Russian Diaspora Policy and the Near Abroad in the 1990s: An Indicator and Warning for Intervention

by

Nicholas Thomas Bruno

Department of Slavic and Eurasian Studies
Duke University

Date: __________________________

Approved:

______________________________
Simon Miles, Supervisor

______________________________
Michael Newcity

______________________________
Edna Andrews

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Slavic and Eurasian Studies in the Graduate School of Duke University

2023
ABSTRACT

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Abstract

The Russian Federation emerged from the ruins of the USSR a diminished power, attempting to reconcile its imperial past with a new post-Cold War order. However, while the Kremlin may have lost a degree of global influence, Russia maintained the mantel of regional hegemon. Moscow was able to maintain this “privileged sphere of influence” through leveraging Russian diaspora communities—a decisive strategy that Russian leaders continued to refine and direct against the expansion of the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Despite being the source of much focus in the foreign policy community in the twenty-first century, research around Russian diaspora communities tend to focus on the mechanics of why Russia projects influence through a diaspora population in a given country. However, the opportunity is often missed to explore how and why the diaspora itself can be co-opted by Russia in the first place. This is due to an under appraisal of how Russia developed and executed its diaspora policy in the 1990s and what Russia learned from this experience. By examining the diaspora policy development and actions of the Russian Federation in the former Soviet space during the 1990s, the West is better placed to understand the execution of Russian policy in the twenty-first century and develop defenses to it. Through a historical assessment of 1990 diaspora policy development and a case study analysis of Russian intervention in the 1990s, this thesis will also answer the contemporary policy question of how Russia can maintain a sphere of influence when it is once again weak due to its war in Ukraine, and examine the course Russia’s future military interventions will take. There are defenses to Russian diaspora policy that can be identified from historical successes and failures, which must inform Western deterrence measures.
Dedication

This work is dedicated to the great people of the Baltics, especially those “Soviet Citizens” who found themselves in the region when the USSR collapsed and contributed to my formulation of this thesis. A special dedication to Alisa of Riga, Nicolai and Natalia of Daugavpils, Ludmila of Riga, drunk Igor of Narva, and all the babushkas in Daugavpils, Riga, Vilnius, Tallinn, Visaginas and along the country roads and random villages of the Baltics.
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<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>ASSR</td>
<td>Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSCE</td>
<td>Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIS</td>
<td>Commonwealth of Independent States</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>I &amp; W</td>
<td>Indicator and Warning</td>
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<tr>
<td>LDPR</td>
<td>Liberal Democratic Party of Russia</td>
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<td>MAP</td>
<td>Membership Action Plan</td>
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<td>MASSR</td>
<td>Moldovan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>MFA</td>
<td>Ministry of Foreign Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOD</td>
<td>Ministry of Defense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<td>NIS</td>
<td>Newly Independent States</td>
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<tr>
<td>OGRF</td>
<td>Operational Group of Russian Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSCE</td>
<td>Organization for Security and Cooperations in Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFM</td>
<td>Popular Front of Moldova</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2P</td>
<td>Responsibility to Protect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSFSR</td>
<td>Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>SMO</td>
<td>Special Military Operation</td>
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<tr>
<td>SE6/8</td>
<td>Southeastern Ukrainian Oblasts</td>
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<td>SOAO</td>
<td>South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSR</td>
<td>Soviet Socialist Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TcFSSR</td>
<td>Transcaucasian Federated Soviet Socialist Republic</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>USSR</td>
<td>Union of Soviet Socialist Republics</td>
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1. Introduction

When the Russian Federation invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022, there was much shock and an equally significant amount of disbelief around the world.¹ This “Special Military Operation” came eight years after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and fourteen years after the Russo-Georgian War of 2008.² Many within academia, government, and journalism attempted to better understand and educate policy makers on the possible reasoning and motivations for Russia’s actions between 2008 and 2022.

One prominent thesis advocated by the likes of former American Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Jack Matlock (D), Political Scientist Professor John Mearsheimer, and CIA Director William Burns (D), was that North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expansion was one of the main drivers of the Russian actions.³ Mearsheimer opined in a 2014 article on the annexation of Crimea by Russia that “No Russian leader would tolerate a military alliance [NATO] that was Moscow’s mortal enemy until recently moving into Ukraine…great powers are always sensitive to potential threats near their home territory.”⁴ Accordingly, NATO expansion exacerbates Russia’s sense of post-Cold War humiliation and is widely interpreted as a direct

² The Russian Special Military Operation refers to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 as described by President Vladimir Putin in his speech from 24 February 2022. Putin, Vladimir, “Address by the President of the Russian Federation” (speech, The Kremlin, Moscow, February 24, 2022).
⁴ Mearsheimer, 5–6. Burns also noted in a cable to Washington in the fall of 1994 that “Yeltsin was determined to reaffirm Russia’s great power status and independent interests in Russia’s so-called Near Abroad….stressing the attachment of Yeltsin and the country’s political elite to Russia’s sphere of influence in the former Soviet space, I emphasized mounting Russian concern about expansion of NATO.” Burns, William J. The Back Channel: A Memoir of American Diplomacy and the Case for its Renewal. 2019, 150.
challenge to Russia’s claim to a privileged sphere of influence. Therefore, Russia’s sensitivity to NATO expansion, therefore, drives the choice to intervene in former Soviet republics to counter the humiliation of the alliance’s power and influence, secure a privileged sphere of influence to offset NATO, and position Russia to better respond to threats to its sovereignty.

Indeed, this idea has received new attention in light of the Russian Special Military Operation (SMO) as part of the debate with other theses that attempt to answer why Russia intervenes abroad. However, more attention to how Russia intervenes should be the primary focus. As Russia loses the conventional military fight on the ground in Ukraine, the why is a secondary problem when weighed against how Russia will continue to maintain a sphere of influence vis-à-vis NATO and how, ultimately, Russia could continue to maintain pressure on Ukraine. The starting point to finding an answer to this question is a closer assessment of how Russia has intervened in the past when it was weak and with what tools. Part of the answer can be found in how Russia developed a policy toward its diaspora in the 1990s and intervened in neighboring countries to maintain a sphere of influence using the diaspora as a tool.

Responding to NATO expansion alone does not fully account for the Russian Federation’s history of foreign intervention in the post-Soviet space. In the early 1990s, before the alliance’s first enlargement into Eastern Europe, Russia intervened in Moldova and Georgia

5 The humiliation I speak of pertains to Russia losing great power status, loss of territory, a military in disarray, and the dissolution of its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe. General William Odom captured a general Western sentiment in how Russia should be dealt with when he said, “Russia is not a great power, can probably not be one for a very long time, and therefore should not be treated as one.” Matlock, Jack. “Contribution to the forum on General Odom’s ‘Realism About Russia.’” Approximately November 6, 2001. Box 20, Jack and Rebecca Matlock Papers, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University, 2.


and used the threat of intervention in the Baltics and Ukraine. Russia began to understand early in the 1990s that securing a sphere of influence would be vital to countering Western power in general, not only military, but the full breadth of national power elements. The surprise and shock in the international community at Russia’s actions are due to a misunderstanding of this policy, and the development of this policy, in response to both domestic and international stimuli throughout the 1990s. In actual fact, Russia’s experiences in the 1990s in trying to counter Western influence, taught Russia circumstantially that diaspora communities ended up being an effective foreign policy tool that could also be used to both oppose and punish NATO expansion plans and to strengthen Russia’s position vis-à-vis the Newly Independent States (NIS), also known as the former Soviet republics.  

Any understanding of when, where, why, and how Russia intervenes begins in Russian foreign policy development of the 1990s. Better appreciation of this period will help answer a contemporary Western policy question: first, where, and even should, NATO expand in the future and second, how will Russia maintain a sphere of influence in its near abroad as its conventional military forces have been largely destroyed in Ukraine? NATO’s mere overtures to Georgia and Ukraine for inclusion in the alliance in the early 2000s, countries that Moscow sees as being squarely in its sphere of influence, were red-lines crossed for Moscow and justified the use of force in the Kremlin’s eyes. These red-lines, however, had been established in the 1990s under Yeltsin through his diaspora policy development and President Putin was not the architect, only the executer. Yet, the success of Putin-era use of force was grounded in the use of 1990 diaspora tactics, techniques, procedures and lessons learned.

Russia’s intervention blueprint of the 1990s was then used to respond specifically to potential NATO expansion and the American unipolar moment by utilizing its diaspora as a

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8 Newly Independent States (NIS) is defined as states that were formed, or gained independence, after the collapse of the USSR.
foreign policy tool. Further, the evidence serves as an indicator that Russian policy would not be
effective or practical without the existing and “cultivated” diaspora and nor does Russia seek to
conduct operations in contested areas where it does not have local support, be it allied
government, compatriot communities, or even separatist movements. Finally, this paper argues
that in the 1990s, Russia had articulated red-lines, areas where Russia would not tolerate NATO
expansion and Western institutions, and that the former Soviet republics were a privileged sphere
of influence.9 It should, therefore, not have been a surprise after the Bucharest Summit
communique of 2008, that Georgia and Ukraine would become part of NATO, that Russia
exercised its response along the policy lines and with means it had established.10

Taken together, assessing the foundations of Russia’s post-Cold War intervention
strategy through the diaspora can better aid the West to predict the course Russia’s future military
intervention will take. This paper should also help inform future NATO expansion policy to
countries that Russia considers within its sphere of influence and where Russia has favorable
local support through its diaspora or the potential for it.11 Even more so now, as Russia seems to
be losing the war in Ukraine and Russia’s conventional forces are decimated, Russia may resort
to policies and tools used in the 1990s. Russian status as a global power has diminished to levels
not seen since the end of the Cold War which in probability will force Russia to change how it
conducts foreign policy while it rebuilds. Indeed, Russia may even question the utility of
conventional force operations to retain a sphere of influence after the Special Military

9 Black, J. L. Russia Faces NATO Expansion: Bearing Gifts or Bearing Arms? Lanham, Md: Rowman &
10 Document, NATO. “NATO Summit Declaration, Bucharest, 3 April 2008.” Hampton Roads
https://login.proxy.lib.duke.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/nato-summit-
declaration-bucharest-3-april-2008/docview/215211660/se-2.
11 However, it is not in the scope of this paper to assess the drivers of NATO expansion but rather highlight
the missed signals of where it should and should not expand. See: Sarotte, M. E. Not One Inch: America,
Russia, and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021 and
Operation’s failures and rely on the utilization of the diaspora even more heavily where it has had successes. Thus, a study of Russian diaspora policy is even more relevant now as Russia historically resorts to maintaining a sphere of influence through diaspora when it is weak.

Research into different aspects of the Russian diaspora population over the past two decades has been quite robust, especially in the context of general minority studies and conflict in the post-Soviet space. Almost immediately upon the collapse of the USSR, the Russian diaspora was recognized as an area of important consideration for both newly independent states and Russia. So to was this recognized as an area that needed examination in the political science, foreign policy, and anthropology communities of practice which generated a large body of writing on the subject. In the twentieth century, the predominant and prevailing research focused on diaspora identity formulation, separatist movements, Russian policy toward its diaspora, language laws, and the impact of diaspora communities on titular state post-independence politics.  

Jeff Chinn, Robert Kaiser, Paul Kolstoe, Neil Melvin, Alexei Arbatov, John Lough, and others developed the original body of work on Russian diaspora in the context of either analyzing conflict in the post-Soviet space or to assess the consequences of the diaspora’s status as a new minority in the near abroad. These authors are frequently cited by modern writers on Russian compatriot policies to establish a historical foundation for their own works on the subject.

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Rogers Brubaker has also been extremely influential to twenty-first century writers through his work on kin-state politics, establishing a triadic nexus model which demonstrates the relationship between minorities, nationalizing state, and external national homelands.\textsuperscript{14} Graham Smith has built upon Brubaker’s work adding the variable of transnational political actors, specifically Western European institutions, to build a quadratic nexus.\textsuperscript{15} Smith builds his theory from previous work into the Russian diaspora, working to develop a theory to assess the passivity of the Russian diaspora.\textsuperscript{16} Sven Simonsen was an early twenty-first century author who expanded on the Russian “diaspora linkage” developed by previous authors in their study on the russification of Russian foreign policy.\textsuperscript{17} He uses a regional case study of the Baltic states to assess how military and domestic political factors advance Russian foreign policy through the diaspora and not an actual Kremlin concern for diaspora safety.

Some authors like James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse have taken theoretical works on minority ethno-nationalism in relation to secession movements developed by Donald Horowitz, Alexis Heraclides, and Joseph Rothschild and applied these ideas to explain conflict in the former Soviet space which includes conflict surrounding the Russian diaspora.\textsuperscript{18} Igor Zevelev, Paul Kolstoe, and David Laitin focus predominantly on identity crisis and nationality in the diaspora.\textsuperscript{19}

Due to the period of Soviet rule, Zevelev presciently argued early on that “there are many factors that may strengthen a relatively dormant Russian ethnonationalism in the years to come, and the plight of the Russians in the near abroad and an attempt in Russia to mobilize politically around this issue should be considered”  

More recently in light of Russia’s revanchist trajectory, authors generally conduct either cross-regional or regional comparative studies of the post-Soviet space using the diaspora as an aspect of larger geopolitical arguments to explain Russian foreign policy.  

Gerard Toal, Katherine Graney, Agnia Grigas, and Anna Batta conduct cross-regional analysis of diaspora populations in the post-Soviet space and illustrate Russia’s “protection” of compatriots as a foreign policy tool. But these authors stop short of prescribing explicit conditions in diaspora spaces that make them ripe for Russian military intervention. Typically, compatriot policies and the diaspora are mentioned by researchers as an indicator of a Russian revanchist trajectory when answering the why question. The idea that Russia can mobilize the diaspora to its foreign policy goals due to a common religion, language, or culture is far too shallow an answer though. Research into how Russia aims to achieve its foreign policy goals, regardless of why, is far less
focused when linking the means specifically to diaspora populations to facilitate military intervention.

A RAND Corporation report, for example, while synthesizing the drivers of Russian intervention, failed to identify the diaspora as a critical means to a successful intervention. Rather, RAND framed the diaspora, or more correctly, co-identity groups, as an unlikely reason for Russia to intervene among a list of drivers of Russian intervention. This same report also concluded with indicators of future Russian intervention but focused on geopolitical factors rather than conditions that allow Russia to intervene through the diaspora successfully. RAND illustrates a gap in the research that has not adequately addressed how Russia is able to use the diaspora for a successful intervention.

Agnia Grigas is one of the few scholars to highlight that Russian neo-imperialist policy and defense of a sphere of influence is critically linked to the ethnic Russian and Russian-speaking communities. Yet, Grigas and I differ in our assessment of the primacy of creating conditions or utilizing existing conditions to co-opt the diaspora community. She argues Russia creates conditions in line with a re-imperialization policy, but I reason that Russia utilizes pre-existing conditions primarily to execute its diaspora policy. These conditions are largely synthesized by me from the work done by researchers in the 1990s when the diaspora was still a nascent foreign policy tool. To be sure, Russia engages in passportization, information warfare, soft power, and other tools to try to create conditions, but these measures are only successfully applied due to pre-existing conditions that favor Russian foreign policy in the diaspora communities. Grigas and I do find common ground in that the policy framework to execute a diaspora policy was born in the 1990s but diverge in our conclusions on what targeted cross-

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23 Charap, 137.
24 Ibid.
regional case studies reveal. Grigas also focuses on a Russian re-imperialization policy but does not draw a clear connection to what indicators are necessary for Russia to intervene outside of Russia developing conditions. In this work, I focus specifically on how diaspora factors into whether or not Russia intervenes in a country when geopolitical circumstances dictate, or soft power fails, enabling military and foreign policy planners to better predict where Russia will intervene militarily by overlaying geopolitical drivers for intervention with the diaspora indicators developed in this paper.

Chapter One will outline the foreign policy evolution of the Yeltsin government during the 1990s. This chapter will also discuss two important topics: what the diaspora is and where Russia considers its sphere of influence to be located—the near abroad. I argue that the diaspora and the sphere of influence are linked and an indicator where Russia has a comparative advantage vis-à-vis the West through local support and a modicum of legitimacy to intervene. Chapter Two will address three case studies focusing on Russian intervention through the diaspora: Moldova, Georgia, and the Baltics. These case studies demonstrate the power and limitations of Russia’s diaspora policy which could have helped the West better anticipate the consequences of the 2008 Membership Action Plans (MAPs) communique to Georgia and Ukraine and the subsequent Russo-Georgian War of 2008, Crimea Annexation of 2014, and Special Military Operation of 2022. The conclusion will outline potential indicators and warnings of future Russian intervention. Through assessing the policy development and the case studies, perhaps trends can be observed that can assist the West to develop effective strategies against Russian policy.

26 Grigas, 53.
2. Chapter One

2.1 Introduction

In February 1990, then–Secretary of State James Baker told the leader of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, that “NATO will not shift one inch eastward from its present position.”\(^1\) As Mary Elise Sarotte and Joshua Shifrinson argue, these words have resulted in much controversy as the West rejects the statement as having any legal obligation or “top-level assurance” while Russia finds the words a bargain broken.\(^2\) However, the evidence shows something else, that in the early 1990s Russia understood, perhaps implicitly, that “not one inch” was not an attainable foreign policy goal or at least they should hedge against the promise being broken. In more general terms, Russia was not only focused on NATO expansion but Western influence in general at a time when it was weak. To this end, Russia started focusing on a “not one inch more” policy and prioritized areas to control in the near abroad and establish a credible sphere of influence. Paradoxically, as Yeltsin increasingly pursued confrontational policies with the West, he would sow the seeds of what would become an effective means to hinder NATO and the West in the Putin era, through the Russian diaspora.

Correspondingly, many posit that it was Putin who decided to actively oppose NATO and prevent the alliance from advancing “one inch more” in the twenty-first century through violent means.\(^3\) Yet, violence was only a twenty-first century escalation from a red-line crossed by the West. Putin utilized one of his most effective and cheapest foreign policy tools to exact

\(^{1}\) Sarotte, 1.

