A month later, Lavrov and his counterpart Hillary Clinton pressed a symbolic reset button at their meeting in Geneva. Optimism regarding the future

¹⁴⁸ J. Biden, 'Remarks at the 45th Munich Conference on Security Policy', 7 February 2009, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=123108>.

trajectory of relations with Russia emanated from public statements by the Obama administration early on.¹⁴⁹

America's core objectives in 'resetting' relations with Russia were to agree on a follow-up agreement to the START Treaty, to achieve Russian support for the northern distribution network (NDN), which allowed the US to transit troops and supplies through Russia to Afghanistan, to obtain Russian support for a nuclear security conference, as well as for international sanctions against Iran. Optimism regarding the achievability of these objectives prevailed after Obama's first Moscow visit in the summer of 2009, given the joint understandings adopted with the Russian government.¹⁵⁰ For the purpose of this chapter, it is crucial to note that achieving progress on the nuclear non-proliferation agenda, including on Iran, featured especially high on President Obama's list of priorities with Russia.

Engaging Russia: win-win outcomes and a multidimensional relationship

The American strategy in pursuing these objectives entailed two core elements, that is, identifying win-win outcomes and building a multi-dimensional relationship.¹⁵¹ According to Ambassador McFaul, the win-win philosophy was sustained by the assumption that: "on most strategic issues that the United States is pursuing, we don't see a disagreement with the Russians."¹⁵² McFaul also emphasized the desired multidimensionality of the new relationship, including building people-to-people ties, noting that: "this is not 1974 [...] where we [just] do an arms control agreement with the Soviets."¹⁵³ At the same time, the US was careful to point out

¹⁴⁹ 'Press Briefing by Robert Gibbs', 6 February 2009, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=85744>.

¹⁵⁰ B. Obama, 'News Conference With President Dmitry A. Medvedev of Russia in Moscow', 6 July 2009.

¹⁵¹ Interview with McFaul.

¹⁵² 'Press Briefing by Gary Samore, Alex Wolff and Mike McFaul', 23 September 2009, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=86675>.

¹⁵³ 'Press Briefing on the President's Trip to Russia, Italy, and Africa', 1 July 2009, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=86367>.

that its approach would not imply a recognition of Russian special interests in the post-Soviet space. Commenting on Vice-President Biden's trip to Georgia and Ukraine in the summer of 2009, Anthony Blinken re-affirmed that: "our efforts to reset relations with Russia will not come at the expense of any other country."¹⁵⁴

By 2010, US officials felt that the 'reset' was yielding tangible results. Speaking to the press after the signing of the New START Treaty, Ambassador McFaul reminded the audience "of where this [US-Russia] relationship was just fifteen or eighteen months ago [...] a low point", going on to argue that the countries now enjoyed a "multidimensional relationship."¹⁵⁵ The density of high-level contacts was also significant, with presidents Obama and Medvedev meeting seven times between early 2009 and the summer of 2010 alone.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, personal relations between senior Russian and US officials contributed to the success of the 'reset'. Applauding its results in June 2010, Ben Rhodes suggested: "that the President believes that that's in large part due to the positive relationship that he's forged with President Medvedev."¹⁵⁷ The Russian President, in turn, was candid in praising his American counterpart, characterizing Obama as a "strong politician" who: "knows how to listen and respond to arguments."¹⁵⁸ Other US and Russian officials interviewed argued that personal connections between senior counterparts contributed to successful cooperation on Iran and New START.

¹⁵⁴ 'Press Briefing by Tony Blinken', 17 July 2009,

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=86436>.

¹⁵⁵ 'Press Briefing by Robert Gibbs, Ben Rhodes, and Michael McFaul', 8 April 2010.

¹⁵⁶ 'Conference Call Briefing with Administration Officials', 22 June 2010,

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=88111>.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ 'Itogi goda s Prezidentom Rossii' ("Annual Review With the Russian President"), 24 December 2009', <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/6450>.

Russia's reception of the 'reset' and its national interests in 2009-2010

President Medvedev was viewed as an “enthusiastic partner” in the ‘reset.’¹⁵⁹ He hoped that qualitatively different relations with the US would help Russia achieve its key domestic and foreign policy objectives. In his September 2009 conversation with Fareed Zakaria, Medvedev commented extensively on the ‘reset’, noting that “we are enjoying truly positive relations with the new administration” and that: “we speak the same language [which] was not the case with the previous administration during its last years.”¹⁶⁰

There were occasional Russian frustrations with the US, for instance, with Vice-President Biden’s remarks in July 2009 to the effect that Russia's economy was “withering,” and that this trend would force the country to make accommodations to the West.¹⁶¹ Nevertheless, the overarching Russian perception was that of improving relations with Washington. Discussing whether the Cold War “had really ended” at the 6th Valdai Annual Summit in Yakutsk in September 2009, Sergey Karaganov argued that, whilst the ‘reset’, in the form originally conceived of, had proven an “insufficiently effective instrument”, since other issues had pushed a Russian-US rapprochement into the background, experts still unanimously agreed that the relationship was on an upward trajectory.¹⁶²

What were the domestic and international components of Russia’s national interest during this period? Following the August 2008 war with Georgia and starting with the Medvedev presidency, Russia turned from an assertive foreign policy vis-à-vis the West back to a more nuanced approach, which was dictated by the need to modernize the economy. Russia had been badly hit

¹⁵⁹ Interview with McFaul.

¹⁶⁰ D. Medvedev, ‘Interview with CNN’.

¹⁶¹ ‘Biden Says Weakened Russia Will Bend To US’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 25 July 2009, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB124848246032580581>.

¹⁶² ‘Vzglyad s Vostoka: Zavershilas’ ‘yakutskaya’ chast’ zasedaniya Valdaiskogo kluba’ (“A Perspective From The East: The Yakutsk Part of the Valdai Club Session Has Ended”), *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 11 September 2009, <https://rg.ru/2009/09/11/karaganov.html>.

by recession in 2008, which ended an era of unprecedented average growth of 7 per cent annually between 1999 and 2007.¹⁶³ In 2009 Russia's GDP fell by 9 per cent and the government spent considerable reserves to bail out domestic businesses. Discussing the implications of economic crisis at the 2009 Valdai conference, Putin explained that the government needed to ensure the availability of long-term loans to Russian businesses, strengthen the financial system, and diversify the economy.¹⁶⁴

President Medvedev laid out his economic modernization vision in a number of speeches and articles, most notably his September 2009 piece "Go Russia", in which he asked: "if Russia cannot relieve itself from these burdens [ie., [a] "primitive economy based on raw materials and endemic corruption", [amongst other things]], can it really find its own path for the future?"¹⁶⁵ Medvedev stressed the importance of attracting investment in the information technology sector and intensifying efforts towards Russia's WTO accession, for which US support was considered vital. In his July 2010 meeting with Russian ambassadors, he also called for "modernization alliances" with the US and other Western countries, again showing he believed the 'reset' could further Russia's domestic objectives.¹⁶⁶

Yet improving the economy was only one component of Russia's national interest, complemented by the objective to defend its status and security interests abroad. During 2009 and 2010, the Kremlin hoped for progress with the US on arms control, welcoming early indications that the Obama administration would reconsider the cost and effectiveness of its European missile defence plans. Furthermore, the Russian government applauded the resumption of high-level

¹⁶³ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, p. 209.

¹⁶⁴ 'Vladimir Putin at the Sixth Valdai Discussion Club', 11 September 2009, <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/eng/events/news/4990/>.

¹⁶⁵ D. Medvedev, 'Go Russia!', 10 September 2009, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/5413>.

¹⁶⁶ 'Kremlin Seeks Investment Alliances With US, EU', *Reuters*, 12 July 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-medvedev-alliance-idUSTRE66B27V20100712>.

formal ties in the NATO-Russia Council, which had been suspended after the August 2008 Russia-Georgia war, and sought renewed engagement on a European Security Treaty.¹⁶⁷ Since the Kremlin remained concerned about the domestic reverberations of destabilization in the Middle East, it also sought greater political influence in the region and pursued ties with other non-Western powers, especially India and China.

The Russian elites' lineup regarding both the legitimacy of sanctions and the desired nature of relations with Iran was discussed earlier in this chapter. It is also important to understand these elites' reception of the 'reset' and of Medvedev's modernization strategy. Westernists and the business class were largely supportive of the President's agenda, while some Statists criticized it as too pro-Western and threatening Russian sovereignty.¹⁶⁸ In particular, representatives of the defence and security establishment argued that Russia held responsibility for strategic balance at the global level and advocated for a more muscular foreign policy. These 'hawks' were also influential opponents of a new arms control treaty with the US.¹⁶⁹ Incidentally, those elites arguing for Medvedev's modernization effort to prioritize the energy and military sectors, as opposed to pursuing diversification of the economy, were also most critical of Russia's support for Resolution 1929, since they stood to lose most from ruptured ties with Iran.¹⁷⁰ The President's approach, however, was supported by Prime Minister Putin, who held that: "our main objective in the development strategy of the country is to diversify the economy and to enhance labour productivity and investment in so-called 'human capital'."¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ D. Medvedev, 'Speech at Helsinki University', 20 April 2009, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/3805>.

¹⁶⁸ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*.

¹⁶⁹ 'Three Flocks of Hawks', *Vremya Novostei*, 24 April 2009, p. 5, in CDRP, no. 16, vol. 61, 20 April 2009, pp. 4-6.

¹⁷⁰ Interviews with Russian experts.

¹⁷¹ 'Vladimir Putin at the Sixth Valdai Discussion Club'.

Pursuing its domestic and international objectives in 2009 and 2010, Russia did not return to the post-9/11 attempt to pursue pragmatic cooperation with the West, discussed in Chapter 2 on Iraq. As seen from Moscow, compared to 2003, Russia had grown stronger economically and militarily, while the world had become less centred on the West. The global financial crisis had severely hurt Western economies, while China and India continued to grow, and the 2008 war with Georgia had shown that the unilateral use of force was no longer a prerogative of the US.¹⁷² Against this backdrop, Medvedev's modernization vision did not undermine a consensus among the foreign policy elite that the government should defend Russian status and national interests abroad, engage the West, but also pragmatically exploit opportunities and build flexible coalitions elsewhere.

Why look for evidence of linkage diplomacy? Russian cooperation as costly and relevant

Against this backdrop of 'reset', as well as Russia's domestic and international objectives in 2009 and 2010, did Moscow pursue linkage diplomacy over its stance on the Iranian nuclear issue? I argue in the introduction that we are more likely to see US amenability to Russian quid pro quo seeking in instances in which Russian support for US policy is considered especially relevant, or it is understood that Moscow incurred significant economic or political costs by aligning with Washington. In the two preceding chapters, I show that Russian cooperation with the US following the 2003 Iraq invasion and the 2005 Hariri assassination did not register as meaningful or costly with US officials. This, as was argued, partially explained the sparse evidence of linkage in these case studies. Cooperation on Resolution 1929 was seen in a different light.

The Obama administration assessed Russian support for Resolution 1929 to be highly significant. Since the Russian government entertained diplomatic relations with Iran, making Moscow a chief architect of the TRR proposal had been considered vital for increasing the chances of Tehran

¹⁷² Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*.

accepting it. The Obama administration also recognized Russia's importance as "essential to moving the Chinese" on the UN Security Council towards support for sanctions.¹⁷³ Select US officials perceived China to be the most difficult negotiators on Resolution 1929, given Beijing's significant economic interests in Iran.

There was also a perception among US officials that "the Russians went pretty far" and "gave a lot"¹⁷⁴ on the specific sanctions supported in 1929, which: "vindicated the argument for why we did the reset, was a manifestation of the pay-off."¹⁷⁵ Mindful to signal that Russia's cooperation was valued, the US government added a waiver for closely cooperating countries in the provisions of the CISADA bill, as it got closer to being finalized.¹⁷⁶ There was a US recognition that supporting 1929 had been economically and diplomatically costly to Russia.

Aware of the importance the Obama administration attributed to constraining Iran's nuclear ambitions, the Russian press abounded with speculations on the concessions and trades Moscow might expect in return for cooperation.¹⁷⁷ The subsequent discussion will, therefore, probe evidence of Russian expectations of direct linkage and diffuse reciprocity in cooperation. I argue that Proposition 2, according to which Russia's cooperation with the United States in the Middle East is driven by expectations of linkage to other issues in the Russian-US bilateral agenda, indeed has greater explanatory value in this case study than in all other empirical chapters.

¹⁷³ Interview with Burns.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Ross.

¹⁷⁶ 'Waiver With Respect To Persons In Countries That Cooperate In Multilateral Efforts With Respect To Iran', in 'Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act of 2010'.

¹⁷⁷ 'Nuclear Bargaining', 14 April 2010, p. 7, in CDRP, no. 15, vol. 62, 12 April 2010, pp. 10-20; 'Quid Pro Quo?', *Sputnik*, 17 September 2009, <https://sputniknews.com/analysis/20090917156165185/>.

4.2) Looking for evidence of direct linkage diplomacy: European missile defence

From scrapping Bush's missile defence plan to the Phased Adaptive Approach in Europe

The Obama administration assumed office in January 2009, hinting that it was no longer rushing forward with earlier US plans to deploy strategic missile defence in Poland and the Czech Republic, instead reviewing its cost and effectiveness.¹⁷⁸ Whilst Vice- President Biden noted that the US would continue to counter Iran by developing missile defences, he said it would do so in consultation with NATO allies and Russia.¹⁷⁹ Rumours about prospective linkage between US policy on missile defence, on the one hand, and the Russian government's stance on the Iran nuclear issue on the other, first emerged in March when the US press wrote about a letter Barack Obama had sent to his Russian counterpart.¹⁸⁰ In the letter the President reportedly offered to reconsider American missile defence plans in return for Moscow working with Washington to contain Iran's nuclear ambitions. President Medvedev denied there was a deal, explaining that his correspondence with Obama had contained suggestions and assessments rather than specific proposals and mutually binding initiatives.¹⁸¹

Nevertheless, the Americans' consistent argumentation that any missile defence for Europe was aimed not at Russia but at an Iranian missile threat, generated a Russian expectation that jointly removing that perceived threat would make US missile defence obsolete.¹⁸² The Kremlin's own

¹⁷⁸ The Bush administration's original missile defence plan, adopted in 2007, called for a "third site" in Europe and claimed to offer "improved protection against ICBM threats emanating from the Middle East while also providing some protection of Europe against medium and intermediate-range ballistic missiles". Department of Defense, 'Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report', February 2010, http://archive.defense.gov/bmdr/docs/BMDR%20as%20of%2026JAN10%200630_for%20web.pdf.

¹⁷⁹ J. Biden, 'Remarks at the 45th Munich Conference on Security Policy'.

¹⁸⁰ 'Obama Offered Deal To Russia In Secret Letter', *The New York Times*, 2 March 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/03/washington/03prexy.html>.

¹⁸¹ 'Medvedev and Obama Admit to Correspondence but Not to a Deal on Iran', *Vremya Novostei*, 4 March 2009, p. 5, in CDRP, no. 8, vol. 61, 23 February 2009, p. 22. The notion that Obama had offered a quid pro quo was denied by the White House too: 'Press Briefing by Robert Gibbs', 3 March 2009, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=85841>.

¹⁸² President Obama himself said in his Prague speech on 5 April, 2009 that: "If the Iranian threat is eliminated, we will have a stronger basis for security, and the driving force for missile defense construction

position on US missile defence for Europe was that it “would damage the current system of checks and balances” and: “complicate the prospects for nuclear disarmament.”¹⁸³ Moscow was also adamant that future readiness to reduce its strategic *offensive* arsenal was inextricably linked to the US strategic *defensive* posture. It threatened to deploy tactical missiles in Kaliningrad, should it prove impossible to reach accommodation over US missile defence.¹⁸⁴

On 17 September, 2009, a week before the revelation of Iran’s Fordow site, the Obama administration announced that it had decided to abandon its original “third site” plan for Europe, instead looking to develop a more economical and high-tech system.¹⁸⁵ Russian officials welcomed the announcement, Medvedev calling it a “positive signal”, while reiterating there will not be “primitive compromises or trade-offs” in return.¹⁸⁶ Konstantin Kosachev, head of the Duma's Foreign Relations Committee, said the Obama administration had shown a better understanding of Russia’s concerns than its predecessor, while another official applauded Russia’s own uncompromising position on missile defence as having driven Obama’s decision.¹⁸⁷

Later in 2009, however, when the US proceeded with the development of an alternative scheme, Moscow repeatedly asked for clarifications. What became known as the Phased Adaptive Approach for Europe (PAA) envisioned enhancing US capabilities in four phases, deploying new SM-3 interceptors to Poland by 2018 and entailing consistent upgrades to missile defence

in Europe will be removed”. ‘Remarks By President Barack Obama In Prague As Delivered’, 5 April 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-prague-delivered>.

¹⁸³ D. Medvedev, ‘Speech at Helsinki University’.

¹⁸⁴ The Russian government reacted to early US statements on the missile defence review by freezing a plan announced earlier to deploy Iskander missiles to Kalinigrad, but later raised the prospects of such a deployment again. ‘Medvedev: Russia May Still Reply to U.S. Shield With Baltic Missiles’, *Sputnik*, 10 July 2009, <https://sputniknews.com/russia/20090710155495000/>.

¹⁸⁵ ‘White House Scraps Bush’s Approach To Missile Shield’, *The New York Times*, 17 September 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/18/world/europe/18shield.html>.

¹⁸⁶ ‘Russia Will Simply Pocket This Concession’, *Kommersant*, 21 September 2009, p. 8, in CDRP, no. 37, vol. 61, 14 September 2009, pp. 7-9.

¹⁸⁷ ‘Euphoria Over Obama’s Decision To Shelve Missile Shield’, *Der Spiegel*, 17 September 2009, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/sense-of-triumph-in-moscow-euphoria-over-obama-s-decision-to-shelve-missile-shield-a-649732.html>.

command and control systems.¹⁸⁸ When in February 2010 the US announced its intention to site interceptor missiles in Romania, Russian officials reacted negatively, Lavrov demanding an “exhaustive explanation” from Washington and Deputy Prime Minister Ivanov warning of disruptions to the New START talks.¹⁸⁹ Meanwhile, the Pentagon maintained that the PAA posed no threat to Russia, but even opened up the prospect: “for a Russian contribution, if political circumstances make that possible.”¹⁹⁰

Since the American agenda on European missile defence was in flux in 2009 and 2010, any investigation of linkage diplomacy has to be mindful of an important distinction – that between a Russian linkage in response to America’s September 2009 abandonment of Bush-era missile defence (ie. the Russian leaderships becoming more cooperative on Iran in response to what was a perceived US concession), versus Moscow later using its leverage in the P5+1 negotiations to get the US to abandon or modify the PAA. While these two forms of linkage play are not mutually exclusive, it is important to analytically distinguish between them.

Parsing the evidence: linkage diplomacy after Obama’s September announcement

Both Russian and US officials publicly rejected any linkage surrounding Obama’s 17 September announcement to scrap the Bush administration’s missile defence plans. Russia argued that Obama’s decision corrected earlier flawed US policy and hence should not be construed as a “concession” to Russia, for which Moscow needed to return a favour.¹⁹¹ US officials were equally adamant that their policy review was pragmatically driven by updated assessments of the Iranian missile threat and the availability of better technology to counter it, rather than by Russia’s

¹⁸⁸ For details on the Phased Adaptive Approach (PAA), see ‘Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report’.

¹⁸⁹ ‘Russia Condemns US Move to Put Missiles in Romania’, *The Telegraph*, 7 February 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/7182258/Russia-condemns-US-move-to-put-missiles-in-Romania.html>.

¹⁹⁰ ‘Ballistic Missile Defense Review Report’.

¹⁹¹ See statements by Fyodor Lukyanov and Oksana Antonenko in ‘Quid pro Quo?’.

position.¹⁹² Even before the September announcement, US officials repeatedly stated that the future of missile defence would not be open to “bargaining.”¹⁹³

The sequence of events in September also fails to conclusively show that the Russian government became more cooperative on Iran in response to what was perceived as a US concession on missile defence. President Medvedev’s hitherto harshest remarks vis-à-vis Iran admittedly came on 25 September, after both Obama’s announcement on missile defence and the Fordow revelation. Yet his statement at the Valdai Discussion Club on 15 September, which predated both events, had already signalled that Russia was amenable to cooperation in a multilateral sanctions effort. In other words, it did not take the American missile defence review for the Kremlin to concede that: “sanctions are not very effective, but sometimes we are forced to impose them.”¹⁹⁴

While there was arguably a shift in tone between Medvedev’s 15 September and 25 September remarks, this nuance does not in itself indicate a qualitative change in Russia’s stance as a result of the American missile defence announcement. In the absence of more concrete evidence, it cannot be conclusively established what causal weight Obama’s missile defence announcement, the Fordow revelation, or the TRR proposal rejection respectively played in driving Russia’s policy on the Iran nuclear issue. The evidence examined, however, suggests that concerns related to Iran elicited the Medvedev government’s readiness to cooperate in a sanctions effort, while the Obama administration’s gesture on missile defence constituted an additional boost.

¹⁹² R. Gates, ‘A Better Missile Defense For A Safer Europe’, *The New York Times*, 19 September 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/20/opinion/20gates.html>.

¹⁹³ ‘Press Briefing on the President's Trip to Russia, Italy, and Africa’.