\(^{2}\) Shifrinson, Joshua R. Itzkowitz. “Deal or No Deal? The End of the Cold War and the U.S. Offer to Limit NATO Expansion.” *International Security* 40, no. 4 (2016): 7–44, 7–9. I acknowledge that there is an active debate on this topic. However, regardless of what the Western view is, the Russian view and opinion is clear: NATO and the West broke its promise to not expand. This reality is what the West must contend with despite if the Russian argument is weak or strong. Indeed, as I argue, the Russian government knew the “promise” was weak and that explains their actions in the 1990s, even if they continue to justify them because of a promise broken. See the following article for the debate: Goldgeier, J., Itzkowitz Shifrinson, J.R. “Evaluating NATO Enlargement: Scholarly Debates, Policy Implications, and Roads Not Taken.” *International Politics* 57, (2020): 291–321.

\(^{3}\) Sarotte, 2.
geopolitical victories vis-à-vis the West based on Yeltsin-era diaspora policy development.⁴ Here Russia balanced its relative weakness to the West as the West capitalized on its strength to ignore Russian red-lines by utilizing the diaspora.

The red-lines too had been established under Yeltsin. As early as 1997, Russian officials began to discuss red-lines “on the map beyond which NATO must not go. That line of demarcation coincided with the borders of the former USSR.”⁵ Potential violence should have been expected as a risk and consequence if NATO intended, which the alliance did, to include countries in Russia’s near abroad in the alliance.⁶ To be sure, continued Russian intervention should be expected as a potential course of action for any Putin successor building further on a Yeltsin-Putin doctrine.

A closer assessment of how Russia developed policy toward its diaspora from 1992–1999, how it defined its sphere of influence, and the laws it enacted, reveal a very clear warning to the West and the case studies of this policy at work, an indicator, for how Russia could utilize this policy in the future.⁷ In this chapter, I will lay out two concepts that frame the policy evolution of Russia; the defining of a sphere of influence as the near abroad; and how Russia defines the diaspora. Furthermore, I will lay out the diaspora policy development from 1992 to 1999 that shows a link between diaspora policy, sphere of influence policy, and deteriorating relations between the West and Russia.

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⁴ Geopolitics can be split into two schools of practice. One, great-power geopolitics, is competition that maintains existing territorial boundaries and two, imperial geopolitics, is competition that seeks to change existing boundaries. Toal, 245.
⁵ Black, 38.
⁷ In Chapter Two, several case studies of Russian compatriot/diaspora policy at work will be discussed to show the utility and limitations of this tool. Use of the tool in Moldova and Georgia in the 1990s can show utility, while in the Baltics a failure. All three would teach Russia how to hone the tool for use in the twenty-first century.
2.2 The Diaspora: Where is it and What is it?

On 25 April 2005, President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, famously proclaimed that “the demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century….Tens of millions of our fellow citizens and countrymen found themselves beyond the fringes of Russian territory.” While it may be cliché to refer to this quote now, it captures two points: that Russians formed a multi-million diaspora population overnight across from the borders of the new Russian Federation and that this territory holds special strategic significance for Russia. These two points are important in understanding how Russia framed its position in the 1990s relative to its neighbors and the West. Both the geopolitical goal, establishing a sphere of influence, and the tool, diaspora, are present in the same space. The relationship between the two points is critical to a full understanding of Russian foreign policy and diaspora policy in the 1990s. While Putin may get credit for the line, Yeltsin gets credit for the policy born from these two ideas. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the Russian population in the former Soviet republics in 1994 for visual reference.

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This map shows the majority of the diaspora resided near the border regions of Russia and in and around main centers of strategic and political importance such as Crimea in Ukraine, home of the Black Sea Fleet; Riga, capital of the former Latvian SSR; Eastern Ukraine, home to the industrial heartland of the former Ukrainian SSR; and Almaty, former capital of the Kazak Soviet Socialist Republic. If anything, this distribution shows the influence that ethnic Russians had within the USSR as the colonizing ethnicity and imperial elite. This distribution raised two considerations for the Russian government in the 1990s: how to ensure the Russian population remained domiciled in these regions of importance to Russian security and foreign policy and

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11 Chinn, 166.
how to keep them out of Russia as refugees and drains on scant resources? If managed correctly, Russia could avoid a refugee crisis it was ill prepared to handle while developing tools of influence loyal to Russia in the NIS.

However, this map does not show populations where Russia has influence outside of ethnic ties, such as lingual, cultural, historical, and ideological. This is the glaring problem with many assessments of the aftermath of the Soviet break-up, where does Russia still hold real or potential civil influence regardless of ethnicity? Many of the early 1990 sources for this thesis also avoid or ignore the issue and only focus on Russians as an ethnic diaspora in the traditional sense of identity. Of course, the importance of ethnic Russians in the Newly Independent States cannot be overstated. These populations would be considered critical to Kremlin foreign policy in the 1990s and interventions in the 2000s. However, the 1990s were also riddled with interventions that had little to do with ethnic Russians but rather populations that identified more with the state of Russia than the new titular nations they found themselves apart. This reveals that Russia would and could consider other groups of people outside ethnic Russians as viable excuses for intervention to secure national interests. This tactic by Russia also reveals how Russia did not see diaspora as purely an ethnic label but rather a framework for engaging with groups of people that had many of the traditional characteristics of diaspora but were still working through the social process of defining their identity after years of Imperial and Soviet rule.

For example, the Transnistria War of 1992 in Moldova was more an intervention to “protect” Slavic, Russian speaking peoples than ethnic Russians. “Protect” was obviously a

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13 Zevelev, 133–134.
14 See authors that wrote on diaspora in the 1990s: Batta, Anna; Chinn, Jeff; Kolstoe, Paul; and Melvin, Neil.
16 Kolstoe [1995], 160.
pretense to secure a strategic position for Russian forces on the Dniester River vis-à-vis Ukraine and the Balkans and thwart early fears that independent Moldova would join with Romania.17 Yet, this intervention would be made possible by the support of the local population and separatist movements in Moldova. The administrative center of Transnistria, Tiraspol, was 41 percent Russian, 32 percent Ukrainian, and 18 percent Moldovan, but all were Russian-speakers primarily through Soviet-era russification policies.18 The Russian 14th Guards Army (formerly the 14th Red Army) stationed in the territory of Transnistria was, apart from the senior officers, local conscripts, which would have consisted of Russians, Ukrainians, Moldovans, Bulgarians, and Gagauzians.19 The 14th Guards Army was critical to the secession of Transnistria from Moldova and found local legitimacy from both its ethnic diversity and its lingual composition that served as a unifying factor to the peoples of Transnistria. Yeltsin would eventually broker a 1992 ceasefire whereby Russian troops would serve as permanent “peacekeepers,” a state of affairs that is still in effect to this day and serves as a Russian check on the Moldovans and a check on potential NATO membership and Western influence.20

Other closely associated cases are Russian peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.21 These episodes highlight the importance of not only where ethnic Russians are located but where there are populations susceptible to Russian influence. Through the Russian Law on Citizenship, two-hundred thousand Abkhazians, fifty-thousand South Ossetians, and one-hundred thousand Transnistrians all obtained Russian passports.22 What is striking about these three populations, is that all were areas where ethnic Russians were not a majority, showing the power

17 Chinn, 173.
18 Chinn, 173 and Hughes, 103.
19 Kolstoe [1995], 160. In 1989 ethnic Ukrainians and Bulgarians joined ethnic Russians to form a pro-Russian culture and language organizations called Edinstvo. Hughes, 105.
20 Batta, 61.
21 The case studies of Moldova, Georgia, and the Baltics and the phenomena of diaspora policy will be discussed in depth in Chapter Two.
22 Zevelev [2001], 7.
that diaspora policy could have in non-ethnic Russian regions of the near abroad as a tool. It also challenges preconceived notions of diaspora as applied by an observer through objective means compared to subjective means through identity and community which in this case would show the formulation of a group identity with Russia.\textsuperscript{23} Yet, the importance of ethnic Russians in regions like northern Kazakhstan; Crimea; Narva, Estonia; Riga, Latvia; Daugavpils, Latvia; and eastern Ukraine cannot be overstated. Taken together, these two distinct groups form a much more powerful tool of Russian foreign policy than is normally considered. A tool, which has also successfully prevented Western security and economic institutions from taking hold in all cases except the Baltic states.

Now, in 1992 a new term emerged that is widely used by Russia to describe the space where the diaspora are located, the near abroad or \textit{bli\v{z}neye zarubezhye}.\textsuperscript{24} To be more specific, lands of the former Soviet Union and lands that had been a part of the Empire of Russia before that.\textsuperscript{25} The idea of a near abroad is closely linked to how Russia defines its sphere of influence and the tool for realizing that control is the Russian diaspora. This gives Russia a legitimate reason to involve itself in the affairs of another state to protect citizens or for Responsibility to Protect (R2P) type missions.\textsuperscript{26} Further, many of the foreign policies put forward by the Yeltsin government of the 1990s were directly or indirectly aimed at the near abroad or more clearly a “near abroad policy.” This policy, while foreign, was also one closely linked to domestic policy and politics as will be discussed later in this chapter on Yeltsin’s foreign policy evolution.

\textsuperscript{24} Toal, 3.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, 2.
\textsuperscript{26} “The responsibility to protect…rests upon three pillars of equal standing: the responsibility of each State to protect its populations (pillar I); the responsibility of the international community to assist States in protecting their populations (pillar II); and the responsibility of the international community to protect when a State is manifestly failing to protect its populations (pillar III).” Simonovich, Ivan. “The Responsibility to Protect.” \textit{UN Chronicle}, LIII, no. 4 (2016), https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/responsibility-protect.
One argument is that the term “near abroad” has been observed to be both “an expression of neo-imperialistic thinking and as an indication that Russian policy-makers are not prepared to acknowledge the full independence of the non-Russian Soviet successor states.”

Although such analysis finds strong basis in expressions of post-Soviet humiliation, this observations is not nuanced enough to distinguish between imperialism and state interests. The near abroad is not defined only in terms of the diaspora but by many aspects like strategic importance, historical memory, and resources. The diaspora as a characteristic of the near abroad only represents a means, in some regions more effective than others, for realizing the acquisition of strategic geopolitical ends such as border stability, economic ties, and managing Muslim extremism.

These ideas find broad support in the academic debate that Russia does not intervene in its near abroad to primarily protect the diaspora but has, as mentioned earlier, pursued a dual policy of cultivation of diaspora ties to Russia and isolation to further foreign policy goals strictly as a tool. The development or support for diaspora can also be viewed as an indicator of where Russia feels it is being challenged through a Russian lens and a warning of where Russia has an advantage through a Western and local lens. Therefore, the link and overlap of the near abroad and the target diaspora can be helpful for understanding future Russian actions in the West.

2.3 What it Means to Be Russian Outside Russia

The evidence shows that what it means to be a part of the Russian diaspora (Russkaia diaspora) has gone through as much an evolution as the Russian foreign policy toward this diaspora. Further, the diaspora was an integral part in how Russia developed methods for

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27 Kolstoe [1995], 259. Professor Kolstoe believes that the term near abroad has very little to do with neo-imperialistic thinking and more to do with the new state of Russia understanding its relationship with lands that are closely linked to it in defense, economics, and diaspora settlement. Kolstoe points out that true neo-imperialists and nationalists within the Russian elite do not view the NIS as neither far nor near and would see the term as inappropriate. See Igor Zevelev [2001], 131. Zevelev argues that Russian policy toward its diaspora is not imperialistic in nature but rather moderate.

28 Kolstoe [1995], 259.

retaining a sphere of influence after the USSR collapsed. This evolution is closely associated with how Russia attempted to find moral, legal, and situational justification to involve itself directly within the borders of former Soviet republics. As will be discussed, the diaspora did indeed become a valuable tool in Russian foreign policy to hedge against NATO expansion and NATO involvement in Yugoslavia type operations in Russia’s near abroad. Finally, the lexical meaning of diaspora will become increasingly convoluted and incorporate many different ethnic, lingual, opportunistic, and associated groups of people within the Russian world to help expand the means in the same way as improving any strategic asset.

To a significant extent, defining what it means to be Russian, and especially a Russian outside of the borders of Russia, was a project in redefining and making of Russian identity after the collapse of the USSR. One suitable way to conceptualize this identity project at work is to ask, “how should the Russian nation be imagined: in state-territorial terms…in ethnoascriptive terms…in linguistic terms…or in historical and aspirational terms.”\textsuperscript{30} This understanding, especially when institutionalized into policy, can drive Russian geopolitical aspirations that are beyond state-territorial limitations.

Further, the crucible in which Russian identity was forged was influenced by many distinct aspects. For the purpose of this paper, NATO expansion is one main driving factor and used to encapsulate the main threat as Russia viewed it: Western influence. NATO served as the embodiment of Western victory in the Cold War, its expansion showed the indifference to Russian geopolitical and world power, and it became a forcing function for Russia to look to secure a sphere of influence.\textsuperscript{31} Early in Yeltsin’s administration, Russia would shed its “no first use” doctrine pertaining to nuclear weapons to offset its relative weakness in conventional

\textsuperscript{30} Toal, 70.
\textsuperscript{31} Matlock [2010], 3–7.
military power to NATO.\textsuperscript{32} Or in other words, centered its defense policy around a means where it had a comparative advantage and credible deterrent. Similarly, Russia sought to develop a pillar within its foreign policy where it could secure a sphere of influence and utilize a means where it had a comparative advantage over the West, namely the cultivation of a diaspora abroad. Defining that diaspora took on a life of its own within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) as Russia forged a foreign policy around it in the near abroad.

For the purposes of this thesis, the term \textit{diaspora} will encompass the full breadth of what the Russian state has come to define it as and not in the traditional sense and include: ethnic, lingual, historical, associative, cultural, and passportized “Russians.”\textsuperscript{33} Although exact figures vary, it is generally agreed that when the USSR collapsed on December 31, 1990, somewhere around twenty-five million ethnic Russians found themselves outside the borders of the Russian Federation.\textsuperscript{34} These Russians would make up 58 percent of the total minority populations formed by the Soviet collapse outside of titular homelands.\textsuperscript{35} What is key here, is that this grouping of Russians were \textit{russkii} (ethnically Russian) but did not encapsulate the entire group that the Russian Federation hoped to include in the diaspora.\textsuperscript{36} As will be discussed later, Russian foreign policy makers in the early 1990s were attempting to do two things simultaneously, promote

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} Grau, Lester W., Charles K. Bartles, and Foreign Military Studies Office (Fort Leavenworth, Kan.). \textit{The Russian Way of War: Force Structure, Tactics and Modernization of the Russian Ground Forces}. Fort Leavenworth, KS: Foreign Military Studies Office, 2016, 204 and Sarotte, 251. Maintaining a large conventional force as seen during the Cold War was far too expensive for an ailing Russian economy following the fall of the USSR and much less accepted as a burden on an economy, regardless of economic stability, that had always placed military expenditure as a top priority (Defense expenditures during the USSR was 15-20% of GDP). Wood, Tony. \textit{Russia Without Putin: Money, Power, and the Myths of the New Cold War}. London; Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2018. https://find.library.duke.edu/catalog/DUKE008623671, 116.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Websters dictionary defines \textit{diaspora} as: people settled far from their ancestral homelands. Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “diaspora,” accessed November 13, 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diaspora. \textit{Passportization} is defined as “systemic distribution of Russian citizenship” to peoples that are not residing in Russia. Grigas, 9. See also Butler and Sokefeld for the social science debate on how \textit{diaspora} is defined.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Kolstoe [1995], 2–3.
\item \textsuperscript{35} \textit{Ibid}.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Melvin [1995], 15.
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stability around the borders where the majority of the diaspora resided and forming an effective lever of Russian influence abroad around the diaspora.\textsuperscript{37} Therefore, terminology mattered as Russia hoped to include the maximum amount of people in this lever outside exclusively russkiis such as Russified Kazakhs, Belarussian and Ukrainian ethnic Slavs, or historically linked South Ossetians and Abkhazians.\textsuperscript{38} Bear in mind that these levers would be pulled in minor and major ways by Russia, the most notable being the major incursions into the near abroad that were heavily supported by diaspora.

Beginning in 1993, the MFA began to employ terms to try to include as many non-ethnic Russians as possible outside Russia into a Russian world (\textit{Russki Mir}). \textit{Sootechestvenniki} (compatriots) would later headline major Yeltsin era policies and is closely associated with the term \textit{Rossiiane}, or “people of Russia.”\textsuperscript{39} The implication of the terms is that these are people who are not Russian citizens in legal terms (\textit{grazhdane}–citizens) but rather peoples that “belong to this [Russian] civilization, value its great history, care about the development of its culture and believe in the future of Russia.”\textsuperscript{40} Further, the root of \textit{sootechestvenniki} is \textit{otechestvo} (fatherland) which is a political rather than ethnic term designed for application and adoption by other ethnic groups outside Russia such as South Ossetia and Abkhazia.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{37} Melvin [1995], 15.
\textsuperscript{38} Paul Kolstoe identifies two competing views on ethnicity, a Western and Eastern lens. In the East, that ethnicity is defined as a “common language, traditions, mores, religion…” and in the West, “common territory, common government, and… common (political) history.” I am referring to ethnicity as he describes here in the East for russkiii. Kolstoe [1995], 11.
\textsuperscript{39} Kolstoe [1995], 262. Professor Igor Blishchenko defined \textit{sootechestvenniki} as “persons who at one time were subjects of the Russian empire or citizens of the Soviet Union, together with their relatives in direct line of ascent, who at the present time do not hold Russian citizenship but belong to one of the ethnic groups of Russia, and who consider themselves as being spiritually and culturally-ethnically linked to Russia.” Izvestiia, 8 September 1992.
\textsuperscript{40} Melvin [1995], 17.
\textsuperscript{41} To not beleaguer the point but to show its depth, other terms include \textit{etnicheskie Rossiiane} (ethnic Russians) and \textit{vykhodstye} (those who left) and \textit{russkoiazychnye} (Russophones). Melvin [1995], 16 and Kolstoe [1995], 262. Byford, 5.
What might seem like an exercise in wordplay is actually a concerted effort to establish a strategy of identity push and pull: a policy of pushing Russians within the federation to support a diaspora policy and a pull of those outside Russia to support Russian influence. Both are necessary to allow the Russian state to exert influence within the near abroad and have some modicum of legitimacy domestically and internationally. This push and pull of national identity out of Russia and toward Russia would have very real impacts in Russian foreign policy and its involvement or ability to involve itself in countries in the near abroad in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. While the push and pull is in support of more noticeable violence in recent history, it was proven in interventions in the 1990s.