¹⁹⁴ ‘Iran's Proposals on Global Issues Require Analysis – Medvedev’, *Sputnik*, 15 September 2009, <https://sputniknews.com/world/20090915156138279/>.

Thomas Graham also doubted that there was a direct trade between the Iran and missile defence files, but introduced the notion of ‘atmospheric linkage’, or what is termed diffuse reciprocity in this study. Graham wrote in September 2009 that the US was “not looking for a concession from Russia, in part because it [did] not believe its decision was a concession to Russia”, but hoped “its decision will further improve the *atmosphere*” in bilateral relations. This improvement, in turn, would incline Moscow to: “deal with common threats, in particular the Iranian nuclear weapons programme.”¹⁹⁵ President Obama himself confirmed his expectation of atmospheric linkage, justifying his decision on missile defence in a CBS interview by saying that: “if the *by-product* of it is that the Russians feel a little less paranoid and are now willing to work more effectively with us to deal with threats like ballistic missiles from Iran or nuclear development in Iran, then that's a bonus.”¹⁹⁶

US sources confirmed that the decision on missile defence, while not primarily intended to elicit Russian cooperation on Iran, was still perceived to have “changed the climate” with Russia,¹⁹⁷ it was “part of the rationale”¹⁹⁸ – “we certainly did not think it would hurt cooperation with Russia.”¹⁹⁹ Such optimism was echoed by the Russian government. President Medvedev stated on 22 September that American willingness to abandon its original missile defence plans created a “good opportunity” to exchange views with Barack Obama on all questions of strategic stability.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁵ ‘Missile Shield Decision Clears Tension in Russia-US Relations’, *Sputnik*, 18 September 2009, <https://sputniknews.com/analysis/20090918156178422/>.

¹⁹⁶ ‘Obama: Moscow Move “Bonus” Of Missile Plan’, *CBS News*, 20 September 2009, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/obama-moscow-move-bonus-of-missile-plan/>.

¹⁹⁷ ‘Press Briefing by Gary Samore, Alex Wolff and Mike McFaul’. Interviews with US officials.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Ross.

¹⁹⁹ Interview with an unnamed US official.

²⁰⁰ ‘Zayavlenie Dmitriia Medvedeva v svyazi s korrektyrovkoi podkhodov SShA po voprosu o PRO’ (“D. Medvedev’s Announcement in Relation to the Correction in US Approaches to Missile Defence”), 17 September 2009, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/5496>.

The aura of ‘atmospheric linkage’ also generated hope for cooperation on joint missile defence. Once the Obama administration dropped the Bush-era scheme, officials on both sides believed the time was ripe for cooperation on the historically sensitive issue. Already in June 2009, Robert Gates suggested that prospects for a US-Russian partnership on a missile defence system had improved. In that context, Moscow and Washington began to discuss proposals involving the possibility of siting a radar or data exchange centres on Russian territory.²⁰¹ Usually hawkish on prospects for cooperation, the Russian military supported joint missile defence, stating that any system would be: “viewed negatively unless we are to built it jointly.”²⁰² Dmitry Rogozin, then Russia’s permanent representative to NATO, laid out his case for joint missile defence in a *Jane’s Defence Weekly* article in October.²⁰³

The US-Russia Arms Control and International Security Working Group, established under the auspices of the BPC, was then made responsible for exploring missile defence cooperation. In addition, Track-II efforts kicked off in December 2009 with the launch of the Euro-Atlantic Security Initiative (EASI) on cooperative missile defence. Co-chaired by Wolfgang Ischinger, Igor Ivanov, and Senator Sam Nunn, and involving other senior officials, EASI was considered a promising initiative in US and Russian expert circles. This serves as further evidence of the shared hope for diffuse reciprocity during the ‘reset’.

In sum, while both US and Russian sources denied any direct linkage diplomacy amid the September 2009 diplomatic flurry on Iran and missile defence, the evidence suggests that US policy on missile defence was perceived as a friendly gesture by the Russian government, which

²⁰¹ ‘US Missile Defence Sets Its Sights On Russia’, *Kommersant*, 11 June 2009, in CDRP, no. 23, vol. 61, 8 June 2009, pp. 17-18.

²⁰² ‘Russia Insists on Involvement in Any International Missile Shield’, *Sputnik*, 21 September 2009, <https://sputniknews.com/russia/20090921156202386/>.

²⁰³ Stat’ya D. O. Rogozina “Jane’s Defence Weekly” (“D. Rogozin’s Article in *Jane’s Defence Weekly*”), 26 October 2009, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/maps/us/-/asset_publisher/unVXBbj4Z6e8/content/id/276186.

strengthened the general notion that the bilateral relationship in the ‘reset’ era was characterized by diffuse reciprocity.

Parsing the evidence: linkage diplomacy in negotiations towards Resolution 1929

What about evidence of linkage diplomacy in early 2010, once negotiations towards Resolution 1929 were underway and Russia grew more concerned about the PAA? US and Russian officials involved in Iran talks could not confirm any direct linkage to missile defence: “I never heard of a conversation in which we told the Russians: We will do something on missile defence if you do something on Iran.”²⁰⁴ While Russian diplomats frequently reiterated that, by helping to resolve the dispute about Iran’s nuclear weapons programme they expected European missile defence to become obsolete, such argumentation was not used as leverage in negotiating the specifics of Resolution 1929.

That said, haggling over 1929’s language on Iran’s ballistic missile threat was directly affected by the spectre of US missile defence.²⁰⁵ The final text established restrictions, according to which: “Iran shall not undertake any activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons, including launches using ballistic missile technology, and States shall take all necessary measures to prevent the transfer of technology or technical assistance to Iran related to such activities.”²⁰⁶ According to one US source, this “muddied language” was a result of Russia’s sensitivity to the provision, since including it in a UN Resolution meant giving credence to a purported Iranian ballistic missile threat, which in turn legitimized the need for US missile defence against Iran. Russia only agreed to what the US viewed as “not so great language” after being engaged bilaterally on the issue.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Interview with Nephew.

²⁰⁵ Interview with a US source.

²⁰⁶ Point 9. of Resolution 1929.

²⁰⁷ Interview with a US source.

4.3) Looking for evidence of direct linkage diplomacy: New START

Turning from missile defence to arms control more broadly, the talks on New START remained insulated from the negotiations towards Resolution 1929 and there was no direct linkage. But again, the evidence suggests that the arms control negotiations supported the general aura of reciprocity in Russian-US relations and were a contextual driver of Russian cooperation on Iran, thus loosely falling within the remit of Proposition 2.

The Obama administration came into office in January 2009 with the stated intention to negotiate an agreement to replace the START Treaty, which was due to expire by the end of the year. Lead negotiators Rose Gottemoeller and Anatoly Antonov made first contact on the issue in April in Rome.²⁰⁸ Sergey Ryabkov struck an optimistic tone two days before that meeting, noting encouraging signs that the new US administration, unlike its predecessor: “will take Russian priorities and preferences into account.”²⁰⁹

At the outset of negotiations, Russia’s objectives consisted in reducing the number of strategic delivery vehicles severalfold compared with the START I Treaty and calling for the number of warheads to be below the level established by the Moscow Treaty of 2002. The Russian government also sought to agree on limitations for the US arsenal of precision-guided strategic weapons and preserve the provisions of the START Treaty relating to the deployment of strategic offensive weapons solely on national territory. Finally, in what would become the major sticking point, Russia linked any willingness to reduce strategic offensive arsenals to US activities on missile defence.²¹⁰ To establish a link between strategic offensive and strategic defensive

²⁰⁸ ‘Three Flocks of Hawks’.

²⁰⁹ ‘Interv’yu S. A. Ryabkova po razoruzhchencheskoi problematike’.

²¹⁰ ‘Dmitry Medvedev Moves To Bypass US Missile Defence’, *Kommersant*, 22 June 2009, p. 6, in CDRP, no. 25, vol. 61, 22 June 2009, pp. 13-14.

weapons was, according to a Russian arms control expert: “a principal thing for Russia.”²¹¹ Since the US consistently resisted that linkage, Moscow resolved in September 2009 that New START was not to result in the kinds of reductions in its strategic offensive arsenal that would in any way be endangered by US limited missile defences, and negotiations were allowed to continue.²¹²

New START and Russian cooperation on Iran: no evidence of direct linkage

Since the negotiations towards New START proceeded in parallel to the P5+1 process on Iran, and since agreeing on reductions to their strategic offensive arsenals was a high priority to the Obama administration, it would seem intuitive that some level of linkage connected the two sets of negotiations, each player using leverage on one issue to extract concessions on the other. However, to the US, Iran represented a “limited missile threat that had to be met with limited missile defence”, which from Washington’s point of view was unrelated to the need for the US and Russia to limit their strategic offensive arsenals. As a result, Washington wanted no mention of Iran or missile defence at the New START talks in Geneva.²¹³

According to Gottemoeller, once the PAA was proposed: “a completely separate team came out from DC to Geneva to brief on the new plan. I sat in, but none of the rest of my team were allowed, because we were trying to keep a strict demarcation between offence and defence.”²¹⁴

Richard Nephew, who negotiated Resolution 1929 for the US delegation, also confirmed that New START did not feature in his discussions with Russian counterparts on Iran sanctions and that the teams responsible for the respective talks were separate. The Russian side was equally

²¹¹ Interview with a Russian expert.

²¹² Interview with Rose Gottemoeller, Washington DC, 27 June 2016.

²¹³ Interview with Gottemoeller.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

vehement in rejecting any notion of linkage: “did we agree to Resolution 1929 because we expected some favour [*blagosklonnost'*] from the US on other issues? Absolutely not.”²¹⁵

Getting many things done at the same time – evidence of ‘atmospheric linkage’ surrounding New START

Whilst the Russian leadership did not make its support for Resolution 1929 conditional upon explicit concessions related to New START, there was again ‘atmospheric linkage’ between the two issues. A joint ability to work together on Iran: “created an atmosphere which made it in some respects easier to settle differences over New START, but it was an atmospheric contribution, rather than some trade-off.”²¹⁶ The notion of diffuse reciprocity was also supported by the sequence of events. When US and Russian officials convened in Prague in early April 2010 to celebrate the signing of New START, small groups leveraged the positive atmosphere to discuss Iran during sidebars. In Prague, President Obama also announced that the US was prepared to lift sanctions on three Russian companies over their ties with Iran, as well as re-introduce the 1-2-3 NCA before Congress. Incidentally, on the same day, the White House confirmed that negotiations on Iran sanctions had formally moved to the UN Security Council in New York.

These data points suggest that New START had generated positive momentum, which spilled over onto the Iran agenda. Amid the euphoria over having concluded a new arms control treaty, the US signalled its willingness to engage in friendly gestures vis-à-vis Russia on other bilateral issues, which it argued would reduce the perceived cost for Russia of supporting sanctions against

²¹⁵ Interview with a Russian official.

²¹⁶ Interview with Burns.

Iran. Ryabkov equally applauded the Treaty as a useful “springboard” for advancing many issues on the international disarmament and non-proliferation agenda.²¹⁷

Ratification of New START – linkage diplomacy on the ‘home stretch’?

Finally, the Russian government’s position on Resolution 1929 was latently linked to the ratification process of New START. Whilst Hillary Clinton assured that ratification in the US Congress was unlikely going to “be affected by anything other than individual senators’ assessments of whether this is in the best interest of American security”,²¹⁸ Russian officials feared the Democrats’ failure to get the Treaty ratified ahead of the upcoming US mid-term elections in November 2010. In that event, the process could drag on until early 2011.²¹⁹ Thomas Graham foresaw this scenario, arguing in May 2010 that “the Republicans will want to put off the ratification of the treaty”, eager to press the administration to commit to modernizing the nuclear forces and pursuing missile defence, as well as raising the question of Moscow’s support for Washington’s efforts to curb Iran’s nuclear programme.²²⁰

Indeed, at the closing debate on the New START ratification, US senators explicitly linked Russia’s position on the Iran nuclear issue with US-Russian cooperation on arms control. While Democrats argued that the Treaty should be ratified since the US needed Russia’s continued assistance to constrain Iran’s nuclear ambitions, Republicans took the opposite line. They accused Russia of not having been helpful on Iran and noted that Moscow would become even less

²¹⁷ ‘Interv’yu S. A. Ryabkova po rabote nad Dogovorom o SNV i perspektivakh ego ratifikatsii’ (“S. Ryabkov’s Interview on the Work on the New START Treaty and the Prospects of its Ratification”), 11 April 2010, http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/voenno-strategiceskie-problemy/-/asset_publisher/hpkjeev1aY0p/content/id/255398.

²¹⁸ ‘Press Briefing on the Announcement of the New START Treaty’, 26 March 2010, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=87683>.

²¹⁹ ‘Interv’yu S. A. Ryabkova po rabote nad Dogovorom o SNV’.

²²⁰ ‘Republicans Will Seek To Delay US Ratification Of New START Treaty – Expert’, *Sputnik*, 13 May 2010, <https://sputniknews.com/world/20100513158999141/>.

supportive of future efforts once New START was ratified.²²¹ The Republicans even filed an amendment to the Treaty, which proscribed a certification of Russian compliance with 1929, to be issued prior to the entry into force of the Treaty by the President each year.²²² While there is no direct evidence that the Medvedev government's vote in support for Resolution 1929 in June 2010 was driven by the objective to ensure Congress' endorsement of New START, or to speed up the ratification process, considerations pertaining to US domestic politics likely featured in the overall calculations of Kremlin officials.

4.4) Looking for evidence of direct linkage diplomacy: the narrow trades on Resolution 1929

While linkages between missile defence, New START, and the Iran file were mainly atmospheric, more explicit linkage was at play regarding Russia's objectives of WTO accession and ratification of the 1-2-3 Nuclear Cooperation Agreement. Indeed, the present case study involves more conclusive evidence of linkage than all other cases examined in this thesis.

In 2009 and 2010, Moscow remained interested in cooperation on peaceful nuclear energy with the US and hoped for ratification of the 1-2-3 Agreement, which allowed US companies to share nuclear technology and materials with foreign counterparts, carry out joint research and development activities, and bid jointly on civil nuclear projects.²²³ Following Russia's August 2008 war with Georgia, the Bush administration had withdrawn the previously signed agreement from Senate ratification. President Obama resubmitted the text to Congress in May 2010, just

²²¹ 'Treaty With Russia On Measures For Further Reduction And Limitation Of Strategic Offensive Arms – Resumed', US Senate, 21 December 2010, <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2010/12/21/senate-section/article/s10888-1?r=4>.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ 'Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Russian Federation for Cooperation in the Field of Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy', 11 January 2011 (entry into force), <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/160815.pdf>.

before the Security Council vote on Resolution 1929. Moscow was also hopeful that the Obama administration would step up its efforts to secure Russia's accession to the WTO.

Importantly, rather than Russian officials explicitly raising their hopes for WTO accession or 1-2-3 ratification with US counterparts in the P5+1, evidence suggests that American officials themselves proactively engaged in *anticipatory linkage*, signalling that US support was more likely in the event of Russian cooperation on Iran:

“The Russians were trying to get support on WTO accession, the 1-2-3 Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, and we weren't shy. We never made it explicitly transactional, we never said ‘You will give us an arms embargo as part of 1929 and we will give you the 1-2-3 Agreement’. We never said that, and we would not do that, but we said it would be easier to get Congressional support if you, Russia, are seen as being positive and effective and helpful on Iran.”²²⁴

Recalling how President Obama raised prospective US support for Russia's WTO bid, ratification of the 1-2-3 Agreement, and sanctions relief for Russian companies with President Medvedev in Prague in April 2010, Ambassador McFaul similarly characterized these gestures as part of a broader approach. This approach, according to McFaul, signalled to Russia that: “we want to make our relationship more valuable to you economically and politically, than your relationship is with Iran.” When I asked the Ambassador whether Russian officials themselves explicitly asked for such *quid pro quos*, he retorted: “It was our strategy to be very pro-active in making suggestions, as opposed to waiting for them.” However, the Ambassador was adamant that this strategy did not sanction trades on unrelated issues – for instance, Russian support on Iran for a shifting US position on Georgia: “We considered [linkage] to be legitimate only *within* the parameters of nuclear cooperation. Lifting restrictions on companies that had been sanctioned because of Iran seemed like a legitimate thing to trade. And on the 1-2-3 Agreement, we made an

²²⁴ Interview with Nephew.

explicit argument that *Rosatom* had business dealings in Iran, and we wanted to create business dealings [for it] with American companies.”²²⁵

4.5) Diffuse reciprocity and atmospheric linkage

Thus while there is some evidence of direct linkage diplomacy between the Russian and US governments over Moscow’s support for Resolution 1929, interviewees’ testimonies overwhelmingly point to a notion of diffuse reciprocity pervading the Iran talks. US officials tried to secure Russian cooperation by promising it a more beneficial bilateral relationship overall. To that end, they rhetorically placed cooperation on Iran into the larger context of the ‘reset’, from which Russia stood to gain. In that sense, although Russia’s principled readiness to cooperate on Iran was driven by considerations captured by Proposition 1 – concerns with nuclear non-proliferation in the Middle East, frustration over Ahmadinejad’s intransigent diplomacy, fears of regional military escalation – which were complemented by the desire to protect the UN as the chief venue for any sanctions effort, expectation of diffuse reciprocity was an important contextual factor explaining Russian cooperation.

US official rhetoric and signalling led their Russian counterparts to believe that the more areas both sides worked on constructively, the better the overall relationship would be, which would then help to achieve understanding on other issues. According to Ambassador Beyrle, describing the essence of Keohane’s idea of diffuse reciprocity, there would be a: “building up of credits on one side, which engendered some giving on the other side.”²²⁶

²²⁵ Interview with McFaul.

²²⁶ Interview with Beyrle.

Explaining the evidence of linkage diplomacy: institutional-contextual factors

The introduction suggests that institutional-contextual factors should partially account for the presence or absence of linkage diplomacy in cooperation. In theory, the time-frame within which negotiations play out, and the level of seniority at which the substance of cooperation is negotiated, should impact opportunities for linkage. Whilst I note in the preceding chapter that linkage over Russian support for Syria's troop withdrawal from Lebanon was partially unlikely to occur because events unfolded so rapidly after the Rafik Hariri assassination, US-Russia talks towards Resolution 1929 played out over the course of many months, providing ample time for linkage to be negotiated. Indeed, the extended time period in which Russian cooperation on Iran materialized appears to have contributed to the perception of diffuse reciprocity discussed above. That said, while the time-frame for cooperation in this case study was relatively lengthy, evidence of direct linkage was still circumscribed.

While the time factor does not conclusively explain why direct linkage diplomacy did not occur more frequently, neither can the institutional context of cooperation. The technical specifics of Resolution 1929 and the New START Treaty were negotiated in working groups, consisting mainly of technical experts (joined by one or two senior officials) who did not enjoy the latitude to make policy linkages beyond narrow trade-offs within the confines of a specific issue negotiation.²²⁷ However, presidents Obama and Medvedev were personally involved, discussing thorny issues, and even: "working out very complex levels of detail."²²⁸ Some issues in Resolution 1929: "could only be resolved by the heads of state talking, and this was on more than one occasion."²²⁹ Since negotiations towards both New START and 1929 were contentious at times, meaning that issues would migrate up the chain of seniority within the interagency process

²²⁷ Interview with a US source.

²²⁸ 'Conference Call Briefing with Administration Officials', 22 June 2010. Interviews with US and Russian sources.

²²⁹ Interview with Ross. Echoed by Russian Foreign Ministry source.

– from the working group level to the Interagency Policy Committee to the Deputies’ Committee and Principals’ Committee “where people would decide what the trade-offs are and what we could do”,²³⁰ room existed in theory for pursuing linkages with Russian counterparts, had there been a conscious policy choice to do so.

Explaining the evidence of linkage diplomacy: a stated policy of ‘no linkage’

However, both Russian and US officials denied the pursuit of direct linkage beyond the parameters of the nuclear proliferation agenda. US sources professed that they “never made the relationship *explicitly* transactional”,²³¹ “would have resisted linkage, had Russia engaged in it”,²³² and pursued a policy of “no linkage” during the reset.²³³ The Russian position echoed this sentiment: “There was no linkage from our side ever on the Iran issue.”²³⁴ I argue, therefore, that the paucity of linkage was chiefly caused by principled policy positions on both sides, while the institutional-contextual factors discussed add little explanatory value, as in the previous case studies.²³⁵

There was a sense on both sides that ‘linking things’ was no way to conduct serious diplomacy, that the relationship should not be managed in those terms – you should not engage in “bizarre transactions”,²³⁶ or: “just trade one thing for another.”²³⁷ Interviewees also betrayed a sense that, in a relationship in which diffuse reciprocity was at play, there was indeed no need for Russia to

²³⁰ Interview with a US source.

²³¹ Interview with Nephew. Emphasis added.

²³² Interview with a US source.

²³³ Interview with McFaul.

²³⁴ Interview with a diplomat in the Russian Foreign Ministry familiar with the matter.

²³⁵ The sparse evidence of linkage diplomacy does *not* constitute proof that linkage did not, in fact, occur. Furthermore, it should be noted that Iran’s own perception has been that the Russian government has used its diplomacy on the nuclear issue as a bargaining chip with the West. See C. Therme, ‘The Iran-Russia Entente: Marriage of Convenience or Strategic Partnership?’, in P. Magri and A. Perteghella (eds.), *Iran After the Deal: The Road Ahead*, ISPI, 2015.

²³⁶ Interview with McFaul.

²³⁷ ‘Medvedev Interview with the *BBC*’, 29 March 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/andrew_marr_show/7972129.stm.

pursue *quid pro quo* since it was going to benefit from improving relations over time in any case. On the other hand, since Russian officials have cast their position on Iran's nuclear programme as historically consistent and in support of existing UN resolutions,²³⁸ they also rejected the notion of expecting reciprocity in return for cooperation as a matter of principle.

5) Conclusion

This chapter argues that Moscow's cooperation with the US in passing UN Resolution 1929 was predominantly driven by Russian leadership considerations related to the Iran nuclear issue. As in the preceding chapters, Proposition 1 on Russia's regional interests thus captures the core drivers of its cooperation. While Russia's long-term objective in preventing Iran from building a nuclear bomb has consistently coincided with that of the US, Moscow repeatedly clashed with Washington on the desired tactics towards that goal, partly because Russia holds a different philosophy on sanctions *per se*, partly because Russia is more wary of military escalation given its geographic proximity to Iran, and partly because it enjoys a complex economic and political relationship with the Islamic Republic. In 2009 and 2010, concerns with disciplining Iran and ensuring regional stability outweighed the scepticism of sanctions and commercial considerations, pushing the Russian government gradually in favour of Resolution 1929.

Added to which, having decided to cooperate in a multilateral sanctions effort, concerns over Russia's commercial ties and political relationship with Iran then drove a Russian strategy of building leverage in cooperation. In negotiating qualified language and carve-outs for Resolution 1929, and subsequently banning the S-300 delivery to Tehran by presidential decree, Moscow

²³⁸ Russia's core interests regarding the Iranian nuclear programme dispute would remain consistent in the following years, when Russia negotiated the JCPOA. See 'Transcript of a Meeting with S. Ryabkov', *CENESS*, 14 August 2015, http://ceness-russia.org/data/page/p1494_1.pdf.

chartered a balanced course between ‘disciplining’ Iran, depriving the US and Israel of any pretext for enforcing military measures, and protecting Moscow’s own relationship with Tehran.

In this context, hopes that cooperation on Iran would elicit US reciprocity in the ‘reset’ were an additional driver of Russian policy, though not its cause. While there was greater evidence of direct linkage between Russia and the US than in the others chapters of this study – for instance, on ratification of the 1-2-3 Agreement – linkage was mostly conceived through the notion of diffuse reciprocity, rather than trades, bargains, or quid pro quos. The sparse evidence of direct linkage was a function not so much of institutional-contextual factors, but simply a matter of both sides’ explicit rejection of quid pro quos as a matter of fundamental policy. That said, Proposition 2 has been found to capture additional important rationales behind Russian cooperation.

Parsing the substantial body of written and oral evidence on the 1929 negotiations, it has been impossible to establish an irrefutable cause and effect relationship between Russian cooperation on Iran and diffuse reciprocity. Did the former propel the latter, or vice versa, or rather, were the two mutually reinforcing? Judging from statements of US officials with long experience of negotiating Iran sanctions with Russian officials, the context of the ‘reset’ was a positive contextual, rather than necessary, condition for arriving at Resolution 1929. The explanatory weight Russian sources, on the other hand, attributed to non-proliferation concerns versus the ‘reset’ in explaining Russian cooperation varied depending upon their institutional and ideological standpoints. While one prominent Westernist thought that sanctioning Iran was hardly more than “pocket change”, used by Russia to achieve aims in the ‘reset’, Russian arms control experts argued that Russia’s support for Resolution 1929 was driven by Moscow’s non-proliferation concerns, while the ‘reset’ was a contextual factor at best.

This inconsistency in views notwithstanding, the 'reset' was ultimately important because it pursued not only a qualitatively new relationship with Russia, but was embedded in a broader US strategy, which sought sincere engagement with Tehran and was, therefore, welcomed by Moscow. It was because an intransigent Ahmadinejad regime was colliding with a US administration that had put Moscow at the centre of its engagement with Iran that the Russian government became convinced that increased pressure on Tehran was needed. To the extent, then, that the 'reset' was inextricably linked to a new US approach towards Iran, it was key to eliciting Russian cooperation.

Chapter 5: “Figuring things out along the way” – how Russia and the US cooperated to demilitarize Syria’s chemical weapons in 2013 and 2014

1) Introduction

This chapter looks at Russia’s cooperation with the US in the removal and destruction of Syria’s chemical weapons in 2013 and 2014. While Russian-US technical exchanges about the Syrian stockpile in 2012 and 2013 fell short of cooperation in disarmament, the Russian government agreed to joint action after the Eastern Ghouta chemical weapons attack on 21 August, 2013. Russian cooperation was driven by a desire to avert a punitive Western military strike against Syria, which Moscow worried would play out analogously to the ‘Libyan scenario’ in 2011 and generate further instability in the Middle East. A concern with the non-proliferation of WMD in the volatile region, as well as the forceful international outcry over the Eastern Ghouta attack, additionally played into Russian official calculations, although they would not have constituted sufficient conditions for cooperation in the absence of a military threat.

The Kremlin pursued leverage building in cooperation to prop up the Bashar Al-Assad regime. Its efforts consisted in carving out a sovereign role for the Syrian regime in multilateral cooperation, shielding Assad from further allegations of chemical weapons use, and supplying Damascus with additional military hardware so as to strengthen its hand in future Geneva process negotiations. Since Russian-US cooperation was enacted through a hybrid disarmament framework, embodied in an OPCW-UN Joint Mission mandate, Russian diplomats were able to stress the consensual nature of the disarmament process and argue that the West had recognized Syria’s sovereignty. While this proved crucial to Russian status seeking in cooperation, there is no evidence that Moscow pursued linkage diplomacy vis-à-vis Washington in expectation of other gains. At best, the Kremlin hoped for an atmospheric contribution of joint chemical disarmament, in order to halt the downward trajectory in Russian-US relations following the collapse of the Obama-Medvedev ‘reset’.

Indeed, cooperation on Syria occurred during a period of deteriorating relations between Russia and the US. Contacts soured from 2011, especially given disagreements over the civil war in Syria and the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1973 on Libya. In November 2011, President Medvedev announced that cooperative missile defence negotiations had broken down. In September 2012, the Kremlin requested that the US wrap up its USAID programmes in Russia, many of which had been part of the BPC process. In December Congress passed the Magnitsky Act into law, imposing sanctions on Russian officials, prompting the Russian Duma to prohibit US adoptions of Russian children. And after US whistleblower Edward Snowden found refuge in Russia in June 2013, the White House announced the postponement of a planned US-Russia presidential summit because of inadequate progress in the bilateral agenda. In this case study the contextual variable – the state of the Russian-US relationship – is characterized by a deteriorating trajectory.¹

The cooperative endeavour on Syria's chemical weapons occurred over three distinct phases: During the first phase, comprising the period between late 2012 and the Eastern Ghouta attack, the US National Security Council (NSC) and Russian Security Council (RSC) engaged in low-profile, technical information exchanges on the Syrian stockpile in various European capitals. The two sides reviewed intelligence on the scale and composition of Damascus' chemical arsenal and discussed practical solutions to neutralize the programme, should conditions permit.²

¹ On the downward spiral in the US-Russian relationship between 2011 and 2014, see Stent, *Limits of Partnership*; Legvold, *Return to Cold War*.

² For background on these exchanges, see P. C. Bleek and N. J. Kramer, 'Eliminating Syria's Chemical Weapons: Implications for Addressing Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Threats', *The Nonproliferation Review*, vol. 23, no. 1-2, 2016, pp. 197-230; 'Roundtable: Destroying Syria's Chemical Weapons: One Year Later', *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, Washington DC, 10 September 2014, <https://www.csis.org/events/destroying-syria%E2%80%99s-chemical-weapons-one-year-later>.

The chemical weapons attack in Eastern Ghouta, near Damascus, on 21 August, 2013, which killed an estimated 1,300 civilians,³ heralded the second phase of cooperation. A prior chemical attack in March 2013 near Aleppo had merely prompted the UN to launch an investigative mission, which did not arrive in Syria until early August. It took the tragedy in Eastern Ghouta to stir up a heated debate in the US about the need for punitive military action against Syria, to give credence to President Obama's "red line" speech a year earlier.⁴ The terms of that debate changed on 14 September 2013, however, when Syria acceded to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and Russia and the US signed a "Framework for the Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons" in Geneva. Two weeks later, the basic legal edifice for a hybrid disarmament mandate in Syria was laid out by two resolutions adopted on the same day – first an OPCW Executive Council decision, followed by UN SC Resolution 2118.⁵

US and Russian sources differed as to which side initiated the idea of forestalling military action by cooperating towards chemical demilitarization. Some said the impetus came from John Kerry at a press conference in London on 9 September, at which he asserted that Assad could avert strikes by turning: "over every single bit of his chemical weapons to the international community."⁶ Others contended that the suggestion to cooperate came from the Russians first, during a conversation between presidents Putin and Obama just a few days earlier, on the sidelines of the G-20 Summit in St. Petersburg. As one US respondent put it, there is a: "whole

³ 'A New Normal: Ongoing Chemical Weapons Attacks in Syria', *The Syrian American Medical Society*, February 2016, <https://www.sams-usa.net/foundation/index.php/component/content/article/2-uncategorised/255-a-new-normal-ongoing-chemical-weapons-attacks-in-syria>.

⁴ 'Remarks by the President to the White House Press Corps', 12 August 2012, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/08/20/remarks-president-white-house-press-corps>.

⁵ 'Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons', *US Department of State*, 14 September 2013, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/09/214247.htm>; 'UN SC Resolution 2118 (2013)', 27 September 2013, http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2118.pdf; 'OPCW Executive Council Decision on the Destruction of Syria's Chemical Weapons', 27 September 2013, https://www.opcw.org/fileadmin/OPCW/EC/M-33/ecm33dec01_e_.pdf.

⁶ J. Kerry, 'Remarks with United Kingdom Foreign Secretary Hague', 9 September 2013, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/09/213956.htm>.

mythology about which side really initiated the cooperation and when.”⁷ For the purpose of this study, it is not critical to provide conclusive evidence on this question. Since the Russian government was engaged in consultations with the US on the chemicals pre-Eastern Ghouta, yet was reluctant to cooperate to remove the stockpile until after the attack, the Syrian case involved a Russian policy adjustment to US preferences, whether that adjustment was proactively initiated by Moscow or suggested by Washington. Russian actions, therefore, met the definition of cooperation adopted in this study.

As cooperation moved into phase 3 to practically implement Resolution 2118, Washington and Moscow collaborated within the context of an OPCW-UN Joint Mission, which was formally established on 16 October, 2013. The Joint Mission’s tasks were to oversee and coordinate the timely and safe elimination of the Syrian chemical weapons programme. The US, Russia, and other international actors played different roles in supporting the work of the Joint Mission, in sequential phases of locating, verifying, removing, and destroying Syria’s arsenal.⁸ An unprecedented decision was taken to transport the most dangerous materials out of Syrian territory and destroy them on board a specially commissioned US commercial vessel, the MV *Cape Ray*, after an elaborate Danish-Norwegian maritime transport operation from the Syrian port of Latakia, led by Russia’s military.⁹ The Joint Mission reported in June 2014 that the vast majority of the declared chemicals had either been destroyed or removed from Syria.¹⁰

⁷ Interview with Rebecca Hersman, Washington DC, 29 June 2016.

⁸ Actors other than Russia and the US played important roles in the September 2013 diplomacy in Geneva, The Hague, and New York, as well as in the subsequent Joint Mission. However, I will focus upon the drivers of Russian cooperation, as well as the Russian-US dynamic within the multilateral effort towards Syrian chemical weapons demilitarization.

⁹ For detail on the maritime operation, see J. Smith, speaking at ‘Roundtable: Destroying Syria’s Chemical Weapons’ and Bleek and Kramer, ‘Eliminating Syria’s Chemical Weapons’.

¹⁰ OPCW, ‘Announcement to Media on Last Consignment of Chemicals Leaving Syria’, 23 June 2014, <https://www.opcw.org/news/article/announcement-to-media-on-last-consignment-of-chemicals-leaving-syria/>.

The rest of this chapter will provide an in-depth empirical account of the three phases in Russian-US cooperation in Syria. Rather than proceeding chronologically, I will engage with different aspects of cooperation and refer to particular phases of the demilitarization effort as relevant. The first part will address the study's research question and focus upon the principal objectives that led Moscow to pursue joint chemical demilitarization in Syria. It will show that the perceived threat of a punitive Western strike against Syria after the Eastern Ghouta attack was essential to eliciting Russian cooperation, while other factors did not meet the test of sufficient condition. A discussion of leverage building in cooperation, driven by the Russian leadership's interests in backing the Assad regime after the beginning of the 2011 Syrian uprising, will follow. The chapter will conclude by asking whether Moscow pursued linkage diplomacy in cooperation to elicit *quid pro quos* from the Obama administration. Evidence of both direct linkage, as well as expectations of diffuse reciprocity, will be assessed. The analysis will also address why this case study represents a particularly successful example of 'insulating' Russian-US arms control cooperation in the Middle East from tensions in their bilateral relations.

2) The key drivers of Russian cooperation

This section will address the principal research question and show that Russia's cooperation with the US in demilitarizing Syria's declared chemical weapons in 2013-2014 was predominantly driven by a desire to avert regional escalation, which Moscow worried might repeat a 'Libyan scenario' and lead to more chaos in the Middle East, a region it saw as already destabilized by prior US foreign policy. A heightened sense of the risks emanating from Syria's chemical stockpile, which was nurtured by prior exchanges with US officials, as well as the scale of the Eastern Ghouta attack in August 2013, additionally played into Russian official calculations. However, it took the threat of a military strike against Syria to tilt the balance from 'talking the talk' to 'walking the walk' in the Russian government's assessment of the chemical weapons

problematique. Since regional security concerns drove Russian government cooperation, Proposition 1 – which holds that Russia’s cooperation with the United States in the Middle East is driven by its narrow security, economic and other interests in that region – is confirmed in this chapter.

2.1) The key impetus of Russian cooperation: averting military escalation

I have argued throughout this study that Russian interests in the Middle East provide the key driver for cooperation with the US in the region. This holds true in the present case study. The Kremlin’s cooperation with the US in ridding Syria of its chemical arsenal sought to avert a punitive Western airstrike against the Assad regime. Moscow was only ready to engage in joint demilitarization of Syria’s chemical weapons when the threat of military force appeared imminent and real.

Russian sources confirmed that the Kremlin’s cooperation was driven by the desire to avert a strike against Syria. The Russian level of concern with anticipated US military action emanated from official government discourse between 21 August and early September 2013.¹¹ According to Ambassador Popov, and confirmed by Foreign Ministry sources speaking off the record: “we very well knew that they were going to bomb.”¹² Possible Western military action was assessed through two prisms – that of incalculable regional escalation and that of historical precedent. On the one hand, officials feared that: “bombing in the circumstances at the time would have led to a big war, possibly involving Iran, Turkey and others.” Consequently, we [Russia]: “acted like a fire brigade, we had to prevent a great regional war in the Middle East.”¹³ On the other hand, the

¹¹ For example, ‘Comment by Lukashovich Regarding the Statements of the United States About the Forceful Action Against Syria’, 30 August 2013, http://www.mid.ru/en/posledniye_dobavleniye/-/asset_publisher/MCZ7HQuMdqBY/content/id/98312.

¹² Interview with Ambassador Veniamin Popov, Moscow, 12 April 2016.

¹³ Ibid.

possible use of force was viewed through the prism of past US interventions, especially in Iraq and Libya.¹⁴ Russian officials also voiced concerns that a punitive strike against Syria would hardly remove the country's chemical weapons threat, but heighten the danger of a loss of central control over the arsenal.¹⁵

Former Foreign Minister Ivanov warned in early September 2013 that “unfortunately, we cannot assume that if Russia and China exercise their veto power on the UN Security Council, that would stop the war [in Syria]”, since: “the operations in Yugoslavia and Iraq [...] created dangerous precedents for circumventing the UN in violation of principles of international law.”¹⁶ The notion that military escalation could have led to a situation worse than a second ‘Libya scenario’ was later shared by Defence Minister Shoigu.¹⁷ Having abstained from the UN Security Council vote on Resolution 1973 on Libya, the Kremlin had observed with incredulity how the 2011 intervention resulted in regime change. President Putin called the elimination of Muammar Gaddafi not just a “medieval”, but outright “primitive apotheosis” of the West’s meddling in regional affairs, warning that Russia would not allow the Libya scenario to be reproduced in Syria.¹⁸

As representatives of Moscow’s expert community explained, in mid 2013 the ‘Libyan experience’ was still fresh in Russian officials’ minds, generating deep wariness of what happens when the West intervenes in other countries’ affairs, even via a purportedly restricted operation that states limited objectives. After Libya, the idea of a successful military operation led by the

¹⁴ S. Ryabkov, ‘Speech at the Moscow Non-proliferation Conference 2014’, 21 November 2014, <http://ceness-russia.org/eng/conf2014/materials/1059/>.

¹⁵ Interview with a Russian source.

¹⁶ I. Ivanov, ‘Oshibka na oshibke’ (“Mistake After Mistake”), *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 2 September 2013, <https://rg.ru/2013/09/01/agressia-poln.html>.

¹⁷ S. Shoigu, ‘Interview with Russian TV Channel *Rossiya 24*’ (in Russian), 15 August 2016, <http://www.vesti.ru/videos/show/vid/688903/cid/5/#>.

¹⁸ V. Putin, ‘Russia in a Changing World’ (text in Russian), *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 27 February 2012, <https://rg.ru/2012/02/27/putin-politika.html>.

West “disappeared for good” from the Russian discourse, but was replaced by a deep-seated conviction – already nurtured during the 2003 Iraq War – that: “everything the US touches falls apart.” One senior Russian official noted that the leadership worried not just about US military action, but that intelligence highlighted the threat of a French strike as well.¹⁹

The notion that an interest in averting military escalation prompted the Kremlin to cooperate was unequivocally shared on the US side. Obama administration officials argued that the threat of US use of force was “so clear to Russia, there is no question that Putin took it seriously and sought to prevent it”,²⁰ that: “Russian Ambassador Kislyak was clearly reporting back from Washington that the threat was real.”²¹ Another source commented “the Russians would not have come to Geneva” had they not taken the threat seriously.²² While US Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford found it curious that the threat of force seemed to have precipitated Russian cooperation, given that the odds of a strike were actually rather small due to the anticipated lack of support by the US Congress,²³ Deputy Secretary of State Bill Burns argued that: “even though the issue over the famous red line got ‘screwed up’ over that period, that red line still focused the Russians’ minds because they realized just how close Obama had come to using force.”²⁴

2.2) Russia’s concern with the safety of the Syrian chemical stockpile

Continuing the discussion about the key drivers of Russian cooperation, to what extent was Moscow moved not just by the incentive to avert military escalation, but also by changed calculations about the safety of the Syrian chemical stockpile? Were the regional drivers of

¹⁹ The above section relies upon interviews with Russian diplomats and experts.

²⁰ Interview with Wallander.

²¹ Interview with Jones.

²² Interview with a US source.

²³ Phone interview with Ambassador Robert Ford, 6 July 2016.

²⁴ Interview with Burns.

Russia's policy (Proposition 1) confined to apprehension over a punitive Western strike, or did they extend to non-proliferation concerns?

Russia and the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) programme

Starting in the early 1990s, Russia and the US had cooperated to reduce risks of proliferation stemming from the collapse of the USSR. Highlights of such cooperation, which was organized under the auspices of the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) programme, included the implementation of security upgrades at Russian military and civilian nuclear facilities, the blend-down of 500 tons of HEU from Soviet-era nuclear weapons that was then sold to the US for use as nuclear reactor fuel, and the repatriation of Russian HEU-bearing reactor fuels from Central and Eastern Europe.²⁵ In the chemical sphere, the CTR's mandate was to neutralize weapons, destroy or convert production facilities, establish safeguards at research facilities, and provide employment to former chemical weapons scientists. While the programme was initially designed to help post-Soviet countries get rid of their WMD, it was later expanded to help third countries – an element which was to prove important for Russian-US cooperation on Syria's chemical weapons in 2013.²⁶

In 1989 the USSR and the US had signed the Wyoming Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which called for information sharing and verification inspections for chemical weapons.²⁷ This memorandum was followed by a Bilateral Destruction Agreement, signed by George H. W. Bush

²⁵ R. Einhorn, 'Prospects for US-Russian Non-proliferation Cooperation', *Brookings*, February 2016. On lab-to-lab cooperation between US and Russian scientists towards these objectives, see S. S. Hecker (ed.), *Doomed to Cooperate: How American and Russian Scientists Joined Forces to Avert Some of the Greatest Post-Cold War Nuclear Dangers* (Los Alamos: Bathub Row Press, 2016).

²⁶ The CTR effort shifted from an emergency response to impending chaos in the Soviet Union to a broader programme seeking to keep WMD away from rogue proliferators. It also grew from a DOD-centred effort to include projects funded by the State Department, the Department of Energy, and the Department of Homeland Security. M. B. D. Nikitin and A. M. Woolf, 'The Evolution of Cooperative Threat Reduction: Issues For Congress', *Congressional Research Service*, June 2014, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/R43143.pdf>.