A 2022 RAND Corporation report assessed why and where Russia conducts military interventions and the report found that the majority of Russian military interventions were in its near abroad or the former Soviet states. What is even more revealing and pertinent for this thesis, and not directly assessed in the RAND study, was that interventions almost always had an element of diaspora involvement, direct and indirect. Passportized diaspora acted directly in support of Russian troops in South Ossetia during the Russo-Georgian War as both legitimate justification for Russia to intervene under responsibility to protect and as partisan forces. The diaspora acted indirectly in Crimea by non-interference to Russian annexation and then as legitimizing enablers to Russian annexation referendums. The Crimean and Georgian case-studies reveal the dichotomy of Russian policy toward the diaspora, “on the one hand, this ‘diaspora’ is conceived as a projection of Russian statehood beyond its borders in international relations; on

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42 Stankevich established a Russian Club in 1992 to serve as an organizing entity for other national diaspora organization, serve as a diaspora lobby, and as a liaison directly to the diaspora populations, forming economic, political, and cultural links. The Congress of Russian Communities was established by Rogozin and was closely linked to Russian nationalist groups. Melvin [1995], 16 and 42.
the other,…kept strategically at a remove from this state itself.”43 In this way, the Russian diaspora has become a valuable enabler to Russian intervention into its near abroad.

2.4 Yeltsin’s Foreign Policy Evolution—Sturm und Drang

On 28 October 1992 in reference to Russians abroad in the Baltic states of Estonia and Latvia, President of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin, declared that:

The Foreign Ministry ought to concern itself with the lawful rights and liberties of rossiiane living in the near abroad. For our diplomats this is a new task. We have to listen to the opinion of the ordinary citizens, who generally think that the Russophone population of the Baltics do not have the necessary security. The Foreign Ministry lacks a clear action program for this.44

There is much to unpack from this small statement made in the second year of his presidency. The ideas of “rossiiane” and the “near abroad” are discussed earlier in this chapter but are important to note in Yeltsin’s rhetoric. Yeltsin also specifically invokes the opinion of the Russian people to both gain favor as a patriot with Russian nationalists and to pander to his neo-liberal base as a moderate using policy and not force. Yeltsin also admonishes his own government, the Foreign Ministry, as not adequately developing a policy for Russians abroad, thereby passing the buck on to Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev.45 However, in this statement, Yeltsin does not explicitly imply that Russia will or should involve itself militarily to protect Russians in the Baltics.46 Yet, his comments are still vague enough to leave the door open for

43 Byford, 716.
45 Andrei Kozyrev was Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation from 1992 to 1996 and considered a new-liberal in the early days of the new Russian state and, initially, a supporter of using international institutions to secure the rights and liberties of Russians abroad. Tsygankov, Andrei P. Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019, 60–61.
46 The author has personally heard of a doctrine called the Karaganov Doctrine. This “doctrine” is most likely related to Sergei Karaganov’s published comments in July 1992 where he said that “special emphasis should be placed on the prevention of violations of civil and other human rights of the minorities…” He specifically referred to the plight of ethnic Russians in Latvia and Estonia and the citizenship laws taking hold there. However, I do not find Mr. Karaganov’s comments to be a doctrine or a call for Russia to intervene directly. See: Karaganov, Sergei A. “Russia I: A Moscow View on the West's Role.” World Today, Jul 01, 1992, 122.
military intervention and threaten use of force. Perhaps most importantly, Yeltsin elected to shift blame and not get directly involved in resolving the diaspora problem. This opened Yeltsin up to influence from multiple interest groups that frustrated rather than aided the formation of a solid diaspora stance that also nested with his Atlanticist or Western leaning agenda.47

These forces included the executive branch, the Duma, the military, the Russian people, the various diaspora lobbies, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the nationalists. It is therefore prudent to assess some of these major factoring elements in how Russia came to develop its diaspora policy. Unfortunately, because of the numerous forces at play, this would contribute to the fog and confusion in the West in defining Russia’s position clearly. What is more, as Yeltsin sidelined the power of the Duma after his assault on the White House in 1993, he changed drastically his own view on the diaspora and the importance of integration with the West waned.48 This dichotomy would reflect Yeltsin finding himself between a rock and a hard place, between calls from Russian nationalists to exert Russian power in the near abroad and a need to not be perceived as a revanchist Russian leader.49 In the end, Yeltsin abandoned his “Atlanticist” policy in favor of a “Statist” policy that advocated for direct protection of Russians abroad.50 This policy would occur simultaneously with a shift in Russia after the shocks of the early 1990s, that Russia should establish a sphere of influence in the near abroad to counter Western influence.51 This shift is the pivot point for a Russia that had pursued foreign policy in partnership with the West but would come to pursue goals in a more competitive way.

48 Toal, 77 and Melvin [1994], 44. In 1993 the Duma impeached President Yeltsin in what would become known as the Constitutional Crisis and in return Yeltsin dissolved the Duma and besieged the parliament building, the White house, and opened fire on it with tanks.
49 Kolstoe [1995], 267.
50 Kugler, 28.
51 Toal, 82.
2.4.1 President Yeltsin: 1991–1993

In the early years of Yeltsin’s presidency, 1991–1993, Russia pursued no clear policy toward the diaspora populations. This was done deliberately by Yeltsin to avoid being perceived as trying to reconstitute the Russian empire and risk the main foreign policy goals that were economics focused.\(^{52}\) The view of the democrats, Yeltsin, and the neo-liberal Foreign Minister, Kozyrev, was that the focus of Russia should be assimilation and integration with Western institutions, especially those that could support economic growth like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank.\(^{53}\) Inherent in this line of policy was also the misplaced assumption that Russia would be accepted by the West on “a basis of equality and partnership.”\(^{54}\) Therefore, a clear diaspora policy was avoided, leaving the diaspora to be dealt with by the NIS and, by extension, Russia could divest itself of any direct interest in the NIS and avoid repeating its imperial and Soviet past.\(^{55}\) Yeltsin made clear that problems with the NIS had to be negotiated and any issues arising around the diaspora should be dealt with through political means, not military.\(^{56}\) Even during the 1992 June Transnistria War where the Russian 14th Guards Army was decisively involved, Yeltsin made several public statements that the use of force should be a last resort and that a “Yugoslav variant with Russian troops participating cannot be permitted.”\(^{57}\)

However, Yeltsin would come under extreme pressure from many sectors in 1992 onward to develop some coherent policy toward the diaspora as the Transnistria conflict served as

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\(^{52}\) Melvin (1995), 11 and Lough, 53 and Yeltsin’s New Year’s address December 30, 1992, and Zevelev [2001], 149—“…Andrei Kozyrev, a dedicated neo-liberal in his views on world politics…”

\(^{53}\) Melvin [1995], 11 and Kolstoe [1995], 266 and Tsygankov, 71. Russia would eventually join the IMF and World Bank in June 1992. However, the large “Marshall Plan” type bail out from the West never materialized leaving Westernizers like Yeltsin and Kozyrev feeling abandoned. Tsygankov, 72.

\(^{54}\) Kolstoe [1995], 268.

\(^{55}\) Melvin [1995], 12.

\(^{56}\) Kolstoe [1995], 268.

\(^{57}\) Ibid. Before the fall of the USSR Yeltsin made the following statement in reference to Russians in the Baltic states—“First and foremost, tanks and violence cannot serve as guarantees. . . The most important and natural guarantee for them will be the retention of solid and multifarious relations between Russia and the other republics. These relations should be built on a reliable legal foundation.” Kolstoe [1995], 264. Transnistria is English for Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (PMR), see Toal 68.
a test case for Russian defense of Slavs. This pressure, a direct risk to his presidency and re-election in the 1996 election, would compel Yeltsin to not be seen as abandoning the diaspora to fate. For example, opponents in the Duma would call the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine into question beginning in January 1992, scrutinizing the legal basis for transfer which led to widespread protest in Ukraine and, more importantly for Western audiences, putting the transfer of nuclear weapons from Ukraine back to Russia at risk. Later in 1992, Vice-President Rutskoi visited Crimea and Transnistria calling for the Russian Duma to recognize the sovereignty of the Crimean Republic, which the Duma would pass in a resolution a month later. Yeltsin attempted to distance himself from the Duma resolutions and rhetoric by issuing sharp statements, further showcasing the divide in policy trajectory between the legislative and executive branches. This struggle, between opposing views on what trajectory Russian foreign policy would take, would have far-reaching consequences for East–West relations in the twenty-first century.

2.4.2 Ministry of Foreign Affairs–Andrei Kozyrev

In the early years, Yeltsin was not alone in his desire to lean on laws, international norms, and international institutions in dealing with diaspora issues. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Andrei Kozyrev, was considered a neo-liberal who “pushed integration with the West against growing pressure from nationalistic and Communist forces.” He also adhered to the idea that “the majority of the great powers were linked together in a system of common values centered on the market economy, in which a country’s status was defined largely by its level of scientific and technological advancement.” In regard to minorities, Kozyrev echoed Yeltsin in believing that issues of human rights among the diaspora populations were best dealt with through international

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58 Hughes, 107.
60 Gunawan, 214 and Kolstoe [1995], 271.
61 Kolstoe [1995], 281.
62 Black, 8.
63 Kolstoe [1995], 269.
organizations like the United Nations (UN) and Organization for Security and Cooperations in Europe (OSCE). Yet, like Yeltsin, his liberal views began to harden by the end of 1992 and beginning of 1993, especially surrounding the rights and liberties of the diaspora in Latvia and Estonia. Yeltsin would try to save his own image on the issue by blaming Kozyrev for not developing an effective diaspora policy. Kozyrev for his part attempted to stick to utilizing international institutions when he spoke to the UN General Assembly in September 1992 where he berated Latvia and Estonia for their treatment of Russians. At the same time that Kozyrev attempted to utilize international institutions, he increasingly raised the possibility of the use of force to protect Russian minorities. This trend to abandon neo-liberal thinking in favor of hard power options against what was widely viewed as advancing Western influence, was occurring across the full political spectrum in 1990s Russia with varying levels of advocacy.

Although, with time, Kozyrev’s view would toughen on how to protect the diaspora, indeed, along with Russia’s place and role in the near abroad, it was not enough to change his inherent character as a neo-liberal in the view of other influential figures and entities in the Russian elite. As mentioned previously, Yeltsin used Kozyrev as a scapegoat for his own indecisiveness and a convenient smoke screen against those that saw the president as too liberal. Vice-President Rutskoi and presidential adviser Stankevich, to be discussed next, heaped disapproval on Kozyrev as being indifferent to the plight of the diaspora as Kozyrev tried to balance neo-liberal rhetoric for Western audiences and advocating for direct protection of the diaspora at home. Kozyrev was unfairly villainized, unable to shed the view by his peers that he

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65 Kolstoe [1995], 283. Latvia and Estonia passed voting and citizenship laws that discriminated against ethnic Russians.
66 Kolstoe [1995], 284.
67 Melvin [1994], 33.
69 Melvin [1994], 33 and Toal, 83–84.
was a staunch neo-liberal even after producing a new foreign policy at the end of 1992 that outlined nine key tenants, three of which dealt with protecting the rights of ethnic Russians abroad.\textsuperscript{70} Even by 1993, statements by Kozyrev that the “protection of legitimate rights of the millions of Russian-speaking minorities in the former Soviet Republics…economic integration…and the peace-making activities in conflict areas: All of these are an objective necessity” was not enough to stem the influential movement of nationalism in Russia.\textsuperscript{71}

The December 1993 Duma elections resulted in the victory of Vladimir Zhirinovsky’s nationalist party, Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), with 22.92 percent of the vote.\textsuperscript{72} This would make the nationalist camp the largest party in Russia’s first multi-party elections signaling a dramatic shift in public and institutional support away from Kozyrev’s Atlanticist policies.\textsuperscript{73} The military and its lobby would also put pressure on Kozyrev and Yeltsin through adopting a new doctrine in November 1993 that declared Russia’s near abroad as critical to its strategic interests and a most vital concern.\textsuperscript{74} Kozyrev would end 1993 following these monumental shifts in Russian foreign policy by “declaring the former Soviet region the sphere of Russia’s vital interests, and the continuation of a military presence in regions where Russia had traditionally been dominant.”\textsuperscript{75} While the Russian Duma, military, and other branches of government were codifying their views, the natural problem to be solved was how to enforce the new policies when Russia was ill prepared to do so.

\textsuperscript{70} Toal, 82.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, 84.
\textsuperscript{72} Toal, 75 and Tsygankov, 78.
\textsuperscript{73} Toal, 75 and Tsygankov, 79. Atlanticism means, from a Russian perspective, a need to cooperate with the West and US to help transform Russia into a member of the liberal democratic order and this can be accomplished through democratic values and market-oriented economies. Mankoff, Jeffrey. \textit{Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics}. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009, 71.
\textsuperscript{74} Tsygankov, 78.
\textsuperscript{75} Tsygankov, 78 and Melvin [1994], 31.
2.4.3 Fedor Shelov-Kovedyaev

Fedor Shelov-Kovedyaev would be appointed in March 1992 to the position of first
deputy foreign minister for Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) affairs in the near
abroad. A Kozyrev surrogate, he advocated for better relations with the NIS and saw the CIS as
a multinational means for addressing the diaspora question. However, Shelov-Kovedyaev was
critical of Russian foreign policy, seeing the brinkmanship used in cases like Ukraine as
weakening Russia’s position and influence in the near abroad. In 1992, at the bequest of Yeltsin,
he wrote a report entitled “Russia in the New Abroad: Strategy and Tactics for Safeguarding
National Interests.” He did not directly address the question of the diaspora’s role in the
safeguarding of national interests. However, more broadly, he addressed the need to protect
human rights across the former USSR through multinational organizations, especially in the case
of the Baltics. Although Shelov-Kovedyaev disagreed with the confusing foreign policy
trajectory, he was an advocate for Russia becoming a leader in the near abroad in recognition of
its “special interests.” Shelov-Kovedyaev’s ambiguity on who Russia should protect and for
what reasons, showcases the general piecemeal approach to foreign policy in the early 1990s and
within the Russian Foreign Ministry.

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76 Defined: “Free association of sovereign states that was formed in 1991 by Russia and 11 other republics
that were formerly part of the Soviet Union. The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) had its
origins on December 8, 1991, when the elected leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus (Belorussia) signed
an agreement forming a new association to replace the crumbling Union of Soviet Socialist
Republics (U.S.S.R.). The three Slavic republics were subsequently joined by the Central Asian republics
of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, by the Transcaucasian republics
of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, and by Moldova. (The remaining former Soviet republics—
Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia—declined to join the new organization.)” Britannica, T. Editors of

77 Lough, 55. See also report entitled “Russia in the New Abroad: Strategies and Tactics for Safeguarding
National Interests.”

78 Ibid.


80 Kolstoe [1995], 273 and Toal, 83.
2.4.4 Sergei Stankevich and Aleksander Rutskoi

An increasingly strong majority of the Yeltsin government favored a far more aggressive policy toward diaspora protection and rights. A common characteristic of this line of thinking was progressively more nationalistic and simultaneously favored a more assertive role for Russia in the near abroad in line with retaining a privileged sphere of influence vis-à-vis the West. The presidential advisor, Sergey Stankevich, was a leading figure in this group. He was a critic of the Russian response to purported human rights violations in the Baltic states, he disagreed that Russia intervening in the NIS was outside international norms but rather necessary if Russians were threatened, and Russia had a responsibility in the NIS to take an active role in adjudicating diaspora issues. On the Baltic situation, to be discussed in more detail later, Stankevich advocated for linking Russian troop withdrawal to the treatment of the minorities and called Estonian and Latvian citizenship laws an “apartheid system.” Not a man to try to balance both Western integration and Russian intervention like Yeltsin and Kozyrev in 1993, Stankevich openly advocated for a policy of intervention when he said, “Russia is entitled to protect her own citizens without having to recourse to the mediation of foreign human rights activists.” Stankevich represents well how the connection between ways and means of establishing a sphere of influence using the diaspora was formed.

Another close associate of Stankevich was Vice-President Aleksander Rutskoi, with whom he traveled to Crimea and Transnistria in the spring of 1992 advocating for the recognition of these regions as independent by the Duma. In Tiraspol, quasi capital of Transnistria, Rutskoi stated that the Dniester Republic “has existed, exists and will continue to exist.” Rutskoi was

81 Sergei Stankevich was a historian and presidential adviser to Yeltsin from 1992 to 1993. In 1996 he would be charged with graft and moved abroad. Grigas, 66.
82 Kolstoe [1995], 270.
83 Simonsen, 771 and Toal, 81.
84 Kolstoe [1995], 271.
85 Ibid.
also a decorated Afghan War veteran with close ties to the military and military lobby, supporting more active measures to defend Russians in the near abroad.\footnote{Kolstoe [1995], 271.} The desiderata was both a need to re-establish Russian influence in the near abroad for strategic depth and reassert military influence. Following his spring 1992 visit to Crimea and Transnistria, Rutskoi would become an outspoken advocate for an increased military role in the near abroad and pushed for an eventual Duma resolution that supported the use of the Russian 14\textsuperscript{th} Guards Army as peace-keeping forces in the region of Transnistria.\footnote{Melvin [1994], 32 and Lough, 54.} So powerful was Rutskoi’s influence that even Yeltsin was forced to make concessions to the vice-president. In February 1993, Yeltsin made a speech to the Civic Union, a group opposed to shock therapy policies in which Rutskoi was a leading member, during which he called on the UN Security Council to make Russia the “guarantor of peace and stability in regions of the former USSR.”\footnote{Toal, 85. Of course Rutskoi would fall from power after the 1993 Constitutional Crisis where he played a prominent role as vice-president of the Russian Federation and temporarily assumed the position of “acting president.”} Far from a concrete policy or codified law, it was an example of a step in the right direction for Rutskoi initially.