²⁷ For a comprehensive history of the American and Soviet Union's chemical weapons programmes, see 'The Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) – Fact Sheets', <http://www.nti.org/learn/countries/russia/chemical/>.

and Mikhail Gorbachev in June 1990, which called on each state to begin destroying its chemical weapon stockpiles. The entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) in 1997 further solidified Moscow's commitment to chemical weapon disarmament and non-proliferation,²⁸ which began to bear fruit in the early 2000s.

Funding by the US and other states enabled Russia to begin the elimination of chemical weapons and to finance peaceful research by former weapon scientists. In terms of CTR financial support for Russia, the majority of the Pentagon's ca. USD1 billion in funding for Russian chemical weapons destruction supported the design and construction of the destruction facility at Shchuch'ye, which began in March 2003. The CTR programme also provided technical support and design advice to a second facility at Kizne.²⁹

However, chafing at the "assistant-advisory optic" of CTR cooperation and suspicious of the presence of American monitors at sensitive Russian facilities,³⁰ the Russian leadership in October 2012 announced its intention not to renew CTR programmes in Russia. Although Senator Richard Lugar failed to change the Kremlin's stance, visiting Moscow in August 2012,³¹ Russia and the US signed a bilateral protocol in June 2013, three days before the expiration of the MoU that had governed the Pentagon's cooperation with Russia under the CTR. The bilateral protocol restored the 2003 Multilateral Nuclear Environmental Programme in the Russian Federation (MNEPR).³²

²⁸ The CWC prohibits the development, production, acquisition, stockpiling, retention, or use of CWs, as well as the: "transfer, directly or indirectly, [of] chemical weapons to anyone." The CWC also requires members to destroy all CW stockpiles and production facilities under its jurisdiction or control. Full elimination of CWs and former production facilities is expected within 10 years of the Convention's entry into force, with a provision for a five-year extension in exceptional cases. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), headquartered in The Hague, oversees the implementation of the Treaty. See J. Cirincione, J. B. Wolfsthal, and M. Rajkumar, *Deadly Arsenal: Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Threats* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), p. 66.

²⁹ Nikitin and Woolf, 'The Evolution of Cooperative Threat Reduction'.

³⁰ Interview with a defence official in the US government.

³¹ 'Russia Won't Renew Pact on Weapons with the US', *The New York Times*, 20 October 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/11/world/europe/russia-wont-renew-pact-with-us-on-weapons.html>.

³² 'The Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI) – Fact Sheet on Russia'.

No document was signed, however, to cover previous cooperation in dismantling ballistic missiles and chemical weapons.

Nevertheless, in the context of the 2012-2013 NSC-led bilateral exchanges with the Russian government on the Syrian chemical stockpile, the US made a deliberate effort to leverage the prior CTR relationship. Officials dispatched to the exchanges with Russian counterparts had previously worked on CTR programmes and told the Russians: “We both cooperated through the CTR programme through all these years. We agreed that the future of the CTR programme would be working with third countries. So let’s talk hypothetically about what we would do, if Syria was to allow us to help them eliminate their chemical weapons.”³³ The CTR programme later funded a substantial portion of the American contribution to the Syrian demilitarization operation, paying USD160 million for destruction efforts on the MV *Cape Ray*, as well as some equipment and material that enabled the removal process.³⁴

Russian assessments of the Syrian chemical weapons threat

Throughout 2012 and much of 2013, the official Russian position was that Syria’s possession of chemical weapons was not a cause for alarm. In August 2012³⁵ Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Gatilov acknowledged Moscow’s concern about chemical weapons falling into the hands of terrorists, but noted that Russia had: “already conducted work with the Syrian government [...] and received a very clear assurance that everything possible will be done for chemical weapons to

³³ Interview with a defence official in the US government.

³⁴ Nikitin and Woolf, ‘The Evolution of Cooperative Threat Reduction’.

³⁵ According to several reports, Syria first publicly admitted its possession of chemical weapons in July 2012, K. Makdisi and C. P. Hindawi, ‘Creative Diplomacy amidst a Brutal Conflict: Analyzing the OPCW-UN Joint Mission for the Elimination of the Syrian Chemical Weapons Programme’, *Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs*, September 2016.

be kept securely.”³⁶ Sergey Lavrov, at the February 2013 Munich Security Conference, assured that: “we have reliable information that so far the Syrian government controls the situation with the chemical weapons.”³⁷ Russian diplomats also argued that the Syrian regime had acquired the chemical weapons as a deterrent against Israel and was, therefore, never going to use them against its own population.³⁸ Russian arms control officials interviewed acknowledged concerns about Syria’s chemical weapons, but exclusively in terms of possible proliferation to terrorist groups. The notion of regime usage domestically was always vehemently rejected.

America’s own risk assessment was comprehensive, ranging from regime loss of control and proliferation to non-state actors, to regime usage externally and domestically.³⁹ Those officials closely involved in the pre-August 2013 bilateral information exchanges with Russia tried to gauge Moscow’s concern, but struggled to look past official rhetoric: “Russia was not at all that much concerned, or if they were, that is not what they were telling us.”⁴⁰ As one official present at these exchanges described:

“The Russians were very careful to bring their talking points each time and abide by the rules [...] And those rules, in my view, were that they were not to acknowledge any concern, they were to engage in these discussions, but to continue to say that the Syrians had their programme under control and that the programme was not as widespread as we claimed it to be. Were they really concerned? I had some optimism throughout these discussions, since they consistently showed up with very robust delegations.”⁴¹

³⁶ ‘Interview with G. M. Gatilov’, *Associated Press*, 24 August 2012,

http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/146022.

³⁷ ‘Syrian Chemical Weapons Under Control – FM Lavrov’, *Sputnik*, 2 February 2013, <https://sputniknews.com/russia/20130202179187200-Syrian-Chemical-Weapons-Under-Control-FM-Lavrov/>.

³⁸ ‘Sergey V. Lavrov with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Jordan Nasser Judeh’, 6 November 2012, http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/maps/jo/-/asset_publisher/bjowS9H8QFIj/content/id/136130.

³⁹ Bleek and Kramer, ‘Eliminating Syria’s Chemical Weapons’.

⁴⁰ Interview with Hersman.

⁴¹ Interview with a defence official in the US government.

2.3) ‘Talking the talk’ before Eastern Ghouta: a driver of Russian cooperation?

While US officials interviewed were somewhat unsure regarding the level of Russian concern with Syria’s chemical weapons, evidence suggests that Moscow was at least alarmed enough to participate in the bilateral technical exchanges. The Kremlin’s initial readiness to authorize the exchanges – which were part of a broader effort led by National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon to use an NSC-RSC channel for engagement on issues such as counterterrorism, arms control, and nuclear security – was partially for reasons of prestige. An ability to engage with the US, bilaterally and in a co-equal format, on issues of international importance was valued in Moscow and seen as status-affirming.⁴² A desire to salvage remnants of the prior CTR relationship might also have played into Russia’s calculations. While Moscow might thus have initially agreed to participate in the NSC exchanges less out of genuine concern over Syria’s chemicals and more for reputational benefits or to humour the US, its concern about safety of the materials underwent a transformation over time.

The bilateral consultations, which took place in Vienna, Budapest, and Rome during the first half of 2013, were abstract, technical, and entailed intelligence reviews on the Syrian stockpile, as well as discussions about how to deal with possible incidents. Whilst the US at this point blamed the Assad regime for chemical attacks in Syria, officials maintained a low-key public posture on the issue, so as not to endanger their talks with Russian counterparts. Assiduously preparing their own intelligence on the location, composition, and extent of Syria’s chemical weapons, US officials quickly felt that their Russian counterparts had an “antique view” of the scale of the problem, but given the perceived level of American concern, the delegation dispatched by Moscow “wanted to find out more” and eventually accepted US intelligence as a basis for the conversations.⁴³

⁴² Interviews with Russian sources.

⁴³ Interviews with multiple US sources.

While the exchanges initially focused upon third countries, ie. how to deal with Jordan or Turkey in the event of an incident, the conversation later moved to thinking about post-conflict ‘chaos’ in Syria – with ‘chaos’ agreed upon as a neutral term, not implying any loss of Syrian state sovereignty.⁴⁴ Crucially, the Russian-US exchanges provided a “quiet channel”, were “low-level, low-key”, and focused upon exchanging information. They were: “about initially trying to create a sense of trust and to be more open with the Russians, so that they would be more open with us.”⁴⁵

It appears that over time and through reiterated consultation the two sides acquired greater appreciation for each others’ concerns related to chemical weapons proliferation. While the initial conversations were, as one US source recalled, like “pulling teeth”, “slow and painful”, since the Russian delegation would describe American intelligence on Syria’s chemicals as mere “rumours”, subsequent consultations moved “past the posturing stage” to discuss concrete realities.⁴⁶ Some US officials argued that these exchanges, therefore, became an important condition for actual cooperation *after* the Eastern Ghouta attack. As Laura Holgate put it, previous exchanges between the American and Russian security councils: “created a place to take the conversation when you had the crisis over Eastern Ghouta – without the common perspective and trust built by these NSC-RSC discussions, we might still have gotten to a deal with Russia, though not within two weeks.”⁴⁷ However, exactly how important a condition they proved to be for actual cooperation in a changed political environment is disputed. Some US sources judged the talks a merely helpful, facilitating factor, others a necessary condition for speedy and successful diplomacy towards Resolution 2118 in September 2013.

⁴⁴ Interview with Laura Holgate, Washington DC, 14 June 2017.

⁴⁵ Phone interview with Patrick Terrell, 21 July 2016.

⁴⁶ Interview with a US source.

⁴⁷ Interview with Holgate.

Some US officials argued that both the bilateral consultations and all the contingency planning and preparation done within the US government⁴⁸ were vital to rapidly getting to the framework agreement on 14 September. Once negotiations began in Geneva on 9 September, the US: “had an entire team ready to go with all the information they needed, the preparation was done.”⁴⁹ When the American delegation went to Geneva, there was also a conscious decision on the US side: “to see if some linkage to the prior existing dialogue and its character – which was to emphasize technical talks – could be made.”⁵⁰ The belief that the usefulness of prior exchanges could be rejuvenated, given the new top-down political direction, partially played out in that there was some overlap – both in the US and Russian delegations – between officials who had participated in talks previously and were now present in Geneva.

Since both sides had, through the pre-Eastern Ghouta exchanges, conducted significant analysis on the capabilities needed to carry out chemical demilitarization in Syria, this allowed for speedy and effective conversations in Geneva. Some US officials saw the greatest merit of the prior exchanges in conveying to previously sceptical Russian officials that the demilitarization project in a country at war was actually feasible. Others assessed their significance primarily on the fact that the exchanges had conveyed to the Russian side just how seriously the US took the Syrian chemical *problematique*, which added to the credibility of the “red line”.

There were indeed indications that there had been some thinking about the desirability of taking the chemical weapons out of Syria on the Russian side *before* the Eastern Ghouta attack. A senior US source recalled a meeting in early August in Washington between Sergey Shoigu, Lavrov, Chuck Hagel, and Kerry, at which Shoigu floated the idea of Russian-US cooperation to remove

⁴⁸ Bleek and Kramer, ‘Eliminating Syria’s Chemical Weapons’.

⁴⁹ Interview with Jones.

⁵⁰ Interview with Hersman.

the Syrian chemical arsenal.⁵¹ Whilst this thought came up rather ad hoc and there was no developed Russian proposal, and whilst it is difficult to establish a clear causal link between the prior NSC-RSC exchanges and Shoigu's remarks, this episode suggests that the idea had been nurtured on the Russian side.

Russian officials interviewed declined to discuss the technical bilateral exchanges with the American NSC, merely stating that the Russian delegation, while travelling to Geneva, was deeply unsure about: "what they would leave with."⁵² Also, the NSC-RSC exchanges hardly received any Russian press coverage during the first half of 2013. A Russian desire to deflect attention from bilateral exchanges with the US on Syria's chemical weapons appears logical, given Moscow's backing of the Assad regime and its insistence on Syrian sovereignty.

Indeed, the Russian official narrative has rejected the idea that Syria's accession to the CWC resulted from tough bargaining with Russia, but has stressed the voluntary nature of Assad's decision. Speaking candidly, however, a Russian diplomatic source confirmed that the Syrian regime had to be "convinced" by Moscow to accede to the CWC, which proved "no easy matter." When Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem came to Russia's Foreign Ministry for talks on this issue, he repeatedly went to the corridor to smoke, visibly not happy about the Russian demand. When the Syrians asked, the Russian source recalled, what they would get in return for accession to the CWC, we (Russia) said: "You won't be bombed by the Americans." When the Syrians retorted "What else?", we said "Nothing."⁵³

Other US officials also caution not to overstate the relevance for successful cooperation of the bilateral exchanges. While the US and Russia developed a common sense of the tasks necessary

⁵¹ Interview with Gottemoeller.

⁵² Interview with a Russian official.

⁵³ Ibid.

for demilitarization, which came to be known as the ‘Universal Matrix’: “some reporting has mistakenly suggested this document was a roadmap for the subsequent elimination effort, but it was far too generic to serve that purpose.”⁵⁴ The talks were useful in opening up exchange where there was none, but were not instrumental in eliciting Russian cooperation, which would never have been forthcoming without the credible threat of military force after 21 August.⁵⁵ As Bill Burns recalls:

“on the day the decision was taken not to strike [Syria] but rather to go to Congress, there was no concrete notion that there would be cooperation with Russia. People after the fact will try to connect various conversations that took place, as if cooperation was a fall-back option that had been thought through, but it really emerged only after the initial decision [by the US] to pause was made.”⁵⁶

In sum, while the Russian-US exchanges unlikely provided a sufficient condition for Russian cooperation on the demilitarization of Syrian chemical weapons, there is evidence to suggest that they, at a minimum, facilitated the successful and speedy implementation of cooperation under changed political circumstances.

2.4) Russian outrage with Assad: a driver of cooperation?

Chapter 3 on the ‘Cedar Revolution’ argues that the Putin government’s desire to avoid regional escalation following Rafik Hariri’s assassination was partly driven by frustration with the Assad regime. A sense that the Syrian regime is a difficult ally, and does not always listen to advice from Moscow, tested Russian officials’ status sentiments and appeared to influence Russian policy in 2005 regarding Syria’s troop withdrawal from Lebanon. The previous chapter on Iran also illustrates that the perceived unruliness of a Middle Eastern client, such as the Ahmadinejad government, can heighten Russia’s resolve in cooperating with the US, especially if the client is perceived to insult Russian status sentiments.

⁵⁴ Bleek and Kramer, ‘Eliminating Syria’s Chemical Weapons’.

⁵⁵ Interviews with multiple US sources.

⁵⁶ Interview with Burns.

Whether the Russian leadership's perceptions of Syrian actions stiffened Moscow's resolve in cooperating in the demilitarization of chemical weapons in 2013 is a controversial issue. While not denying that Assad could sometimes be a difficult partner, Russian officials categorically rejected international allegations about the regime's chemical attacks. The Russian government's reaction to Eastern Ghouta, which was that "an improvised missile was launched from the positions occupied by militants", while evidence suggested the attack was "about an earlier planned provocation", was faithfully reiterated by the Russian sources interviewed. Again, this appears unsurprising, given Russia's backing of the Assad regime in the Syrian Civil War, on which the Kremlin had pinned its 'red line' against Western-backed regime change, as will be discussed below.

That said, US officials sensed outrage amongst their Russian counterparts over the Eastern Ghouta attack. One commented that its scale generated such an international outcry that: "Syria was much more isolated, and Russia would have been more isolated too, if not cooperating in that area."⁵⁷ Another felt that: "the scope and brutality of the attack pushed them [the Russians] over a line [...] the Russians knew what had happened, they probably understood it better than others and even for very hard-boiled people in the Russian services, this crossed a line."⁵⁸ This impression was echoed by several US interlocutors.

In sum, Russia's cooperation with the US in destroying Syria's declared chemical weapons was predominantly driven by a desire to avert regional military escalation, which Moscow worried would result in further instability in the Middle East. A concern with non-proliferation of WMD in the volatile region, a heightened sense of US concerns with Syria's stockpile, as well as the international outcry over the Eastern Ghouta attack all appear to have played into Russian official

⁵⁷ Interview with a US source.

⁵⁸ Interview with Burns.

calculations, although they did not constitute sufficient conditions for cooperation in the absence of a military threat. Overall, the explanatory centrality of Proposition 1 has been confirmed in this case study, as in the preceding empirical chapters on Iraq, Lebanon, and Iran.

Against the backdrop of two rival narratives on Syrian chemical disarmament in 2013 and 2014 – one claiming that coercion was the main contributor, the other highlighting consensual features of the process⁵⁹ – the evidence examined here suggests the primacy of coercion. The threat of a military strike was crucial in eliciting the Kremlin’s readiness to pressure Syria to join the CWC. The coercion narrative, which dismisses the notion of voluntary action by the Assad regime and is represented mainly by US diplomats, accurately captures the importance of military threat as a key driver of cooperation.

That said, elements stressed by the consent narrative should not be entirely dismissed. Once an initial decision for disarmament had been taken, Russian diplomats sought to push the consensual dimension of the implementation of cooperation, continuously highlighting the sovereign role of the Assad regime in demilitarization. Since cooperation was enacted through a hybrid disarmament framework, embodied in an OPCW-UN Joint Mission mandate, the Kremlin was able to stress its consensual nature. This proved crucial for the operation’s successful implementation beyond the limelight of international diplomacy in Geneva and New York in September 2013 through to early 2014, when the Ukraine crisis subjected Russian-US cooperation to a serious test.

⁵⁹ For a discussion on the coercion versus consent debate, see K. Makdisi and C. P. Hindawi, ‘The Syrian Chemical Weapons Disarmament Process in Context: Narratives of Coercion, Consent, and Everything in Between’, *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 38, issue 8, 2017.

3) On Russian leverage building in cooperation: stressing consent over coercion

While a narrow interest in averting military strikes against Syria provided the key driver for Russian cooperation in chemical demilitarization, Moscow then pursued leverage building to prop up the Assad regime. In the introduction I argue that Russia could theoretically build leverage either by seeking to modify the terms of cooperation itself, or by taking additional policy steps on the regional issue. In Syria Russian officials played both cards. Leverage building came in the form of Russia insisting on an independent role for the Syrian regime in multilateral cooperation, shielding Syria from further allegations of chemical weapons attacks, and supplying Damascus with additional military hardware to strengthen its hand in future Geneva talks.

3.1) Russia's historical interests: explaining its support for the Assad regime

Russia's historical interests vis-à-vis Syria have been discussed in Chapter 3 on the 2005 'Cedar Revolution', when Russia supported Syrian compliance with UN SC Resolution 1559. Next, it is important to understand Moscow's interests in backing Assad in the context of the 2011 Syrian uprising. These interests formed the backdrop for Russia's willingness to support Syrian chemical weapons demilitarization, while simultaneously building leverage for Damascus. The following discussion will identify a Russian concern with state order – composed of ideological, historical, and regime survival considerations – as the key driver for Russia's post-2011 policy on Syria, which has included diplomatic shielding for the Syrian regime at the UN Security Council, Russia's cooperation on Syrian chemical demilitarization, as well as military intervention in support of Damascus from September 2015.

Ideology: Russia and 'sovereign democracy'

First, a concern with state order, or regime stability, has been essential to the Kremlin's view. As the conflict in Syria deepened in 2012 and 2013, Russian officials continued to argue that a departure by Assad would exacerbate chaos in Syria and that none of the outside actors advocating a 'political transition' could offer a credible plan for ensuring the orderly survival of existing state structures. Russia feared that the collapse of institutions and concomitant spread of chaos would nurture instability and allow radical Islamist factions to expand their influence. Apprehension of this causal chain – the removal of strong leaders leading to state collapse, facilitating the rise of Islamists – has more broadly characterized Russia's reaction to the 'Arab Spring' since 2011. While Moscow's official response to events in Egypt and Tunisia was relatively low-key, Russian experts and diplomats voiced cautious concerns early on.

The regional fallout from the 2003 US invasion of Iraq had gradually nurtured a conviction among Russian officials, which was then dramatically solidified by the overthrow of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, that Western policies of socio-political engineering in the region are both naïve and irresponsible. Given the chaos that has resulted from Western policy in these states, Western intentions to support democratic aspirations in Syria were judged as either deeply misguided or, worse, seen as a cover for ulterior motives, such as to weaken Russia's own position in the Middle East by undermining its allies.

Turning to the ideological underpinnings of this Russian outlook, as discussed in Chapter 3 on the 'Cedar Revolution', there is the belief that stability and the material wellbeing of a society should be given priority. Following the Rose and Orange revolutions, the Kremlin promoted its own understanding of democratization, which accords primacy to gradual, stability-prioritizing, and state-led change at the expense of the more pluralist role played by civil society inherent in the

liberal democratic model.⁶⁰ This understanding has been nurtured by the Russian leadership's deep antipathy to the idea of linking internal regime legitimacy to validation by external actors or a specific democratic process prescribed from without.⁶¹

The Russian government has formulated its Syria policy through this prism of state-led democratization. It has argued that there are different paths to, and incarnations of, democracy, and that the Russian model is better suited to Syria and other post-Arab Spring countries, given a complex ethnic and confessional fabric that mandates stability-prioritizing policies. In a long 2012 interview discussing Russia's view of the 'Arab Spring', Foreign Minister Lavrov warned that: "any attempts to 'transplant' one's own models of state structure and development, to export one's own values, onto the soil of other countries, ignoring their traditions and culture, as a general rule cannot be successful. Russia is convinced that both the pace and form of democratization should be defined from within societies themselves."⁶²

History: the Chechen Wars

Furthermore, Moscow's concern with state order in Syria has its roots in Russia's own historical experience. After the Cold War, unrest among the indigenous Muslim populations in the North Caucasus raised fears in the Kremlin that Chechen separatism could spill over to other Russian regions and precipitate state disintegration. President Putin expressed these concerns most plainly in an interview in 2000, warning that: "the essence of the situation in the North Caucasus and in Chechnya [...] is the continuation of the collapse of the USSR. If we did not quickly do something

⁶⁰ Dannreuther, 'Russia and the Arab Spring'.