\textbf{2.4.5 Russian Military}

Of all the governmental organizations in Russia, the military would have the greatest influence on diaspora and foreign policy.\footnote{Ibid.} The military at this time was struggling with its own new realities with the collapse of the USSR. First, tactical and strategic considerations needed to be re-evaluated in how to protect the new Russian state while contending with the loss of strategic depth due to the new borders. Principally, Russian defense planners had real concerns about the strategic military infrastructure that was critical to defense, such as the Russian early warning radar which was mostly located in now NIS.\footnote{Kolstoe [1995], 274.} In an environment where several of the NIS were not in the mind of letting Russia maintain military assets on their territory, the defense of the
diaspora seemed like a viable option for justified intervention in these nations to secure assets and support a defense in depth doctrine.

Second, the idea of integrating and working with the West seemed absurd given the decades long struggle with the West as an enemy.\textsuperscript{91} The early Western leaning policies by the Yeltsin government would not result in a cultural shift in the Ministry of Defense (MOD) on who the main threat was. Third, the military suffered a domestic and international reduction in status as a global superpower force and a privileged class of \textit{siloviki} within Russia.\textsuperscript{92} The military was able to take steps to address their organizational concerns by playing on the diaspora question to reestablish the military as an influential force within Russia and in the near abroad. With the support of Rutskoi, Defense Minister, Pavel Grachev advocated for an aggressive policy of intervention in the near abroad on behalf of the diaspora and especially service members abroad.\textsuperscript{93} Grachev promoted this point in a draft military doctrine published in the 1992 edition of the General Staff journal, \textit{Red Star}. A provision stipulated that violation of the rights of both ethnic Russians and those identifying as Russian outside the Russian Federation must be defended.\textsuperscript{94}

As the Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued to flounder on near abroad and diaspora policy, the Ministry of Defense took on a more proactive role. Grachev was very open about his support and advocacy for protecting Russians abroad in real or perceived threatening situations. As will be discussed in depth in Chapter Two, the MOD used the diaspora to introduce troops to Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Tajikistan and with tacit support for 14th Guards Army operations in Moldova.\textsuperscript{95} The military even had enough sway to force Yeltsin to cancel a much anticipated

\textsuperscript{91} Kolstoe [1995], 273.
\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{93} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{94} Kolstoe [1995], 273; Lough, 57; and Melvin [1995], 13.
\textsuperscript{95} Melvin [1994], 39.
summit with Japan on the status of the Kuril Islands in 1992, an international rebuke of the “West.” In April 1994, Yeltsin issued Directive No. 174 which acknowledged executive support for:

The proposal of the Russian Ministry of Defense…on the creation of military bases of the Russian Federation Armed Forces on the territories of the member states of the CIS and the Latvian Republic in order to ensure the security of the Russian Federation and the aforementioned states, and also for testing new arms and military equipment.

Again, this directive demonstrates the increased influence of the military establishment over Yeltsin by the mid-1990s. By 1995 the military felt emboldened enough to advocate, at least in theory, for a re-occupation of the Baltic states to “counter Western attempts to isolate and destroy Russia.”

2.4.6 Yeltsin Transition: A Broad General Consensus 1994–1999

If the early years of the new Russian Federation seemed like a story of confusion, indecisiveness, and conflicting policy, the years of 1994 to 1999 took on clearer meaning for Russia and for the West in theory. Yeltsin signaled a shift in diaspora policy in his 1994 New Year’s Eve Address to the nation when he said:

Dear compatriots! You are inseparable from us, and we are inseparable from you. We were and will be together. On the basis of law and solidarity, we defend and will defend your and our common interests. In the New Year, 1994, we will do this with greater energy and greater resoluteness.

Yeltsin’s comments were a continuation of a storyline begun in 1993 as his Western integration policy floundered following the disastrous 1992 shock therapy, 1993 Duma elections where

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96 Mankoff, 29.
97 Verona, Sergiu. “Russian Minorities in the Near Abroad: Political and Military Implications.” CRS Report for Congress. May 18, 1994, 12. Reports indicate that the plan would have called for the establishment of 30 military bases in the near abroad countries. Verona, 12.
99 Melvin [1995], 18.
radical nationalists won out, and while the West increasingly signaled that it did not intend to include Russian in any meaningful pan-European security architecture. Yeltsin would re-iterate the basic tenants of his New Year’s address in a February 1994 address to parliament where he signaled that any threats to Russians inside or outside Russia would supply a justification for strengthening the Russian state.

What’s more striking is that a link began to form between diaspora policy and the establishment of a larger near abroad policy where Russia believed it should have a sphere of influence. Yeltsin had finally joined the general consensus of the Duma, military, and siloviki that Russia needed a policy that protected the diaspora in line with establishing a sphere of influence in the near abroad. The rhetoric and policy evolution supports the idea that in developing an answer to the diaspora, all facets of the Russian state were coming to the same conclusion. That conclusion was that Russia needed a Monroe type doctrine in the near abroad to solidify great power status and could be justified through the diaspora. Yurii Baturin, President Yeltsin’s security adviser, made the following statement to *Der Spiegel* in February 1994 highlighting this link:

*Der Spiegel*: Recently, Foreign Minister Kozyrev has been repeatedly calling for the understanding to be shown for Russia’s ‘special role’ on the territory of the former USSR. What does this ‘special role’ entail?

Baturin: In the former Soviet republics, there are a great many people who still feel that they are citizens of Russia…

*Der Spiegel*: The figure that is cited is 25 million…Thus, the ‘special role’ is a modest way of expressing great-power politics?

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100 Goldgier [2020], 302. Goldgier and Shifrinson site evidence in their article that “By the fall of 1994…the internal [domestic NATO] enlargement debate was largely over… Alternative approaches discussed in the early to mid-1990s, such as emphasizing NATO’s Partnership for Peace, using CSCE as the basis for a pan-European security architecture, or encouraging security solutions in Eastern Europe through the European Union, fell by the wayside as policymakers treated an expanded NATO as the crux of the US’ post-Cold War efforts to craft a Europe whole, free, and at peace” Goldgier [2020], 302–303.
101 Melvin [1995], 19.
102 Toal, 82.
Baturin: If Russia sees itself as a great power, then it must take care of the ‘Russians abroad…’

Further, the interventions in Moldova and Georgia served as case studies for how Russia could justify intervention on the basis of protecting the diaspora and secure a great-power role in its near abroad. What’s more, in 1993, Yeltsin linked the treatment of Russians in the Baltic states to troop withdrawal of 120,000 Russian soldiers, formerly Red Army soldiers. These cases together show that Russia laid the foundations for a near abroad sphere of influence policy where the near abroad was viewed “as the zone where Russia’s crucial vital interests were concentrated, where threats were gathering, and where Russia needed to preserve a military presence and capacity to act.” Yet, Russia’s policy needed to be codified into law and establish a clear legal and humanitarian basis for intervening on behalf of the diaspora. The resulting presidential decrees, resolutions, and declarations would focus on the compatriots abroad and would serve as an indicator to the near abroad countries, and the West, where Russia stood on the diaspora and reveal the means for securing its sphere of influence goals.

The first compatriot document to come from the Yeltsin administration was the January 1993 “Report on Urgent Measures for Socio-cultural Cooperation between Citizens of the Russian Federation with their Compatriots Abroad.” The report compiled by Sergey Stankevich before his ouster, was still vague on defining what a compatriot was but did call for Russia to establish “links between compatriots and the Russian state as well as public organizations to implement this task.” Yet, it was not until August 1994 that the Duma and executive branch passed resolutions to establish mechanisms for supporting compatriots abroad.

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103 Melvin [1994], 46 and see footnote 106.
104 The US had also eventually accepted Russia’s peace-keeping operations in Moldova and Georgia, even if not in legal terms. Toal, 85.
105 Simonsen, 771 and Grigas, 66.
106 Toal, 85.
107 Grigas, 67.
The two documents were Presidential Decree No. 1681, Guidelines on State Policy Regarding Compatriots Living Abroad and Duma Resolution No. 1064, List of Primary Measures to Support Compatriots Abroad.¹⁰⁹ These two documents in tandem continued to still not clearly define compatriot but did advocate a policy of dual citizenship, but for whom exactly was vague.¹¹⁰ The policies did establish two categories of people that would be affected: “emigrants from Russia and the USSR and the Russian-speaking populations of the former Soviet Union republics.”¹¹¹ A dual policy that worked simultaneously was also enacted through these laws that would encourage emigrants in the West to return to Russia and prevention of migration from countries in the near abroad.¹¹² In this way, Russia was encouraging the exiled intelligentsia community to return to Russia from the West to bolster Russian power and maintain influence in its sphere of influence. Russia was forming a very clear, codified policy that solidified the tool, diaspora, in a region where Russia would pursue a sphere of influence.¹¹³

By 1995 the definitional meaning of compatriot was further defined and codified in the “Declaration on Support of the Russian Diaspora and Protection of Russian Compatriots.”

Compatriots were broadly defined as:

All the natives of the USSR and Russia and all their descendants regardless of their nationality and ethnicity, language, religion, gender, occupation and place of residence and other circumstances, who are not citizens of the Russian Federation but explicitly declare their spiritual, cultural, and ethnic ties with the Russian Federation or with any districts of Russian Federation and confirm this relationship.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Grigas, 67.
¹¹⁰ Zevelev [2001], 143.
¹¹¹ Grigas, 69.
¹¹² Grigas and others identify the reason for this being that Russia was not in a position in the 1990s to provide for 25 million repatriates and had begun to see the value in using the diaspora as a foreign policy tool. Grigas, 70. See sociologist Hilary Pilkington’s study of Russia repatriation prevention from Central Asia in the 1990s.
¹¹³ The means for defending the rights of compatriots in the near abroad was through diplomatic and economic means at this point. Russia pursued engagement programs with the compatriots through broadcasting Russian-language television, supporting Russian-language mass media, and supporting cultural centers in the near abroad. Zevelev [2001], 143.
¹¹⁴ Grigas, 70–71.
The intent of this definition is clear, that Russia sought to define compatriots in a broad sense and thereby be in a position to “develop” compatriot communities across the near abroad. In this way, the tool was not a finite resource but potentially replicable given the right circumstances and not restricted to 25 million ethnic Russians but a full spectrum of peoples with ties to the Slavic world. As ethnic Russian communities abroad decreased in population size throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, non-ethnic populations under the broader compatriot policies would become increasingly important.

In May 1996, the Resolution of the Government No. 590, Action Program for Protecting Compatriots Abroad, was enacted to better define a legal definition of compatriots and reaffirm the government policy of helping compatriots integrate into the states where they resided. Russia declared that it would assist the governments in the near abroad to responsibly include and protect Russians within their societies.\textsuperscript{115} The reasons for preventing repatriation still apply, but integration has the benefit of attempting to incorporate compatriots into governmental structures like the military, industry, and state legislatures.\textsuperscript{116} This type of compatriot with influence would be more valuable than a compatriot with no proximal position to the levers of power should Russia need it to act on sphere of influence policy.\textsuperscript{117}

In the same year of 1996, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs saw a major shift in leadership.\textsuperscript{118} The appointment of Evgenii Primakov in 1996 as Foreign Minister represented the general departure of the Atlanticist view that Kozyrev and other neo-liberals championed in the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{115} Grigas, 67.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Russia promoted partnership between Russia and industrial enterprises in the NIS that were majority employed with compatriots. Zevelev [2001], 143.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Primakov and Yeltsin would attempt to pursue a dual-citizenship policy in the NIS, but the majority of states would reject this idea except for Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. Tsygankov, 120 and Grigas, 72–73.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Lynch, 9.
\end{itemize}
early days of the Russian Federation to a Statist view. However, before 1996 as FSB director, Primakov had championed a policy of linking the fate of Russians abroad to the strength of the Russian state in general. Primakov’s Statist position, and the general opinion in Russia at the time, is captured in his statement that “Russia has been and remains a great power, and its policy toward the outside world should correspond to that status…Russia is both Europe and Asia, and this geopolitical location continues to play a tremendous role in formulation of its foreign policy…” Further, the group of laws passed in the preceding years would prove valuable in opposing NATO expansion, Primakov’s main focus. NATO had decided to pursue an expansion policy in January 1994 in response to several factors ranging from Eastern Europe lobbies and diasporas, Balkan security crisis’, Russia’s own rhetoric, and a certain amount of triumphalism. However, it is not in the scope of this paper to assess the drivers of NATO expansion but rather highlight the missed signals of where it should and should not expand and the strategies to accompany any expansion recognizing potential Russian responses.

To be sure, the Russian government saw the diaspora and its use for perceived legitimate involvement in the affairs of the near abroad countries as a means to counter and prevent NATO

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119 The statist view found that Russia was a great power, needed to counter the US and its unipolar position, did not adhere to the idea that international cooperation shaped world politics, and a reliance on the strength of the state for defense. Tsygankov, 97. A Statist view in general “views cooperation at conditional…it rejects neither cooperation nor community building in principle but it judges these ventures by whether they benefit the nation…it often aspires to dominate the areas near its borders and to exert influence farther out…can be imperial but need not be so…it outward strategic thrust has geopolitical aims…” Kugler, 25.
120 Ibid, 119.
121 Tsygankov, 95.
122 Matlock [2010], 3–7 and Tsygankov, 105.
expansion. The desired result was to support a favorable balance of power in the region.\textsuperscript{124}

Ideally, dual-citizenship would have been the easiest way to incorporate the diaspora and keep them at arms-length. However, this policy option was not accepted by the NIS in general to make it viable. Kozyrev would spearhead this initiative in 1993 but was only successful at signing agreements with Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, more strategically significant countries like Ukraine and Kazakhstan refused.\textsuperscript{125} In the absence of a robust dual-citizenship track to diaspora incorporation, the Yeltsin government continued to draft ambiguous laws to protect compatriots, in a way making it easier for Russia to define who they would intervene for and why.

By 1999, the final compatriot law was drafted, which would stand unchanged until 2010, entitled the Federal Law on the State Policy of the Russian Federation Concerning Compatriots Abroad.\textsuperscript{126} This new law made it so compatriot status was automatically granted and withdrew the ability to self-identify laid out in the 1995 law.\textsuperscript{127} The new definition defined compatriots as those “who were born in one [Soviet Union or Russia] state, are living or lived in it and who share common language, history, heritage, traditions and customs as well as their direct descendants residing outside the territory of the Russian Federation, except for descendants of persons who belong to titular nations of foreign states.”\textsuperscript{128} For example, an ethnic Kazak who was born during the USSR would be considered a compatriot but his descendants would not and an ethnic Russian living in Georgia would be considered a compatriot along with his descendants. Further, a Tatar living in Tajikistan would also be considered a compatriot along with his descendants. In this way, Russia made it so the pool of potential compatriots was not the entire population of the former USSR but could also expand beyond the strictly ethnic Russian diaspora

\begin{footnotes}
\item[124] Charap and Tsygankov, 105.
\item[125] Zevelev [2001], 2 and Grigas, 73.
\item[126] Grigas, 73–74.
\item[127] Zevelev [2001], 5.
\item[128] Grigas, 74.
\end{footnotes}
population.\textsuperscript{129} Regardless of the contradictions and ambiguity in this law, it continues to show an attempt to expand the diaspora and influence potential in the NIS or the Russian near abroad.\textsuperscript{130}

2.5 Conclusion

Russian foreign policy development in the 1990s was an evolutionary story that was forged in the fires formed by Russian weakness and Western strength. The main individual and organizational drivers of Russian foreign policy from an Atlanticist to a complete Statist direction was finalized with the appointment of Primakov to the Foreign Ministry. The insecurity of the Russian state after the downfall of the USSR resulted in an attempt to integrate with the West but was ultimately unsustainable given the forces within Russian government and institutions that distrusted this path. The West, for its part, was not completely unsupportive of the Yeltsin-Kozyrev Atlanticist mission. However, Russian security and national status found broader support throughout the Russian government and security complex that favored a Statist strategy. NATO expansion and European security architecture that excluded Russia was a significant catalyst that gave the forces discussed leverage. This leverage was used to influence the Yeltsin government to abandon integration in favor of taking a deliberate path to secure a sphere of influence in-line with Statist dogma. The question: how to secure a sphere of influence when the West was strong and Russia weak? The answer became clear throughout the 1990s that the Russian diaspora could be used to give the Russian Federation an advantage to secure such a sphere of influence.\textsuperscript{131}

That advantage would be grounded in popular support networks in near abroad countries, control of strategic assets in foreign states through people sympathetic to Russia, and a legitimacy

\textsuperscript{129} Grigas, 74.
\textsuperscript{130} Byford, 718–720.
\textsuperscript{131} The utility of the diaspora tool will be discussed in depth in Chapter Two using case studies to highlight the strengths, weaknesses, and lessons learned about tool utility by the Russian Federation.
to be involved in the affairs of other states for R2P missions. The diaspora policy development in the executive and legislative branches, the general rhetoric, and the military doctrine development, shows a link with sphere of influence policy maturity. Of course, Russia could not pursue an overt sphere of influence policy lest be rebranded an imperial power. Such a branding would have made it impossible for Russia to attract the economic aid it so desperately needed. However, a diaspora policy could be much more acceptable to the international and domestic communities where the true sphere of influence policy could be couched.

Further, the ability to station Russian peace-keeping troops in Moldova and Georgia under an R2P justification in the 1990s shows the importance of the diaspora as a legitimizing factor. Russian policy also started to focus less on ethnic Russians and more with anyone outside Russia that could be associated with Russia and domiciled in the near abroad states. In this way, Russia expanded the population of peoples that could be used and cultivated to support Russian sphere of influence policy. This policy was also relatively cheap as Russia rebuilt its economy and military.

Russia also established two concepts that helped facilitate the diaspora policy: the near abroad and the compatriots. The establishment of the near abroad idea allowed Russia to telegraph where it considered its sphere of influence and where the diaspora was most important. Even more essential was to identify the group of people to be targeted. Ethnic Russians was too narrow a term, but “compatriots” allowed the policy to include far more than the twenty-five million ethnic Russians. Moreover, the definition of compatriots can be adjusted

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132 The 1999 “Concept of the Russian Federations State Policy Toward the Compatriots Abroad” used rhetoric that characterized the plight of compatriots in the near abroad as “discrimination, forceful assimilation, pushing out, ethnic isolation, and growth of ethnic and cultural distance.” This type of rhetoric lays the groundwork for providing Russia R2P type justification. Zevelev [2001], 145.
133 The United States arguably conducts a similar policy of disguising its sphere of influence policy in NATO and NATO expansion.
134 For example, diaspora in Britain would be far less important than diaspora in Ukraine.
to include more or less people. This would be important in scoping who should be targeted in correlation with a limited amount of resources.

Finally, the West should have paid more attention to how Russia developed its diaspora policy in the 1990s. ¹³⁵ This is not the same thing as the West realizing that NATO expansion would unsettle the Russians and not care because the West was strong and Russia weak. Rather, NATO failed to recognize the strength of diaspora countermeasures that Russia was developing to punish NATO. A better understanding could have helped develop strategies that worked to peacefully bring countries like Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova into the European community and out of Russia’s near abroad. However, the predominant result has been violence on the part of the Russians and decreased security in Europe.

The opening salvo of Russian intervention has always been through the diaspora, starting in the 1990s. Indeed, Russian conventional forces have enjoyed remarkable success, even when weak, in utilizing the diaspora to its advantage during incursions. For example, Russia has successfully maintained a peace-keeping presence in Moldova and Georgia and still decisively controls the Crimean Peninsula and the Donbass region of Ukraine, all during times of military weakness. Even more important, Russia has been able to keep all three of these countries out of Western institutions like the EU and NATO. What’s more, the current Special Military Operation shows how important diaspora is to Russian success. Russia has been most successful in regions where it has diaspora and lost decisively in regions that are predominantly Ukrainian. Later in this thesis, I will discuss the indicators and warnings the West should be looking for in the future of where Russia may intervene in its near abroad and where NATO expansion may not be advisable or successful until certain favorable criteria are met that weakens Russia’s hand in diaspora communities.

¹³⁵ Zevelev [2001], 159–160.
As a final note, preliminary evidence shows that when NATO influence, not necessarily expansion, overlaps with significant diaspora populations in Russia’s near abroad, Russia will choose to exercise its intervention capabilities through the diaspora. These three elements, NATO, diaspora, and near abroad, is the most accurate barometer for intervention. Therefore, NATO should pay more attention to this combination and develop a strategy to combat or prevent a Russian incursion by focusing on the diaspora in Russia’s near abroad.
3. Chapter Two

3.1 Introduction

Throughout the 1990s, Russia “consolidated a doctrine that viewed the near abroad as the zone where [its] crucial vital interests were concentrated, where threats were gathering, and where Russia needed to preserve a military presence and capacity to act.”¹ That doctrine was consolidated and refined through multiple interventions in Russia’s near abroad during this period, a doctrine that would set the foundation for the largest war in Europe since World War II in Ukraine. In order to fully appreciate the strengths and weaknesses in this doctrine and its development, a targeted cross-regional case study assessment can be made of several Russian interventions in the 1990s that relied on the existence of a cross-border diaspora community either as a justification, or as a social base of support for military aggression. The RAND Corporation identified twenty-five global military interventions that Russia conducted between 1992 and 2018 based on certain activity types and force size thresholds.² Eight interventions outside the former Soviet states were either UN or NATO sanctioned other than involvement in the Syrian Civil War. The other seventeen occurred in the near abroad and of these, over half, or ten interventions involved the utilization of diaspora. Of the other seven, five involved Russian basing in near abroad countries such as the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea and two were Russian operations in the Tajik Civil War. However, the report’s authors also excluded one case: Russian forces based in the Baltics. This would bring the number of incidents where Russia acted independently of the UN or NATO and not a basing mission in the 1990s up to eleven and the percentage of near abroad interventions where the diaspora was a factor to 65 percent.³

¹ Toal, 85.
³ Russia also was involved in Tajikistan from 1992–2005 as a border presence and from 1992–1997 during the Tajik Civil War. Charap, 62.
For the purposes of analyzing exactly how Russia exercised, refined, and developed its diaspora intervention policy in the 1990s, I have chosen several case studies from this period. The first case study is the Russian intervention in Moldova and, specifically, in the region of Transnistria during and after the Transnistria War of 1992. This could be considered the very first test case of Russia’s ability to defend ethnic Slavs in the near abroad against perceived aggression. It would also be the first case where local diaspora populations would set the conditions for direct Russian intervention, in this case the involvement of Russian’s 14th Guards Army and the permanent stationing of Russian peacekeeping forces in Moldova, which still persists to this day. The stationing of these forces has positioned Russia to hold sway over Moldovan aspirations for NATO and EU membership. Most importantly, this stationing would not be possible without the active support of segments of the Russian community in Transnistria.

The second case study is the Russian intervention on the side of ethnic Abkhazians and South Ossetians in the Georgian Civil War of 1992 and 1993. This case is important as the first intervention that was supported by non-ethnic Russian populations. This case would show the importance of populations outside ethnic Russians and help define the broader compatriot policies of the 1990s. Through Abkhazian and South Ossetian support, Russian peacekeeping force were permanently established in 1993 that would prove critical to Russian involvement in the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and Georgia’s continued exclusion from NATO and the EU.

The third and final case is Russia’s intervention in the Baltics from the collapse of the Soviet Union till the eventual withdrawal of Russian troops on 31 August 1994. Perhaps not traditionally viewed as an intervention with diaspora connections, the withdrawal of troops was directly linked to the treatment of ethnic Russians and, more importantly, the Baltic countries

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4 Hughes, 107.
5 Grigas, 106–107.
6 Chinn, 97.
agreeing to domicile the maximum amount of ethnic Russians. An extreme risk for Baltic sovereignty and a probable boon for Russian influence, a large proportion of the Russian community in the Baltics consisted of retired Soviet military and security personnel, an ideal population that could be mobilized in support of Russian sphere of influence and diaspora policy. In this case, the ethnic Russians in the Baltics would represent the second highest share of the total population of a near abroad country except for Kazakhstan. The Baltic case is also important in showcasing an instance where Russia failed to maintain influence over a near abroad country when it could have had the diaspora population to ensure control. Yet, all three Baltic countries, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, have joined the EU and NATO and strategically isolated the Russian oblast of Kaliningrad, increased NATO control of the Baltic Sea, and brought NATO forces in direct contact with Russian borders. From this perspective, the Baltic case seems to be the most important of near abroad countries for Russia to have kept within its sphere of influence and is subsequently one of the most important cases to study to find defenses to Russian diaspora policy.

In this chapter the background of each case study will be outlined to highlight both the similarities and differences of the conditions that preempted tool utilization. While the Russian goal in each case study was largely the same, namely, to retain control in the near abroad and defend against the perceived threat of Western influence, the conditions on the ground were varied. Next, Russian actions will be discussed. While the diaspora tool can be considered as simple as any tactical maneuver in theory, its application is much more varied in practice. Each case study offers a glimpse at the versatility of the tool and the large capacity to evolve further to account for changing technologies, demographics, politics and other factors and conditions over time. Finally, and most importantly, this chapter will discuss what Russia learned from each case

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7 Chinn, 105.
8 Ibid.
9 Kolstoe [1995], 108.
study about both strengths and weaknesses of this policy. While Russian diaspora utilization in
Georgia and Moldova could be considered successful, Russia lost in the Baltics. Both the success
and failures of Russian sphere of influence policy in the near abroad during this period would
influence the development and refinement of the tool for application in the twenty-first century.
For example, while Russia lost the strategically, economically, and geopolitically important
countries of Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania when the diaspora tool should have been strong would
have influenced Russian calculations when it came to Ukraine. In the Baltics, Russia withdrew
troops in the hopes that its diaspora would keep pressure on the Baltics but in the Ukrainian case,
Russia invaded. Russia learned that the diaspora as a tool was not infallible over the long run but
could be corrupted or weakened by the titular nation over time. These and other lessons learned
will prove important to identifying the indicators, warnings, and defenses to Russian diaspora
policy outlined in the conclusion of this work.

3.2 Moldova

3.2.1 Background to Conflict in Transnistria

3.2.1.1 Regional History Until 1989

The conflict in Transnistria, located east of the Dniester River, internationally recognized
as a part of Moldova, is best evaluated by understanding the complicated history of Moldova and
its relationship with Transnistria and Russia. Moldova, or Bessarabia, located west of the Dniester
River, has a relatively long history as a region which can be traced to the first independent
Moldavan principality founded in 1359. However, over the centuries and predominantly due to its
geopolitical position, the region has been a part of the Kingdom of Romania, the Ottoman
Empire, the Russian Empire, and finally the USSR.\footnote{Melvin [1995], 58 and Chinn, 163.} This history of foreign domination, coupled
with the effects of its imperial and Soviet dominion, resulted in an independent Moldova in 1991
suffering from “a society arranged around a complex series of loosely interconnected socio-economic, political and ethnic subsystems often organized on the basis of divergent sets of interests.”

In other words, Moldova suffered from a crisis of identity exacerbated by a multi-ethnic population with divergent cultures, allegiances, and languages. This legacy would be the defining characteristic of the conflict between independent Moldova and the region of Transnistria, the largest and most violent conflict to erupt after the break-up of the USSR.

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11 Melvin [1995], 58.
12 Arbatov, 145.
Figure 2: Map of Moldova and the Region

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More importantly, the region of this case study, Transnistria, was historically never a part of modern day Moldova from its location on the eastern side of the Dniester River. In 1924 the Soviet Union created the Moldavian Autonomous Republic as a self-governing region within Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). The Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR) did not include the lands to the west of the Dniester River known as Bessarabia but the MASSR was intended as a jumping off point for the eventual inclusion of Bessarabia. Following the Russian revolution, the region of Bessarabia decided to unite with Romania, ending 106 years of Russian rule. Not until the Red Army reconquered the territory from Nazi Germany was the region of Bessarabia included in the MASSR and subsequently designated the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). As a result, the Soviet authorities united a predominantly ethnic Romanian Bessarabia with an ethnic Slavic Transnistria.

From this point onward a division formed between so-called left bank (east of the Dniester) Slavs and right bank (west of the Dniester) Moldovans. This division would prove instrumental to setting the conditions for war between the two sides. What is more, after Soviet annexation, the left bank became much more urban, Slavic, and Eastern Orthodox than the right bank where the majority of the urban-Moldovan intelligentsia had been killed by the Nazis and then in Stalin purges. This left a power vacuum that was filled by Slavs and Russified Moldovans who would come to dominate the political and economic levers of power in the SSR.

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14 Arbatov, 149
15 Ibid.
16 Arbatov, 151; Kolstoe [1995], 156; and Hill, 48.
17 Hughes, 103.
18 Melvin [1995], 59. Note, that for a brief period following the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between Nazi Germany and the USSR, Bessarabia was absorbed into MASSR in 1940 only to be overrun by German forces until the Red Army re-occupied the territory in 1944. Hill, 48–49.
19 Chinn notes that left bank Transnistria and right bank Moldova is denoted in relation to the Dniester Rivers flow to the Black Sea. Chinn, 163–166.
20 It should also be noted that Tsarist Russia and then the USSR encouraged immigration to Bessarabia to dilute the predominantly ethnic Romanian population. As a result, Romanians went from 86 percent of the population in 1817 to 56 percent in the 1930s. Further, Moscow encouraged a separate “Moldovan” identity from Romania to discourage pan-Romanian nationalist tendencies from erupting in Moldova. See Chinn, 166 and Hughes, 103.
from the mid-1940s till the mid-1980s. Further, beginning in Tsarist Russia and then the USSR, immigration was encouraged to Bessarabia to dilute the predominantly ethnic Romanian population and re-populate it with more loyal Slavs. As a result, Romanians went from 86 percent of the population in 1817 to 56 percent in the 1930s. Moscow also encouraged a separate “Moldovan” identity from Romania to discourage pan-Romanian nationalist tendencies from erupting in Moldova. A byproduct of this ethnic Russian-Slavic dominion over Moldova for 40 years would spark demands by Moldovan nationalists for independence in the 1980s.

3.2.1.2 Perestroika

Due to the ethnic make-up of the SSR, the Soviet development of a unique Moldovan identity separate from that of Romania, the russification policies, and the fact that Moldova had never been an independent nation produced a unique set of circumstances when Gorbachev’s perestroika arrived. Unlike other SSRs, Moldova’s implementation of the policy of korenizatsia (the indigenization of the government apparatus) was far less advanced and key political positions and urban areas were disproportionally Slavic. As a result, in Moldova, during the advent of nationalist movements throughout the USSR, the Moldovan movement was far less moderate. Korenzatsia as a policy would likely have checked more radical nationalism if the Moldovan governmental institutions had been indigenized. In the absence of moderate Moldovans in government, a small grouping of pro-independence organizations dominated post-independence

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21 Melvin [1995], 60; Hughes, 103; and Hill, 49.
22 Hill, 49.
23 Chinn, 166. By the 1980s, the Soviet engineered Moldovans constituted 64.5 percent of the population next to 13 percent Russian and 13.8 percent Ukrainian.
24 The USSR russufied Moldova by changing the Romanian alphabet back to Cyrillic and promoting Russian language. Further, Russians dominated the more desirable jobs and Moldovans the agricultural ones. Hughes, 103 and Hill, 49.
25 Perestroika is defined as “transformation” or political reforms within the USSR introduced by Gorbachev in 1986. Hewitt, 51.
26 Melvin [1995], 61 and Arbatov, 153. Korenzatsia was meant to allow for maximum titular nation involvement in government and us of titular language. The goal, to allow Moscow to control ethnic elites and suppress nationalist uprisings. Arbatov, 153.
The strongest and most dominant group was The Popular Front of Moldova (PFM). The PFM, like other popular fronts during this period, fought for Moldovan independence and the promotion of Moldovan culture. In response to the rise of the popular movement, the Moldovan government passed a new language law in August 1989 that downgraded Russian to “the language of inter-ethnic communication” and agreed to replace Cyrillic with the Latin alphabet.

In many ways this was the first warning shot for Russian speaking Transnistrians who saw their own position under attack as Moldovans reasserted themselves. In fact, the downgrading of Russian language across the former Soviet space was viewed by many Russian speakers as an attack. The second and third shots would come between 1989 and 1991. First, the PFM established a new political agenda with its main goal not the sovereignty of Moldova but the re-unification of the country with Romania. This idea was rejected by Russian-speaking Transnistrians who did not want to be part of Romania, a country whose language and church differed from their own. Most importantly, they did not want to lose the privileges bestowed upon the region from Moscow. Transnistria had been the industrial heartland of Moldova, relying on the Soviet military industrial complex and producing 33 percent of all industrial goods and 56 percent of all consumer goods. The Soviets had also deliberately concentrated the majority of factories on the left bank of the Dniester in what was believed to be more pro-Soviet territory. This favoritism from Moscow would contribute to another red flag, the geopolitical orientation of Moldova. The PFM was anti-Soviet and by 1990 the levers of power in Moldova were passing from communist to nationalist hands. The last elections for the Soviet parliament in Moldova in the spring of 1990 resulted in the PFM forming a coalition with other parties to control 66 percent

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27 Melvin [1995], 61.
28 Ibid.
29 Kolstoe [1995], 154.
30 Hughes 106.
32 Hill, 49.
of the parliament. Further solidifying the political orientation of Moldova away from Moscow was the election of Front members to leading positions in the government (Alexander Mosanu to the post of speaker, Mircea Snegur to president, and Mircea Druc to prime minister). Druc, in particular, was a vocal supporter of unification with Romania. By the summer of 1990, the government was mostly controlled by ethnic Moldovans and the Slavic communities put on the defensive as the minority and opposition. Taken together, these three measures, perceived suppression of Russian language, reunification with Romania, and political-economic orientation away from Moscow, would alienate ethnic Slavs and those that ultimately benefited from privilege and influence from Moscow.

3.2.1.3 Transnistria: Referendums and War

In response to the shocks that threatened Transnistrian power and position, a referendum was held in January 1990 in Tiraspol, the historical capital of Transnistria from the days of the MASSR, on the creation of a free economic zone. The referendum received a reported 90 percent in favor, a realistic result when the majority of the residents would have benefited economically from autonomy. By September 1990, Transnistria declared full autonomy, ceased to recognize Moldova as having sovereignty over the region, and established the Dniester Moldovan Soviet Socialist Republic. The central government in Chisinau was ill-prepared to push back against the referendums from a lack of security forces and political unity resulting in Transnistria becoming de facto independent. Nonetheless, the authorities in Transnistria began to form paramilitary units in all the major cities in the region to ensure independence. On 27

33 Hughes, 63.
34 Hughes, 105 and Chinn, 170.
35 Chinn, 170.
39 Kolstoe [1995], 158.
40 Hughes, 107.
August 1991, Moldova declared independence from the USSR and on 2 September, Transnistria also declared independence.\textsuperscript{41} Quickly, the new government in Transnistria consolidated power by electing a president, establishing a currency, electing of district and city councils, and building a Republican Guard of 12,000 men.\textsuperscript{42} Another important characteristic noted by several scholars is that this budding conflict was much less about ethnicity and more about political power.\textsuperscript{43} In 1991, Transnistria consisted of 25.5 percent Russians, 28.3 percent Ukrainians, and 40.1 percent Moldovans.\textsuperscript{44} Yet, the obvious differences between east and west bank populations were weaponized to solidify popular support for succession and independence by the local political and economic elite. These types of manufactured divisions would prove critical to establishing the basis for a threat and then subsequent Russian R2P missions.