⁶¹ R. Allison, 'Russia and the Post-2014 International Order: Revisionism, Realpolitik and Regime Change', Public Lecture, Russian and Eastern European Studies, School of Interdisciplinary Area Studies, University of Oxford, 16 January 2017.

⁶² 'Lavrov: o transformatsiiakh v arabskom mire' ("Lavrov: On the Transformations in the Arab World"), *Interview with Egyptian Newspaper Al-Ahram*, 9 November 2012, <http://inosmi.ru/world/20121109/201973659.html>.

to stop it, Russia as a state in its current form would cease to exist [...] we would be facing [...] the Yugoslavization of Russia.”⁶³ He believed that the false promise of Western-style democracy promoted in the 1990s led to chaos and civil war in the North Caucasus given an emerging power vacuum in Moscow. Ascending to power during the tumultuous late 1990s, these personal perceptions would decisively mold Putin’s outlook on the situation in Syria a decade later.

The Chechnya prism shaped the Russian government’s Syria policy in the lead-up to the chemical demilitarization effort analysed in this study. Moscow’s insistence that transnational Islamist terrorism threatens the very integrity of the Syrian state echoed claims the Kremlin made regarding Chechnya in the early 2000s.⁶⁴ The Second Chechen War was exclusively framed as a conflict fuelled by outside forces. Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the US invasion of Afghanistan of October 2001, the Kremlin held weekly press conferences to support claims that Chechens had links to the Taliban and provided the largest contingent of Al-Qaeda’s foreign legion in Afghanistan. Equally, in Syria Russia labeled the armed opposition as foreign mercenaries supported by external players, who attempted to use the conflict in Syria to further their own nefarious goals.⁶⁵ Its discourse portrayed the Syrian conflict as a binary struggle between the Assad regime and ‘terrorists’. Finally, both in Chechnya and Syria, Russia also claimed that it was fighting a terrorist threat of not just regional, but transnational proportions, leaving Moscow at the forefront of defying what was no less than a civilizational challenge.⁶⁶

⁶³ Quoted in N. Gevorkyan, N. Timakova, and A. Kolesnikov, *Ot pervogo litsa* (Moscow: Vagrius, 2000), pp.133-135.

⁶⁴ For a comparison of Russia’s perspective on the Second Chechen War and the Syrian Civil War, see H. Notte, ‘Russia in Chechnya and Syria: Pursuit of Strategic Goals’, *Middle East Policy Council*, vol. 13, no. 1, Spring 2016.

⁶⁵ For an exemplary Russian account which argues that the Syrian crisis has been predominantly fuelled by external actors, see B. Dolgov, ‘The Syrian Conflict: Russian and GCC Perspectives’, *Russian International Affairs Council*, November 2015.

⁶⁶ Notte, ‘Russia in Chechnya and Syria’.

Regime survival: fearing 'colour revolutions'

Finally, the Kremlin's concern with protecting the existing state order in Syria has betrayed fears of Western-supported 'colour revolutions', not only in the Middle East but also in Russia's own neighbourhood. In providing steadfast support to the Assad regime, Moscow has argued that it is thwarting yet another Western attempt to impose standards of political legitimacy on a sovereign state. Russian grievances over efforts to promote Western democracy have been a consistent theme in this study, running through the discussion of the Iraq War, the 'Cedar Revolution', and the Iranian nuclear file, but they notably intensified following the 'Arab Spring'.

Viewing the Taliban as a threat to its own national security, the Putin government supported the October 2001 US-led campaign in Afghanistan, but as Washington progressively adopted a narrative of state-building in the country, Russia became more critical.⁶⁷ It then opposed military action against Iraq, as noted in Chapter 2. When claims about the presence of WMD inside Iraq proved unfounded and the language of regime change began to figure more prominently in the US discourse on the war, the Kremlin's apprehensions became yet more acute. Furthermore, having abstained from the UN Security Council vote on Resolution 1973 on Libya, in what was partially a gesture of goodwill to the US during the Obama-Medvedev 'reset', the Kremlin observed with incredulity how the 2011 intervention facilitated regime change.

While Moscow's post-2011 support for Damascus needs to be understood from this historical perspective, a fear of contagion of democracy promotion beyond the Middle East has been at the core of its misgivings. Already during the Libya crisis, Lavrov argued that sowing a belief among people that "foreigners will help us" overthrow the regime may be "contagious", and could

⁶⁷ For a detailed analysis of Russian objections to perceived Western-orchestrated regime change and democracy promotion in Afghanistan, Iraq, and beyond, see Allison, *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention*.

“spread to protesters in other countries of the region” hoping for assistance from the international community, and this would be: “an invitation to a whole array of civil wars.”⁶⁸ Fears of Western-backed regime change setting off a domino effect have ultimately betrayed the Russian regime’s apprehensions about ‘colour revolutions’ in the post-Soviet space, which the Russian leadership sees as its legitimate sphere of influence.

Moscow’s reaction to the popular uprisings in Georgia and Ukraine in 2003 and 2004, which the Kremlin staunchly alleged had been encouraged by the West, were an early case in point. By February 2011, then-President Medvedev warned that the scenario unfolding in the Arab world had been prepared for Russia by certain script-writers too, while General Makarov argued, following Gaddafi’s fall, that the technique of ‘colour revolutions’, used by leaders of some countries to remove undesirable political regimes, might later be applied to Russia and its allies.⁶⁹ After Libya, Syria became the Russian litmus test for how the West would be allowed to respond to internal conflicts in the future. Reacting to the perceived threat of a military strike against Syria by cooperating in joint demilitarization of the country’s chemical stockpile, the Kremlin affirmed beyond mere rhetoric that Syria was its ‘red line’ over anticipated US-backed regime change.

It is important to note that the 2011 events in Libya coincided not only with the start of the Syrian crisis, but also with internal turmoil surrounding parliamentary and presidential elections in Russia itself. The Kremlin’s announcement in 2011 that Vladimir Putin would assume the presidency for a third term sparked widespread protests on Moscow’s streets. President Putin blamed these on nefarious foreign influences, attacking Secretary of State Clinton and US Ambassador McFaul personally.⁷⁰ In this context, adopting an uncompromising stance on the

⁶⁸ ‘Sergey Lavrov at a press conference in Tskhinvali (26 April 2011)’, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts: Former Soviet Union*; quoted in R. Allison, ‘Russia and Syria’, p. 797.

⁶⁹ Allison, ‘Russia and Syria’, p. 817.

⁷⁰ Stent, *Limits of Partnership*, p. 246.

unfolding Syrian crisis became part and parcel of his anti-Western policy of power consolidation, which became increasingly driven by Russia's *idée fixe* of thwarting further 'colour revolutions'.

A further driving concern in Russia's Syria policy since 2011 has been an anxiety that the collapse of Syrian state order could facilitate terrorist 'spillover' beyond the country's borders. Such a scenario, the argument went, would pose a real security threat to the Russian Federation itself if extremists moved to Russian regions or Central Asia. Lavrov warned as early as March 2011 that: "the more the Middle East gets unstable, the higher the risk of people with malicious purposes causing *us* trouble."⁷¹ Furthermore, Moscow's geopolitical interests have been at stake in Syria, since its alliance with the Assad regime has represented the core of its post-Soviet presence in the Middle East.

Finally, Russia's diplomacy in Syria must be understood in the context of its relationship with the US, which was beginning to deteriorate from 2012. The Russian government's desire to play a key role in mediating the Syrian war *on equal terms* with Washington betrays the importance Moscow attaches to status and has been consonant with the new national predilection for greater assertiveness, which will be discussed below. In escalating its role in the Syrian war in a carefully calibrated way, for instance in pursuing Syrian chemical weapons demilitarization, Moscow has forced Washington and other players to accept it as an indispensable player in the conflict.

3.2) Russian leverage building and UN SC Resolution 2118

Against this backdrop of Russia's interest in supporting the Assad regime in the Syrian Civil War, Moscow pursued leverage for its client – and by extension itself – once the chemical demilitarization effort was in motion. First, Russian leverage building played out in the

⁷¹ 'Sergey Lavrov in an Interview with Ekho Moskvyy', March 2011, <https://www.rt.com/politics/russia-arab-unrest-caucasus/>. Emphasis added.

September 2013 diplomacy in Geneva and New York, regarding the terms of cooperation itself. Moscow had reservations about UN Resolution 2118 being adopted under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter (pointing to the Libya precedent) and preferred the disarmament process to be led by the OPCW rather than the UN. It also initially argued that US-proposed deadlines for the removal and destruction of the chemicals were too tough on the Syrian government.

These Russian preferences reflected a desire to emphasize the consensual nature of Syria's engagement in disarmament. In pushing for the OPCW, rather than the UN, to take the lead, Russian diplomats argued that the core Syrian disarmament obligations derived not from any coercive framework, such as a Security Council resolution, but rather from the regular, consent-based CWC framework.⁷² Accepting the compromise of a hybrid legal framework with the adoption of both an OPCW Executive Council decision and a UN Security Council resolution on the same day, Russia ensured that the Syrians could henceforth argue that, while the implementation of disarmament was exceptional and had to be validated by the Security Council, the overall process was based upon the Syrian sovereign decision to join the CWC. Since qualified language was adopted on a number of issues in Resolution 2118, the Russian Foreign Ministry would subsequently claim it had successfully shielded Assad from coercive pressure. Regarding Chapter 7, for instance, although the US insisted it "has to be in there, or the deal is off",⁷³ Lavrov stated at the press conference following the Resolution's adoption that the latter: "does *not* allow any automation in the enforcement of coercive measures."⁷⁴

⁷² Makdisi and Hindawi, 'The Syrian Chemical Weapons Disarmament Process in Context'.

⁷³ Interview with Jones.

⁷⁴ S. Lavrov, 'Remarks at UN National Security Council, 7038th Meeting', 27 September 2013, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2013/sc11135.doc.htm>. According to Resolution 2118, the Security Council: "decides, in the event of non-compliance with this resolution, including unauthorized transfer of chemical weapons, or any use of chemical weapons by anyone in the Syrian Arab Republic, to impose measures under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter."

A further example of how Russia strengthened Syrian sovereignty in the disarmament process relates to the tripartite Status of Mission Agreement (SOMA) that required negotiation between the UN, the OPCW, and Syria.⁷⁵ The Assad regime, backed by Moscow, required coordination and consent by the Syrian authorities for the Joint Mission's access to Syrian territory. The notion that international actors operating in Syria be considered 'guests', whose movements are only legal if approved by the Syrian government, would become especially relevant after the start of Russia's military intervention in Syria in September 2015. Then Moscow would routinely argue that the US-backed coalition, striking terrorists on Syrian territory, was an 'unwelcome guest' violating international law, while Russia's own military involvement had been requested by the legitimate government of the country.

Beyond the September 2013 negotiations, the Kremlin undertook other steps to alter the balance of leverage in the Syrian Civil War in Assad's favour and thus further its own key objective of protecting Syrian state order. Moscow's measures towards this end included: applauding Syria's legitimate and crucial role as a sovereign party throughout the entire demilitarization process; building momentum on the Syrian peace talks (Geneva-2), in an attempt to exploit the perceived increased international legitimacy of the Syrian regime; shielding Damascus against further allegations of chemical weapons usage, and stepping up its provision of conventional arms to the Assad regime.

⁷⁵ Further to paragraph 9 of Security Council Resolution 2118, in which the Council called on the Syrian government to conclude modality agreements with the UN and OPCW, the UN and OPCW on 16 October 2013 jointly proposed a draft tripartite Status-of-Mission Agreement (SOMA) to the Syrian government with a view to concluding the Agreement by 1 November 2013. In negotiating, the UN sought "strong liability clauses [...] which minimized UN and OPCW exposure to potential liability by confirming Syria's responsibility to deal with, and to hold the UN and OPCW harmless for, third party claims to the largest extent possible." A tripartite agreement was not signed until September 2014; M. de Serpa Soares, 'My first Eight months as the Legal Counsel of the United Nations, *Lecture at Peking University Faculty of Law*, 28 May 2014, http://legal.un.org/ola/media/info_from_lc/mss/speeches/MSS_Peking_University_Lecture-6-June-2014.pdf; R. Trapp, 'Report – Lessons Learnt From The OPCW Mission In Syria', 16 December 2015, https://www.opcw.org/fileadmin/OPCW/PDF/Lessons_learned_from_the_OPCW_Mission_in_Syria.pdf.

3.3) Stressing consent over coercion: Russian praise for Syria's role in the demilitarization process

Russian diplomats continuously emphasized the role and goodwill of the Syrian government in chemical demilitarization.⁷⁶ Indeed, according to Foreign Ministry officials, cooperation became possible only after August 2013 since prior US initiatives for joint disarmament (for instance, by Senator Lugar in August 2012) were not “proper offers”, given their refusal to account for the participation of the Syrian government.⁷⁷ Acknowledging a role for the Assad regime was a delicate issue. Some states involved in the Joint Mission refused to deal with Damascus directly, accepting only legal arrangements in which they would give assets to the Mission, which would hand them to the Syrian authorities.⁷⁸ And when John Kerry in early October 2013 gave “credit to the Assad regime” for its speedy move towards destroying its chemical arsenal, the State Department quickly scrambled to qualify these comments. Spokeswoman Marie Harf reiterated that the US position on Assad had: “not changed [...] he has lost all legitimacy to lead Syria.”⁷⁹ Russia, on the other hand, saw the Assad regime not only as an indispensable but fully legitimate partner throughout the disarmament operation.

3.4) Towards Geneva-2

This Russian spin was more than rhetorical. It was viewed to support strengthening Assad's hand in the Geneva process.⁸⁰ Russia hoped to revive this track parallel to the demilitarization operation, exploiting the new context of increased leverage for the regime. Commenting on the

⁷⁶ Ryabkov, ‘Speech at the Moscow Non-proliferation Conference 2014’.

⁷⁷ Interview with a Russian source.

⁷⁸ Makdisi and Hindawi, ‘Creative Diplomacy amidst a Brutal Conflict’, p. 88.

⁷⁹ ‘US Department of State, Daily Press Briefing’, 8 October 2013, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2013/10/215200.htm>.

⁸⁰ The Geneva framework dates back to the ‘Geneva Communiqué’, issued in June 2012 by the UN and countries including the US and Russia. The Communiqué called for the creation of a transitional governing body to preside over a Syrian-led political transition and formed: “on the basis of mutual consent.” The regime and opposition came together in January 2014 for Geneva II talks, followed by subsequent rounds in later years. United Nations, ‘Action Group for Syria: Final Communiqué’, 30 June 2012, <https://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/Syria/FinalCommuniqueActionGroupforSyria.pdf>.

ongoing Russian-American negotiations in Geneva in September 2013, Lavrov stated that: “it would be wrong to miss the opportunity to use our stay in Geneva to conduct a meeting devoted to the issues of preparation for the Geneva-II conference.”⁸¹ The Russian government saw the demilitarization process and the political track as linked. At the opening of the Geneva-II Conference on 22 January 2014, Lavrov remarked that: “progress with the destruction of chemical weapons in Syria is of great help as far as the proceedings of the Conference are concerned.”⁸²

The perception that in 2013 Russia was anxious about being back-footed in Syria and “wanted to be back in the game”, instrumentalize cooperation to enhance its leverage over the peace process, was shared by most US officials interviewed. Some went as far as to suggest that this objective lowered Russia’s commitment to speedy disarmament, one charging that delays in the removal operation were deliberately: “built in, because the Russians wanted to get Assad to the June 2014 elections.”⁸³

3.5) Shielding Assad from further allegations of regime chemical weapon attacks

Furthermore, while Russian officials cooperated with the Joint Mission regarding Syria’s declared chemical stockpile, subsequent allegations of materials remaining or regime usage met with Russian intransigence. “Russia-US relations dragged and soured” especially on the use of chlorine gas.⁸⁴ In the wake of the 11 April, 2014 attack in Kafr Zitra in northern Syria, which elicited international allegations of regime responsibility, Smolenskaya Square rejected these as

⁸¹ ‘Sergey Lavrov to a Mass Media Question’, 2 September 2013, http://archive.mid.ru/bdomp/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/4d7aaab2ce01eaff44257be600233995!OpenDocument.

⁸² ‘S.V. Lavrov at the Opening of the International Conference on Syria’, 22 January 2014, http://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/79666.

⁸³ Interview with Hersman.

⁸⁴ Interview with a UN source.

categorically false and fabricated.⁸⁵ Moscow was willing to see the cooperative deal on Syria's declared arsenal through, but in the meantime blocked international efforts towards regime accountability for further attacks. One State Department official noted that, as the demilitarization operation progressed into 2014: "the Russians became increasingly supportive of Damascus at the OPCW in The Hague: Russian statements were often like those of a defence attorney at a trial."⁸⁶

3.6) Conventional arms sales to Damascus

Furthermore, as the chemical demilitarization process proceeded, Russia stepped up its delivery of conventional weapons to the Assad regime. In a hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in early November 2013, the US Ambassador to Syria reported that "there are more deliveries, and in some cases, they are militarily extremely significant", while another US official argued that these deliveries had become: "probably more significant than what Iran provides in terms of military assistance."⁸⁷ Kerry, expressing his frustration with such Russian policy, charged in early February 2014 that: "Russia needs to be a part of the solution and not be contributing so many more weapons and so much more aid that they're in fact enabling Assad to double down."⁸⁸ In response to such accusations, the Russian leadership argued that its arms deliveries were in fulfillment of existing contracts, "which have no relation to the fight against the demonstrators" and were solely of a defensive nature.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ 'MID RF: obvineniya Damaska v primenenii khimoruzhiya neverny' ("Russian MoF: Allegations Against Damascus About Use of Chemical Weapons Are Untrue"), *Ria Novosti*, 25 April 2014, https://ria.ru/arab_riot/20140425/1005453075.html.

⁸⁶ Interview with a US source. For a detailed summary of Russia's confrontation with other UN SC members over the Syrian chemical weapons file between 2014 and 2017, see A. Lund, 'No Justice For Khan Sheikhou', *The Century Foundation*, November 2017, <https://tcf.org/content/report/no-justice-khan-sheikhoun/>.

⁸⁷ 'Russia Increases Syria Arms While Joining Push for Talks', *Bloomberg*, 31 October 2013, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-10-31/russia-increases-syria-arms-while-joining-push-for-talks>.

⁸⁸ J. Kerry, 'Remarks With Indonesian Foreign Minister Raden Mohammad Marty Muliana Natalegawa', 17 February 2014, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/02/221711.htm>.

⁸⁹ 'Sergey V. Lavrov with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Jordan Nasser Judeh'.

3.7) On Russian leverage building and pursuit of status

Finally, the Russian leadership was very concerned with the status aspect of the disarmament operation and with portraying an image of equality with the US. The September 2013 diplomatic breakthrough in the chemical weapons deal was sold as status-enhancing by the domestic press, *Izvestia* headlining that: “We are the champions of peace.”⁹⁰ Russian experts interviewed also suggested that earlier initiatives for joint demilitarization did not go anywhere because those were *American* initiatives and Russia did not want to support them.

Aware of Russian status sensitivities, US officials would sometimes try to exploit these in order to exercise pressure on Moscow. For instance, in the event of delays during the removal of chemicals from Syria, which the Assad regime and Moscow routinely blamed on the difficult security situation: “once the US would say to Russia: ‘You are jeopardizing the Lavrov-Kerry initiative’, things eventually moved forward.”⁹¹ Indeed, to US officials it felt like: “at every opportunity we would hear ‘Lavrov and Kerry, Lavrov and Kerry.’”⁹² Michael McFaul recalled that, when the OPCW won the Nobel Peace Prize for Syrian chemical disarmament, many Russians asked him: “Why does the OPCW get this prize? It was Putin who did this.”⁹³

During the maritime phase of the operation, Russia was also adamant to protect its status, especially when it came to organizing security for the Danish and Norwegian vessels in Syria’s territorial waters. Initially not involved in the removal task force and thus not invited to an operational meeting in Stuttgart, Germany in mid December 2013, the Russian government decided to provide an additional ship for security and invited international parties to a meeting in Moscow. Some US officials felt this was partly done to protect Russia’s image, since Moscow

⁹⁰ ‘My — chempionny mira’ (“We are the Champions of Peace”), *Izvestia*, 30 October 2013, <http://izvestia.ru/news/559838>.

⁹¹ Interview with a US source.

⁹² Interview with Jones.