In response to Transnistrian independence, Moldova kidnapped the Transnistrian leader, Igor Smirnov. Transnistria reacted by mobilizing its considerable economic weight and geopolitical position to interrupt gas and electricity to the right bank and to blockade all rail lines, reducing the freight capacity of Moldova by three-fourths and choking the right bank economically.\textsuperscript{45} Outmaneuvered, Chisinau demurred and released Smirnov, who was elected president of Transnistria on 1 December 1991.\textsuperscript{46} The elections were declared unconstitutional by the Moldovan government. Nine days after the elections in Transnistria, open conflict erupted in the city of Bender between Moldovan police and paramilitary forces from Transnistria.\textsuperscript{47} On 13 December 1991, fighting broke out in the left bank city of Dubossar after Moldovan armed forces entered the city with a mandate to arrest the organizers of the election in Transnistria and to

\textsuperscript{41} Hill, 50 and Hughes, 107.
\textsuperscript{42} Kolstoe [1995], 159 and Melvin [1995], 64.
\textsuperscript{43} Melvin [1995], 64; Kolstoe [1995], 144; Hughes, 101
\textsuperscript{44} Melvin [1995], 64.
\textsuperscript{45} Arbatov, 168; Kolstoe [1995], 159; and Hughes, 107. Transnistria also accounts for 25 percent of Moldova’s industry, 87 percent of electrical supply, and 100 percent of heavy electric machinery. Hughes, 10.
\textsuperscript{46} Arbatov, 172.
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Ibid}, 173.
To settle tensions, President Snegur and President Smirnov met on 15 December 1991 and agreed to resolve the conflict peacefully. However, following the dissolution of the USSR on 25 December 1991, Moldova once again sought to abolish Transnistria now that the USSR, of which Transnistria claimed to be a member, no longer existed.49

Finally, one critical and decisive factor to Transnistria’s ability to defend its interests and borders vis-à-vis Moldova was the 14th Guards Army stationed in Transnistria. The 14th Guards Army significantly bolstered Transnistrian defense forces with personnel and weapons, and even more so after the USSR collapsed when the army was in limbo. The status and existence of the 14th Guards Army in Tiraspol and other main cities in Transnistria is perhaps the clearest point of Russian intervention in the conflict.

3.2.3 Russian Actions

On 5 April 1992, in front of a 1944 World War II war memorial decorated with Russian and Transnistrian flags in Tiraspol, Transnistria, Vice-President of the Russian Federation, Alexander Rutskoi said that “every nation should determine their [its own] destiny…there was a Pridnestrovian Republic and there will be one.”50 In the same month as Rutskoi’s un-announced visit to Tiraspol, President Yeltsin formally placed the 14th Guards Army under Russian control.51 This move by Yeltsin coincided with the struggle in Moscow between the Statist and Atlantist viewpoints discussed in Chapter One. Kozyrev would make his own tour of the near abroad in

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48 Arbatov, 173. Prior to the fall of the USSR, Gorbachev had ordered that the 14th Red Army not intervene in the conflict, and he recognized the right of Moldova to sovereignty over all the territory of the former Moldovan SSR. Arbatov, 164.
51 Hughes, 108.
April 1992 and push back against those that thought the Yeltsin administration was not doing enough for Russians in the near abroad:

We cannot send a military helicopter for every Russian-speaking boy or girl in school in Moldova...We must not provoke Russophobic feelings in Moldova, because 75% of all the Russians and Russian speakers living in Moldova are beyond the Dniester, on the right bank of the Dniester.\(^{52}\)

Kozyrev’s pragmatic stance on the situation would not placate the nationalist sentiment throughout the new Russian government and protecting Russians through threat of force rather than diplomacy was chosen. That force was the 14th Guards Army that Yeltsin had reappropriated in April of the same year, favoring to support Rutskoi’s view over Kozyrev’s.

After the break-up of the USSR, the 14th Guards Army had been designated a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) asset and slated to be disbanded, its equipment to be distributed to Moldova. Yeltsin decision to nationalize the Army was instrumental for Russia’s efforts to gain a decisive hand in the region, since the 14th Guards Army had already unilaterally established inroads to supporting Transnistria. Yeltsin also realized that the majority of the Army would support a Russian take-over given its ethnic make-up and loyalty.\(^{53}\) Without the local support of the Transnistrians and the support of the officers and men of the army, who were predominantly ethnic Slavic, Yeltsin could not have hoped to take control of the situation on the ground—a point that underscores showing the importance of diaspora support for the success of Russian military interventions.

The 14th Guards Army as a fighting force was well equipped and manned and by far the largest military formation in the region when Yeltsin reasserted control over it. It consisted mainly of the 59th Mobile Rifle Division and other supporting elements totaling 6,000 to 10,000

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\(^{52}\) Chinn, 178.

\(^{53}\) Hill, 51. The Soviets had a practice whereby Soviet troops would not serve in their SSR of citizenship. However, in the 14th Guards Army’s case, the majority of the Army was ethnic Russian and citizens of the Russian SSR but residents of the Moldovan SSR. In this way, they circumvented the rule having come from Moldovan residents but retaining Russian SSR citizenship. Hill, 51.
personnel with a 60,000 strong reserve component. The 14th Guards Army had been equipped to participate on a Southern European Front in World War III to include a stockpile of tactical nuclear weapons. From the outset of the conflict, the Army had a predilection toward supporting the aims of Transnistria. Figures vary by source but between 40 percent and 51 percent of the officer corps and 79 percent to 90 percent of the enlisted ranks were from the region, which had been heavily russified. More strikingly, nearly the majority of the troops were ethnic Slavs and therefore identified and supported the aims of Transnistria to defend Slavic culture in the face of the Romanian-Moldovan alternative. Following the collapse of the USSR, reports indicate that many troops and officers joined the Transnistrian Guards, transferred weapons to the Guards, and took key leadership roles in the new Transnistrian defense structure.

A prominent example was the former 14th Guards Army commander, General Yakovlev, who went on to assume the post of Transnistrian Defense Minister. It would later become a challenge for the new Russian Ministry of Defense to prevent the outright mutiny of the 14th Guards Army with all its weapons and personnel to the Transnistrian defense forces and result in Russia losing control of a key asset in the conflict.

Prior to March 1992, Moldova had attempted to placate Transnistria to some extent while Transnistria consolidated control over Moldovan left bank villages and then progressed to control right bank Russian villages. These advances across the Dniester into Bessarabia would lead to more violent clashes. By March 1991, the small skirmishes between Moldova and Transnistria

54 Arbatov 179 and Hughes, 109. Further, the Army was fully equipped with tanks, howitzers, helicopters, and a stockpile of 40,000 tons of ammunition stored in the Transnistrian town of Kolbasnaia. Hughes, 107.
55 Hill, 51.
56 The region was also flooded with Don Cossacks (200–300) that supported the aims of Transnistria and these forces had the effect of promoting the defense of Russians abroad. Hughes, 107 and Arbatov, 176.
57 Arbatov, 179, Melvin [1995], 64, and Kolstoe [1995], 160.
58 Arbatov, 179.
59 Hughes, 107.
60 Arbatov, 182.
61 Chinn, 173.
had escalated to outright war and Moldova declared a state of emergency on 29 March 1992. Moldovan forces were ordered to advance “on the towns of Transnistria in an attempt to seize main communication lines and to isolate the region’s three main cities, Tiraspol, Dubossar, and Rybnitsa.” In April, following Russia’s re-assertion of control over the 14th Guards Army, negotiations for a ceasefire progressed between Russian, Ukraine, Romania, and Moldova with Russia representing Transnistria. Russia demanded that the 14th Guards Army serve as peacekeepers in the region, but this proposal was rejected and negotiations for a ceasefire halted. Following this failure, the war became more violent and saw its highest casualties in June when Moldovan forces armed with tanks advanced on the town of Bender.

3.2.3.1 Bender and the 14th Guards Army

While the war lines had mostly stabilized along the Dniester River, the town of Bender would become a turning point in the conflict. Bender is considered strategically important in linking Moldova to other former Soviet republics and is located on the right bank. Transnistrian Guards attacked and captured the majority of Bender’s police stations on 19 June 1992 while Moldovan forces had also advanced on Bender and attacked 14th Guards Army military housing and facilities in Bender. As a result, 14th Guards Army tanks and 5,000 troops supported Transnistrian Guards in capturing the entire city by 21 June. While the 14th Guards Army was

62 Arbatov, 176 and Chinn, 173. See Arbatov 145, footnote 1, for a definition of war and low-intensity conflict.
63 Arbatov, 176 and Hill, 50.
64 Hughes, 108.
65 Ibid.
66 Hughes, 108 and Arbatov, 178 and Melvin [1995], 64 and Chinn, 173. The city of Bender remained under Transnistrian jurisdiction after the war ended and all Moldovan officials were replaced with Transnistrian citizens. Russian peacekeeping forces have been instrumental in Transnistria consolidating control of territory in Moldova. Chinn, 174. Casualties numbered 500 killed, 1,500 wounded, and 80,000 displaced. Arbatov, 178.
officially neutral in the conflict, it became decisively and unofficially engaged in the fighting, especially after its facilities and personnel were attacked by Moldovan forces.67

This was also not the first time the 14th Guards Army had contributed to giving the Transnistrian Guards an advantage over the Moldovans. The troops of the 14th Guards Army were also engaged during a Moldovan attack on Dubossar on 14 May.68 In response to allegations that the 14th Guards Army was overstepping its mission, the Russian Ministry of Defense stated that the 14th Guards Army was “defending its neutrality in the Transnistrian conflict. Its personnel were allowed to open fire only in attempts to seize arms, or when there was a real threat to the lives of army personnel and their families.”69 The Ministry of Defense also claimed that the actions of the 5,000 soldiers and tanks that took part in the seizing of Bender were volunteers and acting privately.70 This would support reports that 14th Guards Army soldiers would put on Transnistrian Guard uniforms when they were needed to support Transnistrian operations vis-à-vis Moldova.71

At the height of the fighting around Bender, Russia replaced the 14th Guards Army commanding general, Yuri Netkachev, with a Yeltsin supporter, General Aleksander Lebed. This move seems to be an attempt by Moscow to re-assert authority over the 14th Guards Army, which up to this point was officially neutral but unofficially decisively engaged.72 General Lebed was much more vocal about his support for Transnistria than Netkachev who was openly neutral in the conflict. In this way, Yeltsin’s new appointee was a much better commander for re-asserting Russian control over the 14th Guards Army and advancing Russian war aims. Several sources also

67 Arbatov, 178 and Melvin [1995], 64. Kozyrev stated that the “Russian Army was unofficially shipping equipment to insurgents.” Melvin [1995], 65.
68 Arbatov, 181.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Kolstoe [1995], 159.
72 Arbatov, 182; Chinn 173; Kolstoe [1995], 159 and Hughes, 109.
claim that General Lebed ordered the 14th Guards Army to move across the Dniester to support Transnistrians in Bender and also threatened to march on Chisinau. Lebed would bridge the gap between what Moscow was willing to say officially and do unofficially. Lebed’s appointment is also a manifestation of some of the themes of the Yeltsin foreign policy discussed in Chapter One, especially Yeltsin’s desire not to be seen as revanchist in the near abroad to international audiences but a defender of Russians at home. While Lebed may have been a loyal Yeltsin general, he was also not indiscreet, a characteristic that would get him fired from the position several years later. Lebed “called Transnistria ‘part of Russia’ and the right bank city of Bendery [Bender] ‘an inalienable part of the Dniester republic’” during the fighting around Bender in June 1992. Lebed ratcheted up this rhetoric when on 4 July 1992, “in a fiery news conference,” in which “he implied that Russian units were prepared to press deep into Moldova.” Regardless of whether the 14th Guards Army was officially or unofficially involved, it was a key reason that a cease-fire was agreed to in July 1992 as Moldova realized it could not re-assert state control over the region by force while the 14th Guards Army was garrisoned there.

3.2.3.2 Ceasefire and Peacekeeping Forces

During the fight for Bender, mounting pressure to reach a settlement on the Transnistria war was felt by President Snegur of Moldova and President Yeltsin. Snegur needed to avoid an all-out assault by the 14th Guards Army into Moldova now that the 14th Guards Army and its commander were prepared to do so and focus on the weak Moldovan economy that was ill

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75 Chinn, 173 and Kolstoe [1995], 159.

76 De La Pedraja Tomán [2019], 94.

77 Melvin [1995], 65 and Arbatov, 183.
prepared to make war. Yeltsin was coming under mounting pressure from parliament to defend Russians abroad and needed a win for his domestic audiences. The 14th Guards Army under Lebed was able to maximize Russian influence in Moldova to bring the parties to the negotiating table given its overwhelming local support. Russia, Moldova, Ukraine, and Romania met in Istanbul, Turkey to negotiate a cease-fire on 24 June 1992 and, quit tellingly, the agreement entitled “On the Peaceful Settlement to the Armed Conflict in the Transniester Districts of Moldova,” was signed in Moscow on 21 July 1992. The agreement resulted in building a buffer between the two sides, establishing a real cease-fire, and setting the conditions on the ground for the return of displaced persons to the conflict zone. To enforce the cease-fire, a Trilateral Control Commission was established, composed of Moldova, Russia, and Transnistria. The commission instituted “control posts” manned by peacekeeping forces, predominantly Russians, to facilitate the protection of civilians. The forces at large consisted of ten peacekeeping battalions: five Russian, three Moldovan, and two Transnistrian. The mandate for Russia to protect civilians was a victory for Yeltsin. However, the July ceasefire agreement left the status of the 14th Guards Army unresolved and brought more Russian troops into Moldova to man the peacekeeping forces from the Volgograd Military District.

Once Yeltsin had placed the 14th Guards Army under Russian command, the status of these forces became that of an occupying military presence in a sovereign country. With 14th Guards Army presence and influence undeniable, Russia attempted to link 14th Guards Army withdrawal to a settlement on the status of Transnistria. Unofficially, this Russian method came

78 Arbatov, 184–185.
79 Melvin [1995], 74.
80 Hill, 52 and Arbatov, 184.
81 Arbatov, 184.
82 Ibid, 185.
83 Chinn, 174 and Hughes, 109.
84 Hill, 52.
85 Hughes, 111.
to be defined as “synchronization.” 86 Due to synchronization goals, it would not be until 1994 that an agreement was reached between Moldova and Russia on a withdrawal timeline of three years. 87 Even then, however, Russia manipulated the agreement by requiring ratification by the Russian Duma before it would go into effect and the agreement only addressed the withdrawal of the 14th Guards Army. These two requirements would render the agreement dead, since the Duma had openly rejected any agreement and the Russian MOD had rebranded the 14th Guards Army an Operational Group of Russian Forces (OGRF), effectively disbanding the 14th Guards Army. 88

The signing of the agreement and the need for Duma ratification coincided at the height of Yeltsin’s pivot toward a Statist foreign policy following the 1994 coup attempt, heightened nationalist tendencies throughout government, and his bid for re-election. The pact was never submitted again to the Duma following its withdrawal from the legislature by Yeltsin in 1995 and the OGRF remained as a guarantor of Russian interests. 89

The weaknesses in the agreement would contribute to Russian strengths and allow Russia to maintain troops in Moldova and maintain control over the region in line with Statist dogma. Following the signing of the agreement, Russia reduced the size of the peacekeeping forces to 2,500 by 1995. 90 Foreign Minister Primakov would attempt to further solidify Russia as a power broker in the region by negotiating the so-called Moscow Memorandum. Primakov aimed to bring Moldova and Transnistria together “under Moscow’s aegis after signing the statement of principles in the Memorandum in order to…reunite [the] two entities and distribute their government functions and competencies.” 91 This plan, if it had been successful, would have reasserted Transnistria representation throughout the government structure of Moldova with

86 Hill, 55; Hughes, 111; and Chinn, 175.
87 Hughes, 111.
88 Hill, 57 and Hughes, 111.
89 Hill, 56.
90 Hughes, 114.
91 Hill, 56.
personnel loyal to Moscow. However, Transnistria favored independence, showing the limitations of Moscow's influence, and their representatives would avoid signing the Moscow Memorandum. Yet, in 1999, the OSCE secured from Russia an agreement to withdraw troops from Transnistria by 2002 with no synchronization guarantees. In the end, this agreement was reneged by President Putin, who called for the synchronization demands to be met as a condition for withdrawing Russian troops. As of this writing, synchronization has not been met and 1,500 Russian troops still remain as peacekeepers and under OGRF command for a sizable arsenal of weapons, weapons that could be manned by a surge of Russian troops if needs be.

Russia learned valuable lessons, as did other diaspora groups across the near abroad, from the military conflict between Moldova and Transnistria. As the first case of a separatist group successfully de facto gaining independence from a former Soviet republic in the near abroad, the example could be replicated by other separatist groups. The Transnistrian War would also be the first successful use of Russian troops outside Russian borders and contribute to the view that Russia had become the regional power in the near abroad. Further, the ability of ethnic Russians, with the support of other ethnic groups, to fracture national sovereignty has shown the power of diaspora and ethnic division to Russian foreign policy makers. More crucially, the Moldovan example would set a bad precedent. An October 1992 article in the newspaper Moldova Suverana aptly concluded that the next targets of the “Dniester Syndrome”

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92 Hill, 56.
94 Melvin [1995], 74.
95 Kolstoe [1995], 165.
would be Narva, Estonia, and Crimea, Ukraine— a chilling prediction that would take 22 years to come true in part thanks to the many of the lessons learned from this conflict.\footnote{Kolstoe [1995], 165. See Hill for a up to date history of the progress of Russian troop withdrawal from the 1990s to the 2000s.}

3.2.4 Russian Lessons Learned

3.2.4.1 The Power of Division

In the Transnistrian case, the Russians did not actively sow division between one group that was pro-Moscow and the titular, Moldovan government. However, the division was actively exploited by Transnistrian elites, appropriated by Moscow, and showed Moscow firsthand how the masses could be manipulated in new near abroad conflicts. In Transnistria, the wealthy industrial and political elites were able to easily instill fear in the populace on the left bank by playing on the language and ethnic card and the threat of a Romanian takeover that would eliminate the privileged livelihoods of left bank Transnistrians.\footnote{Hill, 48.} Moscow discerned that stoking fear in ethnic-Russian and fringe group populations could be orchestrated directly using local elites. To be sure, the Moldovan nationalists did much to support these fears through their actions and rhetoric. Indeed, the Moldovan’s early nationalistic policies would be in sharp contrast to Lithuania’s inclusive policies toward ethnic Russians, a policy that would lend support to a defense against division and subsequent Russian intervention under the auspices of “protection.”

While Moscow may not have been the instigators of division, they were definitely the beneficiaries. The division would lead Transnistria to look for support and protection and find such support from the 14th Guards Army and then Moscow directly. Moscow would see that division is the first step to intervention. Without division between one group and the titular government, no alternative to the government can be presented, no “protection” can be justified. As has been seen from the Russo-Georgian War, the Crimean Annexation, support for rebel
groups in the Donbass, and, more unsuccessfully, in the Baltics, division is a fundamental precursor to Russian intervention. The key is identifying the fissures in society and stoking those fears or hijacking already festering divisions when it suits Moscow. Once division has been sown, Moscow can present itself as a benefactor and build local support, a necessary step for the introduction of troops.

3.2.4.2 The Power of Local Support

Between Russia’s intervention in Afghanistan till its invasion of Ukraine, Moscow typically has not intervened without unquestionable local support in other countries, the kind of support that would create safe, uncontested spaces for Russian troops to base and operate with impunity and enjoy an advantage over other anti-Russian groups and titular governments. Moscow’s war in Afghanistan and the American Vietnam War showed that “power differentials do not translate automatically in successful policy.” These pre-conditions make for the introduction of less troops, cheaper costs, and fewer casualties that is able to garner high popular support in Russia. What’s more, none of Russia’s interventions in the 1990s were conducted without UN/NATO mandates, titular governmental support, or local support in a contested space within a country. Transnistria was the very first intervention where Moscow saw the power of and legitimacy in local support to justify Russian intervention. Transnistria would be in sharp

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99 Public opinion is very important in Russian politics and Putin knows this. The Russian government has continuously conducted polling of Russians when it comes to Russian foreign policy interventions and other aspects on the performance of the government. Russians polled in 2014 had an increased approval rating of Putin up to 89 percent during the 2014 Crimea annexation, Russians also favored great power status at 48 percent during this period. Polling also after 2014 also indicated that 32 percent of Russians think Russia should be a great power, 32 percent said Russia spends too much time on foreign policy, and Russians usually favor the state taking care of public needs then foreign issues. See Frye, Timothy. *Weak Strongman: The Limits of Power in Putin’s Russia*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021, 53 and 168–169.

100 Charap, 62.
contrast to Russia’s invasion of Chechnya, where it had no local support, and where military intervention resulted in massive casualties, international contempt, and costly destruction.101

Local support also helps Russia justify its invasions to protect under the auspices that the local group is requesting or needs Russian protection. In Transnistria, the region declared in a referendum its economic and then sovereign independence from Moldova. The government was also publicly unambiguous that it was pro-Russia and wanted to remain aligned with first the USSR and then the Russian Federation. Consequently, and unfortunately, Moldova would attack Bender, where Russian troops were garrisoned, and other Transnistrian cities to bring the region back in-line. Moscow was able to use the referendum and the attacks on their troops to intervene on behalf of the Transnistrians. Perhaps more importantly, Russian troops enjoyed the support of local paramilitary groups, an asset that would prove invaluable in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008.102 This type of local support, not only tacit but kinetic, is a critical supporting formation to Russian operations. In the case of Bender, Transnistrian paramilitary formations captured key infrastructure before Russian conventional forces intervened, an impressive shaping operation to overall Russian victory in this case.

Through a game of official neutrality and unofficial intervention, Russia was also able to placate international audiences for a time while it consolidated its position in Transnistria. In a similar vein as Crimea’s Black Sea Fleet, Russia already had forces on ground through the 14th Guards Army that supported the local population unequivocally. To be sure, Yeltsin had to re-assert Russian control over the formation but given its loyalties and ethnic background this was

101 The Chechnya case is not classified as an intervention because Chechnya is a part of the Russian Federation, but it does remind Russia of the importance of local support. Russia has since employed the services of a strong man, Kadyrov, to manufacture the local support needed to retain Chechnya at a low cost to Moscow through fear. Walker, Shaun. The Long Hangover: Putin’s New Russia and the Ghosts of the Past. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018, 46-47.

102 Simon Miles, “Russia’s War in Georgia” (lecture, Duke University, Durham, NC, 20 October 2022).
easily done, and a shrewd move. The Transnistria case would impress upon Russia the importance of Russian military presence for policy use in the twenty-first century.

3.2.4.3 The Power of Military Presence

Initially, the 14th Guards Army was being disbanded under the re-distribution of the Soviet Army agreed on in Tashkent in April 1992 after the collapse of the USSR.103 Negotiations between the Moldovan Ministry of Defense and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Deputy Minister of Defense had resulted in an agreement that the 14th Guards Army, and its equipment, would be re-allocated to form the Moldovan army.104 However, and fortunately for Yeltsin who was acting indecisively in this moment, the 14th Guards Army resisted and allowed Yeltsin time to take control of the Army back from the CIS. This maneuver by Yeltsin quickly and cheaply brought Russian troops to the front lines of the conflict. The timing of Yeltsin’s decision to keep the 14th Guards Army and appoint Lebed in March 1992, as Moldova started its assault on Transnistria, is also critical. If Russia had not taken control of the Army, then the 14th Guards Army would have dispersed, along with all its arms, into the Transnistria Guards and other paramilitary groups and eliminated Moscow’s ability to re-constitute the formation cheaply and with some modicum of legitimacy. It would also have eliminated the need in Tiraspol for requesting Russian support as it would have the arms and men to fight Moldova one-on-one.

As it played out, right as the assault on Bender occurred, Russia re-asserted control over its forces, who were subsequently attacked and allowed Moscow to intervene in self-defense. This maneuver would play out in the Russo-Georgian War when Russian peacekeepers were attacked in Tskhinvali, serving as one of the justifications for a Russian invasion.105 The presence of the 14th Guards Army also brought Moldova to the negotiating table, realizing it

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103 Hill, 50.
104 Arbatov, 174.
could not win over Moscow with Transnistrian local support. The mere presence of the 14th Guards Army allowed Moscow an advantage in the ensuing negotiations and fighting and winning a favorable outcome for the Transnistrians. Presence would also have a hand in Russian negotiations with the Baltic states in 1993 and 1994, in the Crimean annexation, and in the Russo-Georgian War. Furthermore, Moldova was not only contending with Transnistria but also with another breakaway region populated with Gagauzians. Gagauzia, located in south-east Moldova, had many similar characteristics with those of Transnistria: a russified population that favored aligning with the USSR and then Russia, a rejection of the Moldovan government, and a popular referendum for independence. However, two defining characteristics separate the two regions: economic weight and the presence of Russian military assets. If one had compared the two regions, one could also have found that Russia could have used the division and local support to introduce Russian troops to the region. Yet, the prospect of introducing troops to Gagauzia was far less convenient than utilizing the 14th Guards Army to accomplish Russia’s foreign policy goals and showing an example of the limits of Russian troop deployments.

3.2.4.4 The Power of Soviet and Imperial Legacies

Perhaps by far the most important lesson learned by Russia’s military and political leadership was that Soviet and imperial Tsarist colonial legacies could be used to set conditions for Russian intervention. The ethnic-cultural divisions between Transnistria and Bessarabia, the stationing of the 14th Guards Army at a geopolitical cross-roads, language preferences, the Moldovan borders, and the economic influence of the Transnistria region vis-à-vis the rest of Moldova are all thanks to hundreds of years of Russian colonial policies. In the Transnistria case, Russia was first able to easily take control of a predominantly ethnic Slavic 14th Guards Army by virtue of the cultural and historical links between Russia and Transnistria. The 14th Guards Army

107 Chinn, 175.
was, by design, predominantly Russian because of Soviet policies to ensure loyalty of the military formations in this part of Eastern Europe. Second, Russia was able to influence the politics and policies in Moldova for 30 years because of its mandate to maintain peace between the two sides. This was possible because the two sides were coupled together by the USSR, linking a predominantly Slavic region with a Romanian one. Gorbachev and then Yeltsin refused to adjust the borders of the fifteen Soviet republics and as a result “the administrative divisions existing had served the purposes of empire and not the needs of the new states.”\textsuperscript{108} Once again, Yeltsin made the correct decision to maximize Russian influence in the near abroad, even if he did so with an unclear goal in mind. From this, Russia also found legitimacy to protect citizens against violence as war broke out between groups to adjust borders by force. Third, the cultural division itself, not only the physical construct of the country, was engineered by Tsarist Russia and the USSR in its attempt at russification of Bessarabia. As part of this strategy, ethnic Russians were sent to the far fringes of the Russian and Soviet empires and often settled in proximity to the local levers of economic and political power.\textsuperscript{109} This resulted in further division between the powerful colonial elite and the titular majorities. These elites could also be used by Russia to gain popular support and especially support in regions where Russia or Russia’s surrogates could control economic assets, in this case Transnistrians. In this way, by Russia ensuring that Transnistria remained independent of Moldova and an ally of Russia, Russia could use the economic power of Transnistria to maintain pressure on Chisinau.\textsuperscript{110}

Across the near abroad, Russia could find similar aspects in other regions where it wanted to establish influence from the Black Sea Fleet manned by ethnic Russians to the capital of Latvia with a majority ethnic Russian population. The next step would be for Russia to capitalize on imperial and Soviet russification legacies to bind people of diverse ethnic

\textsuperscript{108} De La Pedraja Tomán [2021], 15.
\textsuperscript{109} Chinn, 177.
\textsuperscript{110} Mandelbaum, 106–107.
backgrounds in finding common cause against new governments. Additionally, Russia serving as the inheritor of USSR legacies helped to position it as the patriarch for those communities across the near abroad who favored aligning with Moscow to supporting newly independent state governments. Examples include the South Ossetians in Georgia and the Gagauzians in Moldova.

3.3 Georgia

3.3.1 Background to Conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia

Figure 3: Map of Georgia and the Region

3.3.1.1 Broad Historical Context

The case study of Georgia in relation to its secessionist territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and subsequent Russian involvement in this conflict has some similarities to the Transnistrian case but also some striking differences. These differences are also key to further identifying Russian lessons learned in the utilization, benefits, and limitations of diaspora policy.

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111 Mouritzen, 2.
Like Moldova, the conflict between Georgia and the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia manifested during perestroika and then descended into outright war with the disintegration of the USSR.\textsuperscript{112} The ethnic nature of the conflicts also find origination in Tsarist and Soviet territorial governance as far back as 1783.\textsuperscript{113} Now, while the ethnic makeup of the region has a complex and centuries long history, for the purposes of scoping this study I will focus predominantly on the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{114}

Unlike Moldova, which had a Soviet constructed identity that was exacerbated by the ethnic links to Romania, Georgians have a very distinct and strong national identity. Following the Russian revolution in May 1918, Georgia declared independence.\textsuperscript{115} Like many of the future Soviet republics, Georgia was successfully conquered by the Red Army and the Bolsheviks installed a communist government loyal to Moscow in February 1921.\textsuperscript{116} Early on in Soviet rule, the complex ethnic make-up of Georgia was recognized in Moscow.\textsuperscript{117}

Therefore, the Bolshevik Georgian Central Committee declared in April 1922 that South Ossetia would be the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast (SOAO) and Abkhazia an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR).\textsuperscript{118} Most importantly, these divisions also served to try and quell historical violence and animosity between the Georgian ruling class and the minority communities. The institutionalized separation of the two regions from Georgia and the legacies of

\textsuperscript{112} Arbatov, 341.
\textsuperscript{113} Mouritzen, 9. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Russian empire consolidated control of the Caucasus region, annexing the Eastern and Western Georgian Kingdoms and establishing the region as a buffer zone by 1878. Mouritzen, 9.
\textsuperscript{115} Gahrton, 40.
\textsuperscript{116} Mouritzen, 9.
\textsuperscript{117} In 1922, Moscow combined the territories of modern-day Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan into the Transcaucasian Federated Soviet Socialist Republic (TcFSSR). Tbilisi was chosen as the capital of TcFSSR, which also had been the historical capital of Georgia, until the establishment of separate Soviet republics for Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan in 1936. Mouritzen, 9.
\textsuperscript{118} Toal, 131. It was in line with Lenin’s policy of national self-determination that South Ossetia and Abkhazia were given special status within the Georgian SSR. Mouritzen, 10.
violent conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia and South Ossetia would bubble to the surface and define the renewed violent conflict and wars of the early 1990s as independent Georgia attempted to reassert control over its territory. Therefore, I will discuss briefly the distinct historical similarities and differences between Georgia’s relationship and history with Abkhazia and South Ossetia to further define this conflict.

3.3.1.2 Roots of Conflict in South Ossetia

The beginning of the Ossetian-Georgian conflict in recent memory can be traced to late 1917 and early 1918 after the October Revolution of 1917. What may be superficially viewed as an ethnic conflict began as a social-economic struggle between wealthy Georgian land owners and Ossetian peasants. After the October Revolution, the Ossetians were emboldened by the Bolshevik ideology and soon bands of armed Ossetians were in active revolt against the central government in Tbilisi, rejected the paying of taxes, and sought to appropriate land from Georgian owners.

In 1918, 1919, and 1920, Ossetians revolted against Georgia with the first revolt resulting in the murder of three Georgian princes and the appropriation of their land. Tbilisi responded by sending national guard soldiers to Ossetia to re-assert Georgian rule. Georgian attacks would trigger an escalation in the rebellion and Ossetian forces would route the Georgian national guard and advance to capture the city of Tskhinvali, a focal point of violence to this day. The conflict

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119 Saparov, 66. Ossetians lived on both sides of the Caucasus mountains under Tsarist rule from 1801 with North Ossetia a part of the Russian Empire and South Ossetia a part of the Georgian province in the empire. Arbatov, 346 and Toal, 129. The Ossetians are a Christian people that speak an Indo-European language related to Persian and Russian. Gahtron, 57 and Toal, 129. During this period of Tsarist rule the Ossetians developed a national culture and identity separate from both Russia and Georgia. Under the imperial policy of using local elites to govern, an Ossetian intelligentsia was built with an increased awareness of the social division between the Georgian elites and Ossetian minority. Arbatov, 346.

120 Souleimanov, 112 and Saparov, 66–67.

121 Saparov, 66–67 and Arbatov, 346.

122 Souleimanov, 112 and Saparov, 67.

123 Saparov, 67.
transcended from a social struggle into the ethnic when Georgian forces started murdering and ethnically cleansing regions of Georgia of Ossetian inhabitants.  

The years of revolt would force South Ossetia to seek assistance from the Bolsheviks. South Ossetia’s strategic position at the cross roads of the North and South Caucasus served to support Bolshevik designs on Georgia. Therefore, in the 1919 and 1920 revolts, South Ossetians enjoyed covert support from the Red Army in its struggle. In response, South Ossetians leaders proclaimed political support for the Bolsheviks and a desire to be annexed into the Russian SSR. Following Bolshevik takeover of Georgia, the new Georgian SSR created South Ossetia an Autonomous Region and the privilege of retaining its indigenous language and cultural symbols. This status was a compromise for the Bolsheviks in Moscow and Tbilisi to try and meet the South Ossetian desire for independence while not alienating the far more important Georgians. While the compromise satisfied neither side it did serve to quell the violence and relative stability and peace characterized the Soviet period till the independence movements of the 1980s. A positive relationship with Moscow as the “center” would remain in

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124 Souleimanov, 112. One such example was in response to the 1920 revolt when Georgian forces launched an offensive in June that killed 5,000 Ossetians, resulted in the destruction of 40 villages, and forced 50,000 Ossetians to seek refuge in North Ossetia. The perilous journey over the Caucasus mountains would leave another 15,000 dead from cold and starvation. Arbatov, 347 and Toal, 113.

125 Souleimanov, 112.

126 Ibid, 113.

127 Ibid. Following the 1920 revolt and the Ossetian defeat, fleeing South Ossetians would join Red Army formations for the coming offensive that would end Georgian independence in 1921.

128 Arbatov, 347.

129 Saparov, 86. The matter was made difficult further by the inter-ethnic makeup of the region, the fluid borders of South Ossetian territory, and a lack of South Ossetian historical rule of the region. Saparov, 86.

130 Arbatov, 347; Toal, 131; and Souleimanov, 113. South Ossetia did make a bid for a union with North Ossetia in 1925 but this request was dealt with harshly by Stalin and resulted in the delegation being liquidated. Stalin’s national heritage being Georgian would further contribute to the idea that Georgians were favored over South Ossetians. Gahrton, 58.
the historical memory of Ossetians in the same way as their treatment by the Georgians, just another example of Soviet legacies supporting Russian intervention in the 1990s.\footnote{Many Ossetians maintained ties with North Ossetia in the internal borderless boundaries of the USSR. Peace also prevailed through inter-ethnic marriages, a common religion (Orthodox Christianity), and a Soviet engineered cover-up of the violence perpetrated against South Ossetians. Souleimanov, 113 and Toal, 131.}

### 3.3.1.3 Roots of Conflict in Abkhazia

In 1810, both Georgia and Abkhazia became part of the Russian Empire.\footnote{Abkhazians, like the South Ossetians, have a long historical presence in the region of Georgia and share many cultural links with Georgians. Arbatov, 348. However, unlike South Ossetians, Abkhazians have established traditional lands, experienced independence, owned land, and developed an independent political identity. Throughout the past eleven centuries, Abkhazia enjoyed limited to full independent status. Hewitt, 19-22 and Arbatov, 349. In 1810, Georgia became part of the Russian Empire and Abkhazia voluntarily joined the empire with the condition it could retain its autonomous political structures in exchange for Russian protection. Arbatov, 349 and Hewitt, 24. During the Caucasian War from 1830–1864, Abkhazia allied with the Ottoman Empire while Georgia sided with the Russian Empire. Arbatov, 349.} Abkhazia revolted against Russia in the Caucasian War from 1830–1864 but after the 1864 Russian victory, Abkhazia was brought under direct imperial control.\footnote{Ibid. Deportations occurred in 1864, 1866 and 1867 after revolts against Russia, and after 1880 following the end of the Russo-Georgian War (1877–1880). Hewitt, 25. One example to show the scale of resettlement was the deportation of 80,000 Abkhazians from 1860-1870s. Hewitt, 25. Also, see table 17, Changes in the demographic composition of the population of Abkhazia between 1886 and 1989, Arbatov, 350.} In response to Abkhazian disloyalty, the Russian Empire embarked on a policy of diluting the population of Abkhazians with Georgian, Armenian, Russian, and Greek settlers coupled with Abkhazian deportations.\footnote{Ibid.} Through the deportation-resettlement policy, by the end of the nineteenth century, Abkhazians were a minority of the population of Abkhazia but maintained control of the land through its nobility.\footnote{Saparov, 42 and Hewitt, 28.}

Following the February Revolution in 1917, several Soviets appeared in Abkhazia and a division formed between the Bolshevik landless peasants and the Social Democratic elites.\footnote{Saparov, 43.} After the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia, Bolsheviks convened in Sukhumi, Abkhazia on 9 November 1917 and adopted a constitution and established the Abkhaz Peoples Council
The APC signed a treaty with Georgia in June 1918 that guaranteed Abkhazia the right to self-determination. However, several clauses of the treaty offered Abkhazia protection and the deployment of a Georgian Red Guard formation for Abkhazia’s use. Georgia used this pretext to occupy portions of Abkhazia on 23 June 1918 and install a Georgian military governor.