⁹³ Interview with McFaul.

then insisted that coordination between all actors in the maritime operation be carried out onboard its ship, the *Petr Velikiy*. As one US source commented, “you had a couple of NATO allies [in the operation], and the Russians just couldn’t stand the optics of that”,⁹⁴ another noting that: “the Russian Black Sea Fleet is so important to them, they wanted to stick their boat in the water.”⁹⁵ Russian respondents, in contrast, belittled the importance of the earlier Stuttgart meeting, arguing that the main consultations occurred in Moscow: “where the US played more of an observer role.”⁹⁶

To summarize, whether it was Moscow’s selective softening of Resolution 2118, for instance regarding the automatism of punitive measures in the event of Syrian non-compliance, its insisting on a sovereign role for the Syrian regime in multilateral cooperation, its shielding of Assad from further allegations of chemical weapons attacks, or its supplying Damascus with additional military hardware, the Kremlin sought to build leverage for Syria parallel to its cooperation on chemical demilitarization. In the introduction it is assumed that the Russian leadership can pursue leverage for itself – for instance in protecting its commercial interests in the Middle East that might suffer as a result of its cooperation with the US – or for its regional partner – for instance, in bolstering the latter’s security position which US policy threatens to render more vulnerable. Unlike in the chapters on Iraq and Iran, Russian leverage building in the Syrian case was directed less at protecting commercial interests and investments with a Middle Eastern client, and more at furthering Russia’s political objectives in the Syrian conflict.

⁹⁴ Interview with a US source.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Interview with a Russian source.

4) Russian expectations of reciprocity as a driver of cooperation

While the Russian government was clearly engaged in building leverage for its client in Damascus, there is no evidence that Russia explicitly pursued linkage diplomacy with the US over other issues in their bilateral relationship. Rather than making its cooperation in chemical disarmament conditional upon gains in its bilateral agenda with the US, Russia was chiefly driven by its desire to avert military escalation in the Levant. However, Moscow hoped for an atmospheric change in bilateral relations with the US, which had deteriorated since Putin's return to the Russian presidency in early 2012. Hopes of leveraging cooperation to decrease overall bilateral hostility, however, were not so much a driver of Russian cooperation, as they reflected Russia's anticipation of a side benefit of joint arms control in Syria. Proposition 2, which suggests that " Russia's cooperation with the United States in the Middle East is driven by expectations of linkage to other issues in the Russian-US bilateral agenda", thus has very limited explanatory value in this case study.

4.1) Mounting Russian-US bilateral crisis and a desire to put relations 'back on track'

"The reset has run its course" – Russian-US relations deteriorate from 2011

Russian-US cooperation on Syria occurred during a period of deteriorating bilateral relations. Contacts soured from 2011, especially given disagreements over the civil war in Syria and the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1973 on Libya. Notwithstanding concrete accomplishments of the 'reset' – New START, cooperation on Afghanistan and Iran, and Russia's WTO membership – the durability of the 'reset' was in doubt by late 2011.

Toughening Russian rhetoric during the Duma and presidential election campaigns and Putin's stated intention to return to the presidency were of particular concern to US officials.⁹⁷ When Putin was re-elected as President amid massive protests in early 2012, he blamed the latter on foreign influences.⁹⁸ The tense internal political situation caused the Kremlin to further consolidate power against political opposition, and the government passed legislation requiring NGOs receiving foreign funding to register as 'foreign agents', while ordering the closure of USAID in Russia.

Continuing on the path of reciprocal punishment, the US Congress endorsed the Magnitsky Act in December 2012, imposing visa and financial sanctions on Russian officials. The Duma's reaction to the bill, which specified that individuals connected to Sergey Magnitsky's death⁹⁹ should be placed on a visa ban list and their assets in the US frozen, consisted in passing the Dima Yakovlev Law, which banned all future adoptions by Americans of Russian children. After US whistleblower Edward Snowden found refuge in Russia in June 2013, the White House announced that it had postponed a planned US-Russia presidential summit because of inadequate progress in the bilateral agenda.¹⁰⁰

Already by the time of the November 2012 US elections, in Stent's assessment the 'reset' had run its course. Each capital saw the downward spiral to have been caused by the other side and perceptions of the most thorny issues consistently did not add up.¹⁰¹ For instance, while Moscow – unlike Washington – believed “the Snowden affair was a very small issue and was only

⁹⁷ Stent, *Limits of Partnership*.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

⁹⁹ The Justice for Sergei Magnitsky Act was adopted as a response to the death of lawyer Sergei Magnitsky in a Russian prison. Magnitsky had uncovered large-scale embezzlement on the part of Russian law enforcement and tax collection officials. It was alleged that he had been denied medical care and tortured. *Ibid.*, p. 252.

¹⁰⁰ 'Statement by the White House Press Secretary', 7 August 2013, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/07/statement-press-secretary-president-s-travel-russia>.

¹⁰¹ Legvold, *Return to Cold War*.

sensitive with the media”, Russian elites were “outraged” by the open position adopted by US Vice-President Biden that Putin should not return as President. This: “was perceived not just by Putin and his people (*svoi*), but by the entire political elite, as a US attempt to influence Russian national sovereignty.”¹⁰²

Russia’s national interests after the ‘reset’

Russia’s national interests adapted in response to the tensions with the United States outlined above, but also to other shifting international contexts, including the ‘Arab Spring’ and the strengthening of non-Western economies. While the overarching framework for Russia’s national interests evolved from the pursuit of pragmatic cooperation with the West (Chapter 2) to greater assertiveness amidst continued cooperation (Chapter 3), to prioritizing economic modernization (Chapter 4), it took a civilizational turn after the collapse of the ‘reset’¹⁰³. From 2012, President Putin revived the assertive element in Russia’s foreign policy.

The shift from rapprochement with the West under President Medvedev to greater assertiveness from 2012 was driven by tensions with Washington, the political and economic rise of non-Western nations such as China, as well as Russia’s own enhanced economic and military strength.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, by 2012 Moscow had become increasingly confident that the US is a declining power, proving unable to successfully complete military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, stabilize the Middle East, constrain Russia, or maintain a viable international economic order.¹⁰⁵ While President Putin had already become more assertive vis-à-vis the West between 2005 and 2008, the period after 2012 was different in that the Russian leadership was far more

¹⁰² Interview with a Russian source.

¹⁰³ Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy*.

¹⁰⁴ For Russia’s efforts to modernize its military after the 2008 war with Georgia, see A. Bryce-Rogers, ‘Russian Military Reform in the Aftermath of the 2008 Russia-Georgia War’, *Demokratizatsiya*, vol. 21, issue 3, summer 2013.

¹⁰⁵ Tsygankov, *Russia’s Foreign Policy*, p. 236.

convinced that the unipolar moment was over and Russia had the means and the will to help build a truly multipolar order.

Both in response to continued US criticism of Russian domestic affairs and in the name of multipolarity, the leadership promoted Russia as a conservative power committed to defending distinct values. The new ‘civilizationalist’ discourse resonated with the Russian public, Statist and Eurasianist elites. By 2012, tensions with the West had substantially weakened the position of those Westernists who had backed Medvedev’s efforts to pursue a ‘reset’ with Washington.¹⁰⁶ That said, it is important to note that Russia’s course since 2012 has remained Statist. The idea of Russia as a distinct civilization was instrumentalized mainly in order to give an ideological justification to a foreign policy pursuing the classical Statist objectives of making Russia a strong and sovereign state. Putin’s civilizational discourse, rather than signalling a deep-seated shift in Russia’s cultural affinities, served to promote the idea of Russia as one powerful pillar in a multipolar world. Given its resonance for a broad public and an elite audience, the discourse enabled the leadership to forge mass loyalty to the state, deflect the appeal of ethnic nationalism, and brush aside Western criticism of Russia’s human rights record.¹⁰⁷

While the post-2012 mix of Russian national interests prioritized greater assertiveness vis-à-vis the West, as well as closer ties with non-Western nations, the Russian leadership remained interested in good relations with Europe and the US, including through cooperation in counterterrorism, non-proliferation, and the economic sphere. The 2013 Russian Foreign Policy Concept reflected this mix of objectives, arguing that the West was weakening and destabilizing the international system, highlighting Russia’s role in a multipolar world, stressing the CIS and

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 240.

the creation of a Eurasian Economic Union as policy priorities, all the while calling for a solid economic foundation for Russia-West relations.

Russia's cooperation in demilitarizing Syria's chemical weapons was fully consonant with the new course. Primarily aimed at thwarting perceived US ambitions to topple the Assad regime, it represented a continuation of the Russian leadership's assertive policy of saying 'never again' to US-backed 'colour revolutions' in the Middle East. Moscow also sought to leverage cooperation to halt the downward spiral in Russian-US relations. Reflecting these various considerations, the Kremlin's decision to cooperate in September 2013 enjoyed wide support among Russian elites. As one source explained, the Syrian case generated less discussion internally than the Kremlin's decision to work with the US against Iran in 2010. "First because the decision after the Eastern Ghouta attack was taken so quickly. Second because its technical nature was emphasized over the political implications, and third because it was not viewed as changing Russia's strategy in the Syrian war. Indeed, everyone was satisfied: the liberals, because Russia cooperated with the US, and the Statists, because they could argue that the US cannot achieve anything on its own."¹⁰⁸

4.2) "The Russians delivered the Syrians" – Russian cooperation as essential to the narrow task of demilitarization

The introductory chapter explains that expectations of reciprocity in cooperation cannot be assessed without considering how the parties construe the meaning of their interaction. The scope for linkage, it is noted, should be partly determined by the perceived relevance and costliness of Russian actions. As shown earlier in this chapter, the coercive element was essential to eliciting Russian cooperation in the demilitarization of chemical weapons in Syria. That said, most US officials still considered the Russian contribution to joint disarmament in Syria as critical. Although linkage diplomacy was not a driver of Russia's initial decision to cooperate, American

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Kortunov.

perceptions of the meaningfulness of cooperation still raises the question of whether diffuse reciprocity was at play.

Overall, Obama administration officials assessed Russia's role in cooperation as meaningful, in that the operation could never have succeeded without Moscow's communication with the Assad regime: "the Russians delivered the Syrians, I never thought the Syrians were going to agree to this."¹⁰⁹ Ambassador Ford recalled great relief when the Russian initiative to cooperate emerged in early September 2013, since it: "appeared like a *deus ex machina* to solve the American dilemma. Had there not been a Russian proposal, it's very possible there would have been no US strike and there would have been absolutely nothing to show for the American red line."¹¹⁰ Other US officials recalled early scepticism in September 2013, thinking ["this will never work"], but admitted that subsequent practice showed Russia could get the Assad regime to cooperate, although the process was not without frustrations. Yet, while conceding Russia's importance, most officials were still careful not to unduly praise its role in cooperation, mindful that US and Russian objectives in Syria remained sharply at odds overall.

Some US officials involved with the daily practical aspects of cooperation noted their frustrations with a perceived minimal Russian contribution past the 'limelight' of September 2013's diplomacy in Geneva and New York: "All the burden on identifying the partners, finding locations for destruction, the decision to use US capability on a ship, all of the removal operations work, this was done by the US, the OPCW, the UN etc."¹¹¹ However, this is not how things were seen at more senior levels by US officials less involved in the day-to-day implementation of cooperation. McFaul, who delivered demarches in Moscow in the event of delays during the operation, could not recall their specific contents and concluded that the issues could not have

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Gottemoeller.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Ford.

¹¹¹ Interview with Hersman.

been “sufficiently noisy” or problematic, but acknowledged: “I’m sure if you were a lower-level official working on this, it felt like that every single day.”¹¹²

While US perceptions of Russian ‘status posturing’ in cooperation were present, they did not dominate the American view of Russia’s role in cooperation, which was assessed by most as “meeting expectations” at a minimum, at best critical towards achieving the intended outcome. Many respondents also noted that the Russian ship donated for protection in the maritime operation was positively received. Yet others argued that any Russian involvement beyond what was forthcoming – specifically hypothetical participation in the hydrolysis destruction process onboard the MV *Cape Ray* – would have been difficult, either because the Russians did not have the expertise, or due to legal aspects given the sensitive gear on the vessel.

4.3) Looking for evidence of linkage diplomacy

In the above two sections I argue that Russia was keen to halt the downward slide in bilateral relations with the US in 2013, and Russian cooperation was considered critical towards the goal of chemical demilitarization in Syria. Nevertheless, the Kremlin did not pursue direct linkage diplomacy in cooperation. Moreover, as the cooperative effort moved from the diplomatic phase of September 2013 into practical implementation over subsequent months, the prospects of Russia pursuing direct linkage diplomacy would turn out to be inherently limited.

Embarking with the US on joint chemical disarmament in Syria, Russian officials rather hoped for an ‘atmospheric’ change in bilateral relations with Washington. At the press conference following the signing of the US-Russia framework agreement in September 2013, Lavrov read out a long list of issues – including the peaceful use of nuclear energy, drug control, cyber and

¹¹² Interview with McFaul.

international information security, and economic issues – expressing his hope that Russian-US cooperation on these would now be possible.¹¹³ Press commentary similarly suggested that cooperation represented: “an opportunity to break the stifling web of mutual estrangement that has been entangling relations between the two powers.”¹¹⁴

While Russian experts interviewed did not go as far as to suggest that Moscow hoped for another ‘reset’, they argued there was a desire to: “re-establish a positive trend in bilateral relations.” Some hinted at the expectation of further arms control cooperation and a broader resolution to the Syrian crisis, the likely calculation in the Kremlin being: “Now that we did this, we can solve the Syrian problem overall, and then even tackle the non-proliferation agenda more broadly.” There was also consensus among Russian sources that the Kremlin expected status gains from cooperation, hoping that Washington would accept Moscow as an equal partner as a result of the successful chemical weapons operation.¹¹⁵

US diplomats with direct responsibility for the Russia relationship also believed that Moscow sought reciprocity in cooperation, one arguing that: “in terms of what the Russian leadership was saying to us [...] there was clearly in the fall of 2013 an eagerness to look at multilateral cooperation but also bilateral issues.”¹¹⁶ Another diplomat, based at the US Embassy in Moscow, felt that the Kremlin hoped to prevent further deterioration of the Russian-US relationship as a positive side effect of cooperation. Other officials, narrowly focusing upon arms control or the Middle East, did not share that sentiment. Yet other individuals in the Obama administration sought diffuse reciprocity themselves, hoping that the improved climate with Russia would

¹¹³ ‘Sergey Lavrov During His Joint Press Conference with John Kerry’, 14 September 2013, <http://rusemb.org.uk/foreignpolicy/1295>.

¹¹⁴ F. Lukyanov, ‘Poimali na slove’ (“They Took Him By His Word”), *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, 11 September 2013, <https://rg.ru/2013/09/11/lukyanov.html>.

¹¹⁵ Interviews with multiple Russian sources.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Wallander.

provide an: “opportunity to make other things less hostile.”¹¹⁷ Finally, some anticipated a positive spill-over onto the P5+1 negotiations with Russia on Iran towards what would become Resolution 2231.

4.4) Explaining the sparse evidence of linkage and reciprocity

If Russia’s cooperation was considered meaningful vis-à-vis the intended objective, which should have facilitated reciprocity, what factor narrowed the scope of its successful pursuit? While institutional-contextual factors partly account for the sparse evidence of linkage diplomacy during the September 2013 negotiations, the key reason for the shrinking scope for reciprocity in this case study lies in the combination of seriously deteriorating Russian-US bilateral relations and the challenges in implementing an unprecedented disarmament process on the ground. Indeed, once the Ukraine crisis furthered the downward spiral in ties between Moscow and Washington in late 2013, while the security situation in Syria continued to pose daily risks to the Joint Mission, officials on both sides exerted great efforts to ‘de-link’ cooperation from crisis. As a result, hopes for diffuse reciprocity receded into the background.

Explaining the sparsity of direct linkage diplomacy: institutional-contextual factors

I show throughout this study that the institutional form of cooperation has certain implications for the pursuit of linkage diplomacy in cooperation. The Syrian case study highlights this finding. The September 2013 talks in Geneva and New York constrained opportunities for the pursuit of linkage, confirming my proposition in the introduction that longer periods of cooperation are more conducive to reciprocity. Negotiations towards the US-Russian framework agreement were held under enormous time pressure, which greatly curtailed the possibility to pursue linkage. As one official on the US delegation recalled events in early September: “I was out of the office for

¹¹⁷ Interview with a US source.

something, I walked back in and [a colleague] said: ‘We are going to Geneva tomorrow’. I said: ‘Okay, what do we think we will actually get out of it?’ – ‘We will find out when we get there’. So, everything was happening so fast.”¹¹⁸ Wendy Sherman, Under-Secretary for Political Affairs, emphasized that: “within 48 hours this [US] government put an interagency team together, agreed on a policy [...] we went to Geneva, and over a weekend found a way to get chemical weapons out of Syria.”¹¹⁹

Turning to institutional factors, the US delegation in Geneva involved mainly very senior and lower level arms control officials. The Russian delegation was led by Lavrov, who brought diplomats and technical experts from the Foreign Ministry, Defence Ministry, and *Minpromtorg*. The technical experts, however, were hardly involved in any of the actual negotiations, which were exclusively high-level: “Even though we were filling hotel rooms, we were not meeting, and when we met, they were information exchanges [...] technical advice was going up on both sides.”¹²⁰ Another individual present in Geneva recalled that: “there were larger group discussions, where you would have 60 people in the room, but then also the side discussions between Kerry and Lavrov, where the ‘real things’ were getting hammered out.”¹²¹

Multiple US and Russian officials confirmed that the core of the deal was reached at the highest level between Kerry and Lavrov. I argue that, given the participation of mainly technical experts in what were short-lived and condensed negotiations, opportunities for conveying or receiving attempts at linkage were limited in Geneva. That said, it is possible that Kerry and Lavrov themselves discussed the implications of joint chemical weapons demilitarization in Syria for the

¹¹⁸ Interview with Terrell.

¹¹⁹ ‘Wendy Sherman at a Press Roundtable’, Washington DC, 25 September 2015, <http://www.state.gov/p/us/rm/2015/245745.htm>.

¹²⁰ Interview with a US source.

¹²¹ Interview with Terrell.

US-Russian relationship, since they led the most crucial discussions in Geneva. Therefore, institutional-contextual factors cannot conclusively explain why linkage did not occur.

Successful de-linkage amid the Ukraine crisis

While it could not be confirmed that Russian officials pursued linkage diplomacy amid the September 2013 diplomacy, scope for the subsequent pursuit of reciprocity was constrained. This was because efforts on both sides turned to de-linking the joint disarmament work from the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis in late 2013 and early 2014. Participants recalled a conscious and concerted effort to create a ‘firewall’ around the demilitarization process when things went further awry between Washington and Moscow. That such insulation would succeed was not a given. One Pentagon source noted that a number of US officials wanted all cooperation with Russia to stop after events in Crimea in February 2014, and Laura Holgate received an ‘exemption’ to continue implementing Syrian chemical weapons demilitarization with Russian counterparts and pursue dialogue on critical arms control issues.¹²²

De-linking was also important given the unprecedented and risky nature of the disarmament effort. Although the process was coordinated by the OPCW and UN: “no one was specifically in charge, what kind of operation it would be was unclear, and it would have to be figured out along the way.”¹²³ According to a senior UN official, while the September agreements and Resolution 2118 were an important basis for cooperation: “after that it was basically: you are on your own.”¹²⁴ A number of subsequent ‘Lessons Learnt’ reports, commissioned by various participants

¹²² Phone interview with Christine Parthemore, 17 August 2017.

¹²³ Interview with a source from the Joint Mission.

¹²⁴ Interview with a UN official.

in the Joint Mission, have noted in great detail the legal, financial, and operational challenges for various actors, which resulted from the *sui generis* character of the project.¹²⁵

Both the US and Russian governments had great expertise in chemical weapons destruction and verification through CTR work. Yet Syria presented an unprecedented challenge, being a country at war in which it was considered unfeasible to destroy the arsenal on-site, given the volatile and unpredictable security situation.¹²⁶ The unprecedented and risky nature of the mission focused participants' minds, causing everyone involved to concentrate on the immediate tasks at hand, rather than be distracted by either adverse developments at the *regional* (ie. in the Syrian war) or *extra-regional* (ie. the Ukraine crisis) levels, or indeed think about the positive knock-on effects of cooperation. Owing to great practical challenges in cooperation: “there needed to be a lot of ‘What is really important today?’ versus ‘What is important in a month?’”¹²⁷

One way in which the negative trajectory in bilateral relations did shape cooperation was in the prospects of a joint NATO-Russia mission. In early 2014, as the US was putting together the security envelope for the *Cape Ray*, there were consultations on whether Russia could participate under the auspices of a NATO-Russia mission. While NATO did not consider the Russian element to be substantively necessary, it intended a symbolic gesture of wanting to pursue cooperation.¹²⁸ Discussions were held in Brussels, a general agreement was reached by the end of January, and the two sides began discussing practical questions in February.¹²⁹ However,

¹²⁵ Makdisi and Hindawi, ‘Creative Diplomacy amidst a Brutal Conflict’; ‘UNODA and OPCW, Workshop on the lessons learned from the international maritime operation to remove and transport the Syrian chemical materials in furtherance of Security Council Resolution 2118 (2013) and relevant OPCW Executive Council decisions’, OPCW Headquarters, The Hague, 9-11 March 2015; ‘Operation RECSYR – Lessons Learned: A Norwegian perspective’. None of these documents are in the public domain, but were kindly sent to the author by officials interviewed.

¹²⁶ R. Trapp, ‘Elimination of the Chemical Weapons Stockpile of Syria’, *Journal of Conflict & Security Law*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2014, pp. 7–23.

¹²⁷ Interview with Terrell.

¹²⁸ Interview with Vershbow.

¹²⁹ Interview with a Russian source.

following what the US and its partners termed the Russian ‘annexation’ of Crimea, NATO walked away from the project, which reportedly left the Russian side disappointed. Furthermore, since cooperation had to lead to successful completion at a time when the bilateral relationship was increasingly frayed, opportunities for ‘positive knock-ons’ were perceived to be extremely limited. As one US source put it: “I don’t think between January and June 2014, anyone was saying: ‘This chemical weapons operation feels so good, let us do more.’”¹³⁰

Yet, despite the sharp deterioration in US-Russian relations, it was possible to de-link cooperation in Syria, given political will at the very top – “Kerry and Lavrov getting along and wanting this to succeed.”¹³¹ Senior commitment on the US and Russian sides was also considered critical by other participants in the Joint Mission, such as Denmark and Norway.¹³² Joint US-Russian political will to see the operation through against all odds was perceived to hold the entire endeavour together and generate the necessary level of consensus within the OPCW and the UN Security Council.

Based on the sum total of primary evidence I studied on the Syria case, I conclude that Russian-US bilateral crisis did not disrupt narrow arms control cooperation in Syria for the simple reason that the security issue was successfully de-linked from deteriorating relations. Since 2011, the Syrian Civil War has represented a regional security issue important to both Washington and Moscow, the question of chemical weapons demilitarization amounting to a more narrow issue *within* the macro issue. Cooperation succeeded because, while there was continued interest dissonance between the US and Russia on the Syrian Civil War overall, there was real interest convergence intra-issue in the more narrow belief that Syria’s possession of chemical weapons posed a threat to the people of Syria, the wider region, and the international community.

¹³⁰ Interview with Hersman.

¹³¹ Interview with a US source.

¹³² Interviews with Danish and Norwegian officials.

Arms control cooperation in Syria also remained possible because it allowed the participants to draw on their shared CTR experience, while implementing it in a third country. Finally, the Kremlin staked its reputation on delivering its end of the bargain, and being perceived as a US peer in cooperation. Seeing the operation through was crucial to a Russian leadership intent on showing the world that unipolarity was a relic of the past, and Russia was a responsible great power with the means and will to shape outcomes in a multipolar world. That said, bilateral crisis *did* sharply narrow the scope for reciprocity over Russia's cooperation, even though the latter was considered critical to the intended objective of chemical disarmament.

5) Conclusion

This chapter argues that Russia's cooperation with the US in destroying Syria's declared chemical weapons stockpile between September 2013 and mid 2014 was driven by the objective of averting a punitive Western military strike against the Assad regime, which Moscow feared might precipitate the forced departure of Assad, cause wider regional escalation, while simultaneously heightening the risk of loss of control over Syria's chemicals. Thus Moscow was narrowly driven by its regional security interests, with the desire to thwart Western-backed regime change in the Middle East and prevent mounting instability close to Russia's own borders judged a priority, while concerns with WMD proliferation were a secondary concern.

If Russia's apprehensions about the Syrian chemical stockpile had been the driving force behind cooperation, Moscow could have pursued it earlier, agreeing to its bilateral arms control consultations with the US resulting in joint action over Syria. Yet since the Russian leadership prioritized its concern with Syrian state order over its non-proliferation interests in the region, it took the spectre of military force after the August 2013 Eastern Ghouta attack for Russia to act.

That said, Russian official concerns with WMD control in the Middle East were an additional driver of cooperation, not just because their intelligence exchanges with US counterparts led to heightened levels of concern with the threat emanating from Syria, but also because Moscow believed that eliciting Syria's accession to the CWC was a more effective way of dealing with that threat than a Western military strike that might endanger the controllability of materials.

While the threat of force played a decisive role in facilitating cooperation, its subsequent form – a hybrid disarmament framework embodied in an OPCW-UN Joint Mission mandate – allowed the Russian government to stress the consensual nature of Syria's cooperation, which was important for status reasons and served Russia's primary interest in protecting Syria's sovereignty. Given this overarching concern, the Kremlin also pursued leverage for the Syrian government within cooperation, pushing for Western recognition of an independent Syrian role in multilateral cooperation, shielding the regime from further allegations of chemical weapons attacks, and supplying Damascus with additional military hardware, all with a view to strengthening its hand in future Geneva negotiations.

Since Russian-US cooperation on Syria played out during a period of exacerbating bilateral tension, there was also a Russian hope of leveraging the successful joint disarmament endeavour to render the climate between Moscow and Washington less hostile overall. Limited hope of US diffuse reciprocity in return for Russia's cooperation extended to the Syrian Civil War more broadly, as well as the shared arms control agenda. The Russian leadership also pursued status gains within cooperation, stressing its co-equal partnership with the US and carving out a prominent role in the maritime operation that provided security for the Joint Mission.

The institutional context of cooperation – technical talks preceding the Eastern Ghouta attack, followed by negotiations under enormous time pressure in September 2013, followed by the

unprecedented and risky implementation phase of Resolution 2118 – significantly narrowed the scope for a hypothetical Russian pursuit of linkage diplomacy. Yet since cooperation occurred against the twin backdrops of exacerbating Russian-US tension, as well as a volatile security situation in Syria, few Russian and US officials hoped for reciprocity in cooperation, rather focusing their efforts upon de-linking Syria’s chemical disarmament from the myriad risk factors and tensions.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

1) Argument

This study has argued that Russia's cooperation with the US in the Middle East is predominantly driven by its security, non-proliferation, and economic interests in that region, more than by expectations of US reciprocity. This holds true during times of both improving and deteriorating bilateral relations. While direct linkage diplomacy vis-à-vis the US does not meet the test of explanatory variable in this study, Russian concerns with status, a preference for multilateral diplomacy, and the desire to protect the authority of the UN Security Council have been identified as auxiliary drivers of Russia's cooperation with the US.

Furthermore, Russia seeks to build regional leverage in cooperation, driven by its historical interests with Middle Eastern allies. As this study shows, leverage building in cooperation is intended to bolster both Moscow and its regional partners, and can take the form of expanding economic and political ties with client states that are under US pressure, curtailing unilateral US influence over conflict resolution, shielding clients diplomatically, and providing weapons systems, as well as championing consensual over coercive approaches to arms control.

Russian pursuit of direct linkage in cooperation could not be confirmed from the extensive evidence gathered. That said, there is evidence that Moscow pursues diffuse reciprocity, is eager to accumulate goodwill or 'credit' with the US, which can then be used to find accommodation over other bilateral issues. The pursuit of diffuse reciprocity is an important additional driver of Russian cooperation, especially when Russian-US bilateral relations are on an upward trajectory (as seen in chapters 2 and 4), which is captured by the contextual variable in the research design. This reflects the fact that, while interests in the Middle East are important to Moscow in their own right, the US remains a key reference point for Russia's foreign policy. Discrete decisions on

Middle East security issues that involve US interests are generally judged partly in light of their implications for Russian-US relations.

However, the success of cooperation is not dependent upon the contextual variable. While a positive trajectory in the Russian-US relationship is always perceived to facilitate issue-specific cooperation in the Middle East, a negative trajectory has no automatic adverse effect on cooperation. Indeed, issue-specific cooperation can be fully de-linked from evolving bilateral crisis when there is sufficient political commitment on both sides.

The institutional form of cooperation, which results from the specific nature of any security issue, marginally influences the scope for Russian linkage diplomacy. Especially when cooperation involves ad hoc and short-lived diplomacy, or technical talks led by low- to mid-level issue experts, as opposed to sustained engagement between senior officials with responsibility for the broader relationship, opportunities for linkage diplomacy are inherently limited. Yet the sparse evidence of linkage in Russian-US cooperation is more convincingly explained by stated policy and US perceptions of the costliness and meaningfulness of Russian actions, rather than by the institutional-contextual factors stipulated in the cooperation literature. When Russian-US relations deteriorate (as seen in chapters 3 and 5), scope for reciprocity in cooperation is especially limited.

2) Findings on Russia's cooperation with the US in the Middle East

2.1) Russian cooperation today – beyond the Cold War's crisis management

While Soviet cooperation with the US in the Middle East was overwhelmingly tacit and consisted in joint crisis management, Russian-American cooperation has been far more varied in form and

occasion since 2001. Moscow's calls on the Assad regime to withdraw Syrian troops from Lebanon in 2005 perhaps constituted the closest to the type of tacit cooperation characteristic of the Cold War, since it entailed the fortuitous pursuit of a shared objective without close coordination of positions between Russia and the US. The other cases examined involved explicit cooperation, not just in order to avert military escalation (Chapter 5) but in pursuit of additional objectives, such as the non-proliferation of WMD. The Russian leadership has also been eager to cooperate *after* regional escalation, in order to mitigate its anticipated economic, security, and political ramifications, for instance, following the March 2003 US invasion of Iraq. Overall, scenarios in which the Kremlin has chosen cooperation with the US have expanded in tandem with the crystallization of a more complex Middle Eastern security landscape after 9/11.

Russian desire to be involved in regional cooperation for status reasons outlived the end of the Cold War. As noted in the introduction, the USSR frequently advocated for multilateral approaches to address Middle Eastern security challenges, eager to be recognized as the equal of the US. The Soviet leadership wanted to signal that "there is no problem anywhere that can be solved without the USSR or in opposition to her",¹ whereas Washington preferred a unilateralist-exclusionary approach, confident in its own capabilities and either underestimating or distrusting Moscow's prospective contributions. Following the American unilateralist affront in invading Iraq in 2003, Russian status concerns were especially focused upon protecting the authority of the UN Security Council. The Iraq War heightened fears among Russian elites that the UN was becoming sidelined and that Russia's veto right as a permanent Council member was losing its value.

¹ Breslauer, 'On Collaborative Competition'.

Yet Russian official pleas for multilateral approaches to solving Middle Eastern security issues have represented more than just a Cold War concern with status and prestige. While Moscow's initial cooperation with the US post-Iraq invasion formed amid a perception of US superiority and impunity, there was from 2004 a growing Russian sense of America's Middle East policy being incompetent and destructive. Russian cooperation in chapters 3 (Lebanon) and 4 (Iran) was, therefore, also driven by wariness about US unilateralist solutions to regional problems, which Russian officials believed would further exacerbate conflict. Especially after the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya, the idea of a successful military operation led by the West disappeared from Russian discourse, replaced by a deep-seated conviction that everything the US touches 'falls apart'. Moscow's cooperation in demilitarizing Syria's chemical weapons (Chapter 5) was then fully aimed at thwarting a further repetition of what was perceived as amateurish US policy in the Middle East.

2.2) It's the security, stupid!

This study confirms the explanatory centrality of Proposition 1, which was introduced in Chapter 1 and stipulates that: "Russia's cooperation with the United States in the Middle East is driven by its narrow security, economic, and other interests in that region." The empirical analysis conducted further allows us to make a more nuanced statement about the relative balance between Moscow's security, non-proliferation, commercial, and status interests in the Middle East. Except for Russian cooperation with the US in the aftermath of *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, which was equally driven by commercial interests in post-war Iraq at a time of Russian economic weakness, as well as a desire to return the Iraq file to UN auspices, security and status concerns have largely outweighed economic considerations in the other cases examined.

Moscow's support for Syrian compliance with Resolution 1559, its decision to 'discipline' Tehran in 2010, and its participation in Syrian chemical demilitarization were all, first and foremost, driven by security considerations, as well as a realization that Russia's failure to join a multilateral effort to address these issues would leave room for US unilateralism, coercive diplomacy, and possibly even military action. This is not to say that economic considerations proved irrelevant. Indeed, endorsing sanctions against Iran in 2010, Russia realized that Russian businesses would incur economic losses, yet calculated that these could be compensated through more attractive commercial relationships with American companies. Economic considerations have figured in one way or another in Moscow's reasoning in all the cases examined. Yet, while Russian commercial interests in the Middle East have, compared to the Cold War, become elevated in importance and geographically more diverse, they still remain subordinate to security and status concerns, at least in the cases examined.

Turning to security concerns specifically, a Cold War focus upon preventing superpower confrontation has been replaced by a more comprehensive array of perceived challenges. Whilst Moscow was less anxious than Washington about the possibility of Iran militarizing its nuclear programme, or the presence of chemical weapons in Syria, Russian officials have, overall, shared US concern with non-conventional arms control in the Middle East. The region's proximity to Russian borders has fuelled this apprehension. Furthermore, the Soviet Cold War worry about regional escalation leading to superpower confrontation has transformed into a broader fear of regional instability, the collapse of state institutions, the rise of extremist groups, terrorism, and a spill-over of these phenomena to Central Asia and the Caucasus.

In recent years, these security concerns have also become increasingly bound up with Russian apprehensions about domestic and regime stability at home and in its direct neighbourhood. As

the Russian leadership's fears of Western-backed regime change in the Middle East intensified following the Iraq invasion, so have its concerns about 'colour revolutions' in the post-Soviet space, which Russia sees as its legitimate sphere of influence. As a result, domestic interests have become gradually bound up with the Kremlin's security interests in the Middle East over the course of the four cases examined. Its relationship with the US had been the main frame of reference for the USSR's diplomacy in the Middle East, in the sense that it had sought to limit US influence, while cooperating to avert a superpower confrontation. Today, America has returned as a key prism through which Russia's Middle East diplomacy is formulated, to the extent that the Kremlin views the region as a line of defence against Western-backed 'colour revolutions'.

2.3) No cooperation without leverage building

Across all the cases analysed, the Russian government was concerned that cooperation, which was considered necessary given Moscow's security interests, would produce relative US gains on the regional issue. Supporting Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, or ridding the Assad regime of chemical weapons in 2013, Russian officials feared undue weakening of Damascus vis-à-vis domestic and international opponents, which would enable the American goal of regime change. Therefore, the Russian leadership calculated that it needed to balance out its support for US policy by building additional leverage for its regional clients.

Whether Russia builds leverage by modifying the terms of cooperation itself, or by taking additional policy steps, has varied by case study. In the chapters on Iraq and Iran, long drawn-out negotiations at the UN Security Council towards resolutions 1483 (May 2003) and 1929 (June 2010) entailed some room for 'horse-trading'. Russian negotiators had an opportunity to shape the final text of both resolutions such that their clients' and Moscow's own leverage would be protected to the greatest extent possible. The final draft of Resolution 1483, for instance,

prevented complete American control over Iraqi oil resources and extended the ‘Oil-for-Food’ regime, accommodating key Russian economic interests in Iraq and thus ensuring leverage for Moscow itself. Similarly, during the negotiations towards Resolution 1929, Russian diplomats lobbied for the draft to exempt the transfer of air-defence systems to Iran and opposed any sanctions which would have hurt Russian businesses. In the chapters on Lebanon and Syria, on the other hand, Moscow took additional precautions to sustain leverage, for instance, by selling conventional weapons to Damascus.

These Russian actions suggest that the assumption of a binary choice in cooperation – i.e. fully cooperate or do not cooperate at all – is a drastic oversimplification of reality in international politics.² Instead, available policy choices are often multidimensional and: “graduated policies allow the state to achieve intermediate levels of cooperation in circumstances in which it is unwilling to risk complete cooperation.”³ This understanding of Russia’s behaviour in cooperation is also consonant with this study’s Constructivist understanding of Russia’s national interests as multifaceted and subject to constant internal contestation.

To return to the earlier theoretical debate about whether states are *rational egoists* seeking absolute gains, or rather *defensive positionalists* driven by concerns about relative gains, it appears that both characterizations apply to Russian government reasoning in cooperation. Joseph Grieco, cited in the introduction, holds that once a state is anxious about relative gains, it will leave or sharply limit its commitment to cooperation. The empirical analysis, however, suggests that the Russian government does not outright defect from cooperation if it believes its support for American policy will increase US influence over a regional ally, but will instead engage in measures to limit anticipated American gains. It will either seek to modify the terms of

² Snidal, ‘Coordination versus Prisoners’ Dilemma’.

³ Ibid., p. 928.

cooperation itself, or take additional policy steps in order to counter-balance the anticipated effects of cooperation on US leverage. In this context, Moscow is both interested in building leverage for itself – mainly in protecting its commercial relationships with clients and shielding the UN Security Council’s authority – as well as for its regional partners, protecting them from anticipated vulnerability.

2.4) Little evidence of linkage diplomacy

In the introduction I argue that if Russia’s cooperation with the US in the Middle East was found to be driven by linkage, we would expect the actual scope for such linkage in implementation to be driven by institutional-contextual factors, by US perceptions of the meaningfulness and costliness of Russian actions, as well as the trajectory of the Russian-US bilateral relationship. Whilst this study has shown that the Russian government’s interests in the Middle East itself, rather than linkage, principally drive its cooperation in the region, the rare evidence of direct linkage as even merely a contextual driver of Russian policy was an unforeseen finding. Linkage, implying a Russian strategy of explicitly making its course of action concerning a given Middle Eastern security issue *conditional* upon American behaviour on a different issue, appears to occur very rarely.

There are several reasons why this analysis generated sparse evidence of explicit linkage. First, government officials on both sides reject linkage as a matter of fundamental policy. From Washington’s perspective, those issues on which Russia has been assumed to expect US concessions – for instance a sphere of influence in the post-Soviet space, or the US abandoning its European missile defence plans – are not up for trading as a matter of principle. Since Moscow, on the other hand, always casts its policy choices on the Middle East as reflecting a historically

consistent position which is also driven by considerations of international law, the notion of its stance being up for bargaining with the US is also firmly rejected.

A second key reason why evidence of linkage was sparse in the cases examined relates to US perceptions of Russian cooperation. As noted in the introduction, for linkage to work, it is necessary that Russian officials be perceived to successfully deter, i.e. present the US with credible evidence that its behaviour on a given Middle Eastern issue will be influenced by American behaviour on another issue.⁴ Moscow, in other words, must appear to have a credible alternative to cooperation if it wishes to successfully pursue linkage. Furthermore, the theoretical discussion notes that perceived intentionality, as well as the costliness of concessions, are important elements favouring reciprocity in cooperation.

However, in the chapters on Iraq and the 'Cedar Revolution', the Bush administration considered Russia to be marginal to its policy-making in the Middle East and was sceptical that the Kremlin held substantial leverage over its historical clients in Baghdad and Damascus. As a result, Russian cooperation following *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, or in enforcing Resolution 1559, was considered important but far from critical to US objectives. Putin's government was also perceived to have had little choice but to cooperate, eager to preserve its seat at the table or desperate to appear to be 'on the right side of history'. The introduction outlined a continuum of cooperation, ranging from cooperation with completely harmonious interests, to cooperation with some conflict of interest, to cooperation compelled through external coercion or deterrence. A US perception that the Russian government had no viable alternative but to cooperate, given its relative weakness vis-à-vis the US, or given the economic and status costs it would incur if it rejected cooperation, was especially prominent in the earlier case studies on Iraq and Lebanon.

⁴ Schelling, *Strategy of Conflict*, p. 13.

In the chapters on Iran and Syria, on the other hand, Russian cooperation was considered more meaningful towards achieving America's regional arms control objectives. In the case of Russian support for Resolution 1929, there was additional US recognition of the economic and political cost to Russia, given its relationship with the Islamic Republic. The perceived relevance and costliness of Russian cooperation on the Iran nuclear issue heightened American willingness to reciprocate, during a period of 'reset' with Russia. Four years later, however, the perceived importance of Russian cooperation in chemical demilitarization in Syria did not elicit the same US reciprocity, partly given the serious deterioration in bilateral relations by that point, and partly given the stark divergence of the partners' interests in the Syrian Civil War more broadly. This finding suggests that the perceived meaningfulness of Russian cooperation in itself is not enough to elicit US reciprocity over cooperation.

Finally, institutional-contextual factors matter little in accounting for evidence of linkage. The introduction suggests that occurrence of linkage should partly be a function of the constellation and mandate of government actors involved, as well as the temporal characteristics of cooperation. First, I note the relevance of seniority, suggesting that it should only be once policies percolate to the top and higher echelon officials who have responsibility across multiple issue areas discuss cooperation that opportunities for linkage diplomacy open up. Second, I flag the importance of time, proposing that extended or iterated engagement in cooperation should heighten the scope for linkage, since it permits the actors involved to make their strategy contingent on prior choices of the other side.

That said, while the cases examined exhibit variance on: US-Russian bilateral versus multilateral cooperation; the government agencies and actors involved; the nature of cooperation (negotiations versus military-technical cooperation), and the time horizon involved, evidence of direct linkage

was consistently rare. In all cases analysed, senior involvement complemented the discussions held at lower levels – whether it was Igor Ivanov and Colin Powell talking about Resolution 1483, presidents Obama and Medvedev working out the details of Resolution 1929, or Sergey Lavrov and John Kelly holding sidebars in Geneva to discuss the core of the Syrian chemical demilitarization effort. In other words, cooperation in the final instance always involved engagement between those officials holding leverage to decide what the trade-offs were and ‘what one could do’. Room for linkage existed in theory, had there been a conscious policy choice to pursue it. Furthermore, the temporal aspect could also have been conducive to linkage in the Iraq and Iran case studies, where cooperation on UN SC resolutions materialized in negotiations extending over many weeks or months. Nevertheless, evidence of linkage was sparse in these cases.

The chapter on Resolution 1929, which exhibits some evidence of direct linkage and extensive evidence of diffuse reciprocity in cooperation, was the only case study in which ‘the stars aligned’ and a range of factors conducive to linkage were present. Russian cooperation was assessed as both meaningful and costly, the institutional context entailed negotiations over many months and included senior level involvement and, crucially, the episode played out during a period in which the US government was, if not amenable to explicit trades, at least willing to reciprocate in cooperation.

In sum, the theoretical assumption that institutional-contextual factors facilitate linkage in cooperation could not be confirmed from the primary evidence gathered. Take away a conscious policy choice to pursue linkage, and absent perceptions of an actor’s concessions as meaningful or costly, then linkage is extremely unlikely, even in institutional settings that appear conducive to it. That said, since linkage, trades, and bargains could conceivably occur between select

officials at the highest level of government, this study cannot conclusively prove the absence of linkage diplomacy in Russian-US cooperation, but merely suggest that its pursuit is neither systemic, nor official policy, nor the key driver of Russian cooperation.

However, we should be cautious when drawing inferences from this finding about linkage diplomacy in inter-state relations generally, given the specific nature of the Russian-US relationship. Linkage diplomacy might well be easier to trace in multilateral trade negotiations, or be more visible in other great power relationships. This study has offered distinct insights, explaining why evidence of linkage is sparse in Russian-US diplomacy, as well as why it is not the primary driver of Russia's cooperation in the Middle East. While this finding does not lend itself to obvious generalizations, it does caution scholars against taking the general applicability of stipulations on linkage, offered by the cooperation literature and frequently recycled by contemporary pundit analysis on Russian-US relations, at face value. Further research is encouraged to probe whether the conclusions derived from this analysis apply to regional security cooperation in other great power constellations, for instance the US-China relationship.

2.5) Russia's tireless hope for US diffuse reciprocity

While explicit linkage in Russian-US cooperation could not be confirmed, the empirical analysis has highlighted the need for a more nuanced vocabulary, which adequately reflects the reality that Russian officials have expectations of cooperation that are less clearly specified than the canon on linkage suggests. Keohane's concept of 'diffuse reciprocity' helps to capture this idea.

Across all case studies examined, Russian cooperation, precipitated by regional interests, also pursued either a continued upward trajectory in the bilateral relationship with the US (chapters 2 and 4), or was designed to prevent it from unravelling further (chapters 3 and 5). In the case

studies on Iraq and Iran, the Russian government hoped that there would be an accretion of US goodwill with Russia over time. Following the 2003 Iraq invasion, for instance, the Putin government remained interested in pragmatic cooperation with the West, still: “wanted to test how far cooperation could go.”⁵ In the Lebanese and Syrian case studies, situations which entailed Russia’s cooperation amid tension with the US, diffuse reciprocity was conceived of in terms of Moscow forestalling the further unravelling of the bilateral relationship. Supporting the 2005 Syrian troop withdrawal from Lebanon, for instance, Russian officials expected that cooperation might “buy some space”⁶ for it on other issues and appeared eager to: “put the relationship back on track.”⁷

Evidence of Russian hope for diffuse reciprocity as a supporting driver of cooperation was strongest when the contextual variable – the trajectory of Russian-US relations – was improving. By contrast, in the final chapter on Syria’s chemical weapons ties between Moscow and Washington unravelled to such a point that any cautious expectations of diffuse reciprocity, still present in September 2013, gave way to an effort at complete de-linkage amid the Ukraine crisis a few months later. By early 2014, Russian-US relations were so strained that any expectations of reciprocity receded into the background and were replaced by a concerted effort to insulate cooperation from the rest of the bilateral relationship.

2.6) To Russia, status continues to matter

Furthermore, this study has shown status to be an important additional driver of Russia’s cooperation with the US in the Middle East, just as it was to the USSR. Russian official concerns with status have been reflected in Moscow’s protection of the UN Security Council’s authority,

⁵ Interview with a US official.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

its pursuit of a co-equal partnership with the US, and its efforts not to be cast as an international pariah that sides with Middle Eastern players perceived to be ‘on the wrong side of history’.

The authority of the UN Security Council

In this study the Russian government’s pursuit of status has been reflected in insistence on resolving the security issues examined exclusively through action authorized by the UN Security Council. Russian diplomacy following the 2003 Iraq invasion was principally driven by the desire to enhance the Council’s authority over settling Iraq’s political and economic future, and to constrain the scope for CPA unilateralism. Following the American circumvention of the UN in invading Iraq, the Russian leadership was concerned that its permanent seat on the Council would not depreciate in value. As senior officials representing the US at the UN put it, Russia: “wanted to have a seat at the table and help write the rules.”⁸

In early 2005, whilst the Russian delegation to the UN Security Council had abstained from Resolution 1559, Moscow cast its call for Syrian compliance with the text as supporting the authority of existing Council resolutions. A key reason for Russian support of UN sanctions against Iran in 2010 was its apprehension of a US-led sanctions effort outside the P5+1. Finally, Russia’s preference in 2013 for the Syrian chemical disarmament process to be led by the OPCW, rather than the UN, did not so much reflect reduced concern with the UN’s authority, but rather a desire to downplay the coercive elements entailed in the hybrid disarmament framework applied.

Thus, while Russian officials have championed the UN Security Council’s prerogative in dealing with the security issues analysed, Moscow has consistently opposed the activities of bodies created by the Council if it perceived that those exceed the original mandate, thereby undermining

⁸ Ibid.

the Council's exclusive authority. The Foreign Ministry's objection to sanctioning Syria amid the IIC investigation into Rafik Hariri's murder was justified with the argument that, if the IIC "would be able to introduce sanctions at its own discretion", this would constitute: "an unprecedented idea [that] virtually strips the UN Security Council of prerogatives it has in line with the UN Charter."⁹ As with the Volcker Committee's corruption probe into the 'Oil-for-Food' programme, the Kremlin was concerned that a body created by the Security Council would transgress its mandate and claim authority that Moscow believed should solely reside with the Council itself.

A co-equal partnership with the US

Beyond a focus upon the UN Security Council's authority, Russian status concerns have also been reflected in the Russian leadership's pursuit of a co-equal partnership with the US in cooperation. This was the case not so much in the earlier case studies on Iraq (2003) and Lebanon (2005), when Moscow supported US policy from a position of relative weakness. In the case studies on Iran and Syria, on the other hand, when Russia grew both economically and militarily stronger and politically more assertive, Moscow stepped up its quest for status. Russian officials' appreciation of the TRR proposal was crucially related to its design as a scheme that implied a co-equal US-Russian partnership and entailed a critical Russian role in implementation. The joint chemical demilitarization effort in Syria four years later was widely celebrated in Russian official and elite circles, not just because the initiative averted a military strike against Assad, but also because it implied a co-equal Russian role in arms control cooperation.

⁹ 'Transcript of Interview with Sergey Lavrov to *Vesti Podrobnosti*', 31 October 2005.

Being on the right side of history – the sensitive issue of siding with pariahs

Finally, Russian status concerns in cooperation have been reflected in a desire to appear as a responsible great power that stands ‘on the right side of history’. All case studies involved a modicum of perceived ‘obstructionist’ or ‘unhelpful’ behaviour by Russia’s regional clients, Iraq, Syria, and Iran.

Since the February 2005 assassination of Rafik Hariri in Beirut was such a cataclysmic event, eliciting widespread international condemnation, Russia’s cooperation was also perceived to be driven by prestige concerns: “If I were Russia, I would not want to stand against this.”¹⁰ With momentum building towards sanctions against Iran in 2010, Russia’s cooperation with the US was then partly a message to an intransigent Iran, which had offended Russian status sentiments by deceiving Moscow about the secret Fordow enrichment facility and by rejecting the TRR proposal, a scheme which had been co-authored by Russia. Finally, after the Eastern Ghouta attack in August 2013, which precipitated diplomacy towards chemical weapons demilitarization, multiple US sources recalled Russian frustration with Syria, one commenting: “the Russians knew what had happened, they probably understood it better than others and even for very hard-boiled people in the Russian services, this crossed a line.”¹¹

All being equal, a regional client’s perceived intransigence or offending behaviour appears to insult Russian officials’ status sentiments, thereby stiffening Moscow’s resolve to cooperate with the US. This finding also highlights the role of cognitive aspects at the level of individual officials and elites.

¹⁰ Interview with a US official.

¹¹ Interview with Burns.

2.7) Why de-linking cooperation from bilateral crisis is possible

This study accounts for the trajectory of the Russian-US bilateral relationship as a contextual variable in explaining Russian cooperation. As the empirical analysis has shown, this trajectory has little explanatory value in accounting for the Russian government's willingness to cooperate in the first place, which is driven by Russian interests in the Middle East. It also cannot account for the success of cooperation. Rather, the trajectory of bilateral relations appears to matter most in determining the scope for diffuse reciprocity.

Insights from the cooperation literature suggest that a state's past experience in relations with another actor may either encourage or hinder their future collaboration, because of the effects of learning and building of trust over time.¹² The more trustworthy a state considers its counterpart, the more inclined that state will be to cooperate, worrying less about not only cheating, but also the implications of gaps in relative gains. Sustained reciprocity tends to generate trust as a result of the "recurrent and gradually expanding character" of processes of social exchange.¹³

Constructivist writings on the importance of status echo this sentiment, suggesting that prior experiences of respect increase trust, which facilitates bargaining and heightens the chances of cooperative behaviour. Constructivists note that "adequate respect for another actor includes proper consideration of the latter's importance, needs, merits, and rights."¹⁴ Russian officials' perceptions that they are being respected should be more pronounced under improving bilateral relations. The theoretical literature thus assumes that sustained improving relations should facilitate cooperation, while stipulating the opposite causal effect for deteriorating relations.

¹² Snidal, 'Coordination versus Prisoners' Dilemma'.

¹³ Keohane, 'Reciprocity in International Relations'.

¹⁴ Kelman, 2007, quoted in R. Wolf, 'Respect and Disrespect in International Politics: The Significance of Status Recognition', *International Theory*, vol. 3, no. 1, pp. 105-142.

A positive trajectory in the Russian-US relationship, while not a necessary condition for cooperation, does indeed facilitate collaboration between Russian and American officials. For example, diplomats interviewed believed that the ‘reset’ context and concomitant good personal rapport between key senior officials made an atmospheric contribution to the P5+1 talks on Iran. Negotiating Resolution 1929 in 2010, interlocutors felt that the context of the ‘reset’ “helped”, “did not hurt”, “made things easier”. However, they also noted that the later 2015 negotiations in the P5+1 towards UN Resolution 2231 – the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) – were just as constructive, despite a considerable cooling in relations.¹⁵

Indeed, negative developments in the Russian-US relationship do not necessarily obstruct successful cooperation in the Middle East. This is especially clear in the last chapter, with Syrian chemical weapons demilitarization continuing largely unaffected by the onset of the Ukraine crisis. A substantial chilling in Russian-US relations did not disrupt the narrow arms control cooperation in Syria, since the security issue was successfully de-linked. This was possible because, while interest dissonance between the US and Russia on the Syrian Civil War overall continued, there was real interest convergence in the narrower belief that Syria’s possession of chemical weapons posed a threat to the region and potentially undermined a regime that Russia was committed to. Arms control cooperation in Syria could also be de-linked from bilateral crisis because it allowed the participants to draw on their shared CTR experience, while implementing it in a third country. Finally, the Kremlin had staked its reputation on delivering its end of the bargain, and on being perceived as a US peer in cooperation. Seeing the operation through was crucial to a Russian leadership intent on showing the world that Russia was a responsible great power with the means and will to constructively shape outcomes in international affairs.

¹⁵ Interviews with multiple US officials.

2.8) Discerning broader trends: Russia steps up the game in the Middle East

Furthermore, this study has detailed the growing perceived relevance of, and leverage in, Russia's cooperation with the US in the Middle East. This finding indicates the broader trajectory of Russia's mounting clout in the region. As noted, Russian support for US policy in Iraq following the March 2003 invasion, as well as its calls on Syrian troops to vacate Lebanon in 2005, were seen as marginal by the Bush administration. For instance, Moscow's joining the US in calling for Syrian compliance with Resolution 1559 was perceived as a "free ride"¹⁶, "not essential"¹⁷ and meant Russia was "not sacrificing a lot."¹⁸ Years later, on the other hand, the Obama administration recognized Russia's clout over the P5+1 negotiations in 2010 and admitted that Syrian chemical weapons demilitarization would have been unfeasible without the assistance of a Russian leadership that had thrown its full support behind Assad in the Syrian Civil War.

Russia's leverage in cooperating on security issues in the Middle East has expanded in tandem with its economic strengthening and growing foreign policy assertiveness more generally. It has also been driven by Moscow's mounting perception that security challenges in the Middle East are intimately bound up with concerns over domestic and regime security in Russia and its neighbourhood.

On the first point, the overarching framework for Russia's national interests analysed in this study evolved from the pursuit of pragmatic cooperation with the West (Chapter 2), to greater assertiveness amidst continued cooperation (Chapter 3), to prioritizing economic modernization (Chapter 4), before taking a turn towards renewed assertiveness after the collapse of the 'reset'

¹⁶ Interview with a US official.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

(Chapter 5).¹⁹ As noted in the discussion on the Syrian Civil War, by 2012 Moscow had become increasingly confident that the US was a declining power, proving unable to successfully complete military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, stabilize the Middle East, constrain Russia, or maintain a viable international economic order.²⁰

While President Putin already pursued greater assertiveness vis-à-vis the West between 2005 and 2008, the period after 2012 was different in that the Russian leadership was far more convinced that the unipolar moment was over and that Russia had the means and the will to help build a truly multipolar order. As a result of its growing economic strength and greater political assertiveness, Russia had greater leverage over the Syrian file in 2013 compared to 2005, given its enhanced willingness and capacity to throw full economic, diplomatic, and military support behind its regional client.

Secondly, the Kremlin's leverage in cooperation has increased in tandem with the perceived challenges posed by Middle Eastern security issues to Russia itself. I show that, by cooperating in 2005, Moscow made a rudimentary link between upheavals in the Levant – the 'Cedar Revolution' and Western calls for regime change in Damascus – and the 'colour revolutions' in the post-Soviet space. Cooperating with the US to end the Syrian presence in Lebanon was also a policy intended to prevent a success story for the Freedom Agenda, because such success might have emboldened the Bush administration to support democratization in Russia's own neighbourhood more actively. While the perceived challenge of events in the Middle East to domestic and regime stability in Russia and its neighbourhood was not yet robust in 2005, it grew in intensity. Russian grievances over Western efforts to promote democracy are a consistent theme in this study, running through the discussion on the Iraq War, the 'Cedar Revolution', and

¹⁹ Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

the Iranian nuclear file. By 2011, when Moscow backed the Assad regime in the nascent Syrian Civil War, a Russian link between externally imposed regime change in the Middle East and the post-Soviet space had reached its apogee.

2.9) On mutual perceptions and recurring disappointments

Furthermore, this study shows that one cannot make sense of expectations of reciprocity in negotiations without considering how individual parties construe and subjectively interpret the meaning of their interaction. Policymakers make inferences about their counterparts' intentions, and do so under the inevitable impact of pre-existing beliefs and images about their interlocutors: "the heavy baggage of history, culture, and political socialization."²¹ Personal interest, background, and personality influence perceptions. Given this range of potential 'irritants', whether Russian officials pursue reciprocity in cooperation can be a matter of subjective perception on the part of their US counterpart. Also, whether the latter adequately responds to quests for reciprocity is a matter of individual perception.

How are these theoretical reflections applicable to the empirical observations presented in this study? In the post-2003 Iraq invasion context of Russian-US diplomacy, US officials bearing responsibility for policy towards Russia or post-Soviet countries at the NSC or State Department were typically more prone to think Russia had expectations of diffuse reciprocity than were US diplomats negotiating with their Russian counterparts at the UN in New York. Dealing with the Russia file from Washington, Thomas Graham and Daniel Fried, for instance, recounted their awareness of implicit Russian expectations of US reciprocity in exchange for not being 'difficult' on Iraq. Ambassadors John Negroponte and James Cunningham, on the other hand, negotiating

²¹ Larson, 'The Psychology of Reciprocity'.

with Russia at the UN, did not share this sentiment. A similar pattern applied to the P5+1 negotiations in 2010.

Another interesting finding on US perceptions is that some officials believed their Russian counterparts to be tacitly amenable to linkage diplomacy. This assumption, in turn, informed these US diplomats' strategies towards their Russian interlocutors, leading them to signal that the US was ready to compensate Russia for cooperative behaviour. Such signalling even played out in mid- or low-level engagement, in which US officials typically enjoy greater latitude in formulating negotiation strategies than their Russian counterparts. It should be cautioned, however, that this finding applied to discrete individuals in the US government, rather than across officials interviewed.

Ultimately, however, any discrepancies in perception at the level of the individual official were not decisive in explaining outcomes in cooperation. They can explain disappointed expectations of reciprocity, but cannot account for the presence or absence of cooperation in the first place. Nevertheless, deciphering such variance in perceptions of linkage amenability and expectations in cooperation is far from a purely theoretical exercise. Further research is needed to understand more fully the recurring discrepancies in Russian and US assessments of outcomes in cooperation, especially of what has been 'gained'. Fyodor Lukyanov recognized this problem when he discussed President Obama's September 2009 statement on abandoning the Bush administration's European missile defence plans. Lukyanov warned that the US gesture might give rise to unwarranted expectations of Russian reciprocity. Using this example, he drew attention to recurring misunderstandings in Russian-US cooperation, caused by unclear expectations:

“In Russia, it [the US’ missile defence decision] may not be seen as a ‘concession’ so much as a return to ‘common sense’ [...] The danger is that the two sides could fall into the same trap as in 2001, but in reverse [...] Then, President Vladimir Putin thought that [Russia offering America access to Central Asia] was a great concession and a very serious gesture, whereas the feeling in America was that the Russians were not doing anything that was not in their own national interests.”²²

Since unmet expectations of diffuse reciprocity appear to be one important driver of recurring crises in the bilateral relationship, further studies on mutual perceptions in Russian-US cooperation are encouraged.

2.10) Russian cooperation: thwarting US coercive arms control in the Middle East

Finally, a few words are in order about Russian concerns with non-proliferation as a driver of cooperation with the US in the Middle East. Considering the various security challenges that have been found to animate Russia’s cooperation, an apprehension of regional military escalation and instability typically outweighs arms control concerns. In the chapter on Syrian chemical weapons, I argue that a Russian desire to thwart Western-backed regime change in the Middle East was the primary driver of Russia’s cooperation, while concerns with WMD proliferation were a secondary concern. If Russian official apprehensions about the Syrian chemical stockpile had been the driving force behind cooperation, Moscow could have pursued it earlier, agreeing for its bilateral arms control consultations with the US to result in joint action over Syria. Yet, since the Russian leadership prioritized its concern with Syrian state order over its non-proliferation interests, it took the spectre of military force after the August 2013 Eastern Ghouta attack for President Putin to act.

Equally, I found in Chapter 4 that Moscow was less concerned than Washington with the prospect of Iran militarizing its nuclear programme. Overall, Russia has been historically more sanguine

²² See ‘Quid Pro Quo?’.

than the US about proliferation threats emanating from its clients – Iraq, Syria, or Iran – but has still ultimately shared the American objective in non-conventional arms control in the Middle East. While the US has mainly championed a coercive approach to achieving its non-proliferation objectives, Russian officials have advocated for consensual arms control in the case studies analysed.

As Makdisi and Hindawi note, the international community's post-Cold War emphasis on the coercive aspect of non-conventional arms control was largely predicated on the Western idea that WMD should not find their way into the 'wrong' hands, understood as authoritarian Third World states during the 1990s, as well as terrorist groups after 9/11.²³ As a result, Western states assigned themselves the role of protecting international rules and norms of non-proliferation, resorting alternatively to coercive diplomacy, economic sanctions, or even the threat or actual use of military force. Indeed, the US invaded Iraq in 2003 in order to remove the alleged WMD threat once and for all. During the periods analysed in the Iran and Syrian chapters, Washington elicited Moscow's cooperation on arms control largely through the threat of military force or other punitive measures. While Obama devised a 'new' approach to Iran that was to entail not just a 'pressure track', but also engagement in diplomacy and the cooperative TRR proposal, the US never took the military option against Tehran off the table.

The Kremlin has championed a different approach to non-proliferation in the Middle East. It consistently opposed military action, expressed a Statist scepticism of sanctions as an effective and legitimate tool to pursue non-proliferation objectives, and argued that it was critical to involve 'target states' in consensual arms control efforts. In 2009 Moscow was eager to include Tehran in the TRR scheme, while insisting on an independent and equal role for the Assad regime

²³ Makdisi and Hindawi, 'The Syrian Chemical Weapons Disarmament Process in Context'.

in chemical weapons demilitarization in 2013. Russia's preference for consensual arms control has underscored the importance its leadership attaches to Statist ideas, such as state sovereignty and non-interference in a pluralist international order.

Thus, cooperating with the US in the cases examined, the Russian leadership ultimately challenged the coercive US approach. The 2003 Iraq invasion taught Russian officials what consequences to expect when the US pursues arms control unilaterally and by force. Moscow then cooperated in order to thwart US coercive diplomacy in the Middle East. As discussed, Russia's preference for consensual over coercive approaches has served a number of Moscow's interests at once, including: the protection of leverage for its regional allies; the protection of Russian economic interests with these allies; the protection of Russian status and the authority of the UN Security Council, and the thwarting of US unilateralism, which, Moscow concluded after 2003, had destructive consequences in the Middle East, heightened instability in a region close to Russia's own borders, and thus needed to be curtailed.

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