By February 1921, Abkhazians welcomed the invasion of the Red Army and the lifting of Georgian occupation. On 26 March 1921, Abkhazia’s Revolutionary Committee sent a telegram to Moscow proclaiming their intention to declare Abkhazia a Soviet Socialist Republic. The declaration was accepted and declared on 31 March. However, by 1931, Abkhazia was demoted to an autonomous republic within the Georgian SSR. To add insult to injury, Moscow eliminated the Abkhazian political elite and intelligentsia, restricted the Abkhaz language, and further altered the demographics of Abkhazia by resettling the region with Georgians and deporting Abkhazians. Finally, unlike South Ossetian dissidence, which was put down early, Abkhazia held mass demonstrations against Georgia in 1957, 1965, 1967, and 1978 asking to be incorporated into the Russian SSR.

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137 Saparov, 43. The APC’s authority and legitimacy would be challenged over the ensuing months by pro-Russian Bolsheviks, pro-Turkish aristocrats, and pro-Georgian socialists. Souleimanov, 114.
138 Hewitt, 54. The treaty outlined: (a) the temporary nature of the agreement; (b) the fact that the final decision-making power lay with the ANS [APC]; and also (c) the separate status of the two states, reading: “The concluded treaty will be reviewed by the National Congress of Abkhazia, which will finally determine the political construction of Abkhazia and also the mutual relations between Georgian and Abkhazia.” Hewitt, 54.
139 Ibid, 35.
140 Ibid, 39.
141 Mouritzen, 10 and Toal, 131. Though this status was higher than the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast, it still further sowed seeds of resentment towards the Georgians. The first demotion of the SSR status was announced in the Union Treaty of December 1921 between the Georgian and Abkhazian SSRs that formed a political, military, and economic union but reserved the right to conduct foreign affairs solely to the Georgian SSR. Hewitt, 4 and Arbatov, 350.
142 Arbatov, 351. During the Stalin era, 100,000 new settlers arrived in Abkhazia and the policy continued into the 1970s following Decree No. 533 to immigrate 60,000 Georgians by 1980 and 160,000 by 1990 into Abkhazia. Arbatov, 351. Many of the mass deportations of Abkhazians and the policy to “georgianize” the region took place under the notorious Georgian and NKVD head, Lavrenti Beria. De La Pedraja Tomán [2019], 110 and Gahrton, 63. See Arbatov, footnote 19, 351 for full list of oppressive measures taken against the Abkhaz people in favor of Georgian dominance.
143 Arbatov, 352.
outnumbered by Georgians two-to-one feared a Georgian take-over and saw their union with Russia as protection against this.\textsuperscript{144} This sentiment would resurface in the days of perestroika when nationalist tendencies on both sides reached a fever pitch.

3.3.1.4 Perestroika and Independence Movements

During the era of perestroika, people of the Georgian SSR joined other nationalities and ethnic groups within the Soviet Union in seeking independence. Like the Moldovans, Georgians took an ethno-nationalist approach and saw the Abkhazians and South Ossetians as threats to their independence and culture.\textsuperscript{145} Beginning in 1988, Georgian elites initiated a media campaign aimed at promoting the Georgian ethnicity and excluding Ossetian and Abkhazian minorities.\textsuperscript{146} This campaign helped create an environment that was increasingly chauvinistic and ethnically intolerant, triggering the historical memories in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia of Georgian oppression and violence.\textsuperscript{147} In order to try and hedge against the Georgian nationalist trajectory, South Ossetia began seeking either a union with the Russian SFSR or independence, while Abkhazia made bids for independence in both 1988 and 1989.\textsuperscript{148} Finally, on 10 November 1989, the Supreme Soviet of South Ossetia voted to change its status from an Autonomous Oblast to an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Region, a deliberate break from the Georgian SSR.\textsuperscript{149} This move was struck down by the Georgian Supreme Soviet the next day.\textsuperscript{150} Georgian nationalists, including the future president of an independent Georgia, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, fanned the flames of ethnic tension and accused the South Ossetians and Abkhazians of being criminals and

\textsuperscript{144} De La Pedraja Tomán [2019], 110.
\textsuperscript{145} Arbatov, 352.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid. Arbatov notes that Professor John Mearsheimer “defines the psychological ground of hypernationalism as the belief that other nations are ‘both inferior and threatening and must therefore be dealt with harshly.’” Arbatov, 352–353.
\textsuperscript{147} Arbatov, 352.
\textsuperscript{148} Mouritzen, 11.
\textsuperscript{149} Gahrton, 58 and Arbatov, 353. The new status did have self-imposed conditions by South Ossetia that South Ossetia would not change its borders but if the Georgia SSR left the USSR, then South Ossetia would apply for membership in the USSR. Arbatov, 353.
\textsuperscript{150} Gahrton, 58.
terrorists. In response, South Ossetia went one step further and declared itself a Soviet Socialist Republic in August of 1990.

In October, Gamsakhurdia was elected president and reduced South Ossetia’s status to that of a Georgian district and imposed an economic blockade. In December 1990, Georgia refused to sign the new union treaty with the USSR and was de facto independent. With the new Georgian de facto independence from the USSR and the election of Gamsakhurdia, both South Ossetians and Abkhazians understood Georgian intentions to be the forced creation of a nation state and the elimination of the political, economic, and cultural autonomy the regions enjoyed under the USSR. Pleas to Moscow for assistance fell on deaf ears as Gorbachev decided to not interfere in hopes that he could bring Gamsakhurdia to the table and agree to a new union treaty. After December 1990, the Georgian conflicts with South Ossetia and Abkhazia developed and played out differently and will be addressed separately.

3.3.1.5 Conflict in South Ossetia: 1990–1991

In December 1990, South Ossetia held elections for a new president and Georgia responded by declaring a state of emergency in the region. These actions were followed by savage and bloody fighting between armed groups on both sides. In January 1991, Gamsakhurdia decided to suppress South Ossetia with force. He deployed 3,000 Interior Ministry troops to the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali. Heavy street fighting ensued between Georgian troops, independent Georgian nationalist paramilitary groups, and Ossetian self-defense units. The ensuing stand-off resulted in a blockade during which time water and electricity ceased to

151 De La Pedraja Tomán [2019], 102.
152 Arbatov, 353.
153 De La Pedraja Tomán [2019], 102 and Gahrton, 58.
154 Mouritzen, 11. Georgia reinstated the constitution of 1921, cancelled all Soviet decrees, and eliminated the autonomous status of both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Arbatov, 353.
155 Gahrton, 59 and Arbatov, 355.
156 Arbatov, 354.
158 Arbatov, 356.
operate, Georgian troops destroyed parts of Tskhinvali, municipal services ceased to operate, 20,000 people fled the region, and 50 Ossetian villages were destroyed. The events of the winter of 1991 reminded many Ossetians of the Georgian offensive of 1920 discussed earlier and these events as the “second genocide” of Ossetians.

Tension continued to rise as Georgia drifted toward de jure independence from the USSR. In response South Ossetia made a plea to the Supreme Soviet that if Georgia seceded, that South Ossetia would request admission into the USSR stating that “it is only as a result of the Soviet authorities…that the Ossetian people have been able….to preserve…[and] develop their language, national culture, and science.” In an act of defiance, on 17 March 1991 both South Ossetia and Abkhazia decided to hold the Gorbachev referendum on preserving the USSR and voted in favor of preserving the union. Georgian voters would vote for independence from the USSR on 31 March 1991 which also meant independence for South Ossetia and Abkhazia under Georgian rule. In the ensuing months as Soviet authority wanned and Georgian confidence increased, attacks and violence in South Ossetia, especially around Tskhinvali, also ebbed and flowed. The division between Gorbachev and Yeltsin was also on display as Gorbachev sent troops into South Ossetia in April to bring some peace and Yeltsin was meeting with Gamsakhurdia to undermine Gorbachev’s authority. Ironically, after the collapse of the USSR in December 1991, South Ossetians turned their attention to a new benefactor, the Russian Federation and Yeltsin. Likely aware of Yeltsin’s support for Gamsakhurdia at the expense of

159 Arbatov, 356.
160 Soviet Central Television described the winter of 1991 in South Ossetia as “worse than Leningrad in 1942.” Toal, 134. Following and concurrent with the winter war of 1991, the rest of Georgia saw an ethnic separation with Ossetians. Ossetians were forced from their homes in regions outside the SOAO and Georgians within Ossetian controlled regions of the SOAO also were forced to flee. Arbatov, 356.
161 Arbatov, 357.
162 Gahrton, 59 and Arbatov, 357.
163 Arbatov, 358.
164 At that time, Yeltsin’s aim was to ally with Gamsakhurdia and give him a free hand in South Ossetia which was viewed as a communist strong hold, a position he would change later. Arbatov, 358.
South Ossetian autonomy, there was still hope for a union with North Ossetia, a part of the new Russian Federation. On 22 January 1992, South Ossetia voted 99 percent in favor of joining the Russian Federation placing the fate of Ossetians in the hands of Boris Yeltsin, the new Russian president, and Gamsakhurdia’s replacement, the former Soviet Foreign Minister, Edward Shevardnadze.165

3.3.1.6 Conflict in Abkhazia: 1990–1992

The events in Abkhazia unfolded quite differently than those in South Ossetia, but there are some common throughlines regarding a general aim of independence from Georgia, ethnic violence, and countering Georgian nationalism. Most strikingly in this case, Abkhazia is majority ethnic Georgian, through decades of georgianization policies resulting in a split society.166 This division would spark the first instance of violence in July 1989 but relative calm was sustained from July 1989 to July 1990 under the watchful eyes of Soviet Interior Ministry troops.167 In the environment of nationalism sweeping Georgia in 1990, the Supreme Soviet of Georgia voted in August 1990 to make the Georgian language the only language spoken in the Supreme Soviet of Georgia. Abkhazia responded by adopting a declaration on sovereignty and a decree on the defense of Abkhazian statehood which was boycotted by the ethnic Georgian members of the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet.168 These motions were declared invalid by the Georgia Supreme Soviet and in response, the Georgian deputies of the Abkhazian Supreme Soviet voted to rescind the decrees, cementing the ethnic division of Abkhazia for the war to come.169

165 Gahrton, 59 and Arbatov, 362.
166 Gahrton, 63. For example, the Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia in 1990 was 57 ethnic Abkhazians, 53 Georgians, and 14 Russians. Arbatov, 375.
167 Arbatov 373–374 and Hewitt, 85. The July conflict was over the establishment of a branch of the Tbilisi State University in Sukhumi, capital of Abkhazia. Arbatov, 373; Hewitt, 75; and Gahrton, 65.
168 Arbatov, 375.
169 Hewitt, 92.
Like South Ossetia, Abkhazia voted in the 17 March 1991 referendum on the preservation of the USSR in which 97.65 percent of voters said “yes” to preserve the union.\textsuperscript{170} Georgia voted for independence in its own referendum in March 1991 in which Abkhazians voted 59.84 percent in favor of independence but only 61.2 percent of the population participated. The ethnic division between Georgians and Abkhazians is again evident through the respective votes to either preserve the union as a separate entity or seek independence within Georgia. This environment was also influenced by Gamsakhurdia’s assault on South Ossetia which resulted in both the calming of tensions between Abkhazia and Georgia and prompted Abkhazian elites to look for allies to come to their defense if needed.\textsuperscript{171}

However, the situation in Abkhazia would turn from violence to war once Gamsakhurdia was ousted and replaced by Shevardnadze in January 1992. In July 1992, the ethnic Abkhazian deputies of the parliament restored the 1925 constitution when Abkhazia was an independent SSR and declared Abkhazia a sovereign state.\textsuperscript{172} Shevardnadze’s response: war.\textsuperscript{173} On 14 August 1992, Georgia invaded Abkhazia with the official war aims the limited protection and control of the rail lines in western Georgia and not the capture of urban terrain.\textsuperscript{174} None the less, Georgia attacked the capital of Sukhumi and Gali with arms from the arsenals of the former Soviet military district headquartered in Tbilisi. With heavy armor and helicopters, all of which would give the Georgians the upper hand compared to Transnistria where the minority was heavily armed, succeeded in capturing Sukhumi on 18 August.\textsuperscript{175}

\textsuperscript{170} Arbatov, 376–377. Gamsakhurdia retorted that South Ossetians and Abkhazians should be content with cultural autonomy in a news conference in Moscow in July 1991. Arbatov, 377.
\textsuperscript{171} Gahrton, 65.
\textsuperscript{172} Arbatov, 378. The deputies also instated a coat of arms, flag, and renamed Abkhazia the Republic of Abkhazia. Arbatov, 378.
\textsuperscript{173} De La Pedraja Tomán [2019], 103.
\textsuperscript{174} De La Pedraja Tomán [2019], 103 and Hewitt, 127.
\textsuperscript{175} Arbatov, 381 and De La Pedraja Tomán [2019], 103. Georgia also appointed the general who commanded operations against South Ossetia, Georgi Karkarashvili, in charge of the offensive who delivered a stark message in Sukhumi that “the enemy soldiers would be shot on sight and that he was calling on all armed groups in Georgia to fight in Abkhazia.” Arbatov, 381–382.
However, the force that would turn the tide of the war and result in forcing Yeltsin to take a more active role in the conflict was the support of Muslim paramilitary volunteer detachments from the North Caucasus and the Russian Federation. Quickly the war turned into a guerrilla war with Georgian troops operating in urban and rural hostile environments against newly reinforced and armed Abkhazians and their supporters. The unrecognized Republic of Chechnya and the leaders of Adygan, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkarian, Krasnodar, and Stavropol all made demands for an end to the Georgian occupation and the withdrawal of troops. By August and September, Russian forces stationed in Abkhazia were caught in the cross-fire as Georgian units conducted operations in and around Sukhumi and Gagri. Yeltsin finally called for peace-talks on 3 September 1992 in response to growing discontent in the Duma, the conditions developing in the North Caucasus region and especially Chechnya, and to prevent Russian units on the ground from escalating the situation to outright war with Russia.

3.3.2 Russian Actions

3.3.2.1 Russian Actions in South Ossetia: 1992

After replacing Gamsakhurdia in January 1992, Shevardnadze had attempted to reach a cease-fire agreement with South Ossetia in May 1992. This agreement was short lived and in June 1992, Shevardnadze initiated an assault on the capital of South Ossetia, Tskhinvali, with freshly armed Georgian troops following the re-distribution of Soviet weapons. On 20 June 1992, Georgian armored forces broke through the defenses of Tskhinvali, ordered the defenders and inhabitants to leave, and then continued the assault. At this point, North Ossetians were

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176 Arbatov, 381.
177 Ibid, 380–381. Cossacks troops also came to Abkhazia’s aid. The Cossacks main goal in all the secessionist conflicts in the former Soviet space, was to bring these regions back into Russia and re-establish the Russian Empire. Arbatov, 381.
178 Ibid, 381.
179 Ibid, 382.
180 Ibid, 362.
181 Ibid. The offensive destroyed 80 percent of the buildings in Tskhinvali, but the South Ossetian defenders prevented Georgian forces from capturing the entire city. Arbatov, 362.
becoming increasingly involved in the conflict and refugees from South Ossetia were flooding to North Ossetia and threatening to destabilize the North Caucasus further and weaken Russian control in the region. Yeltsin had initially taken the position of non-interference in Georgia and even supported Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze until their actions threatened Russian security. Now that the conflict was directly affecting Russian interests, the government issued the following statement on 20 June 1992:

> The acts of violence aimed at driving the non-Georgian population out of South Ossetia are a flagrant violation of human rights. A growing number of refugees are pouring into North Ossetia, a part of the Russian Federation, which poses a direct threat to Russian national security. The Georgian leadership has conducted a vast campaign of disinformation aimed at deceiving its own people and the world as a whole. We reject Georgia’s accusations of Russian aggression...Russia proposes that negotiations begin immediately...If the various sides involved in the conflict ignore these justified demands...the Russian Federation will take all action necessary in order to protect the human rights, lives and dignity of all inhabitants of the region, and to restore peace and order.

Yeltsin was also coming under fire from the Supreme Soviet and Vice-president Rutskoi for not only being weak on defending Russian people but also Russian interests in the near abroad. As the conflict started to risk Russian relations with its ally, North Ossetia, Rutskoi fanned the flames further calling the war “a genocide against the Ossetian people.” This pressure compelled Yeltsin to change course to not only save his political position but also protect Russian interests. Finally, Yeltsin and Shevardnadze agreed to a cease-fire in Sochi on 24 June 1992, called both the Sochi and Dagomys Agreement. The agreement called for troops from Russian, Georgia, and Ossetia to form a peacekeeping force, a formula that would seem to influence the Transnistrian cease-fire agreement signed on 21 July 1992. Four battalions, numbering 2,000 troops and 1,000 reservists would uphold the ceasefire agreement that mandated monitoring

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182 Toal, 135 and Arbatov, 362–365.
184 Ibid, 363.
186 Hewitt, 120.
187 Arbatov, 364 and Hewitt, 120.
security in the conflict zone, monitoring the withdrawal of Georgian troops, and disband all other armed groups.\textsuperscript{188} For all intents and purposes, the Sochi agreement legalized Russia’s occupation of parts of Georgia.\textsuperscript{189}

3.3.2.2 Russian Actions in Abkhazia: 1992–1994

As was characteristic of much of Yeltsin foreign policy during the 1990s, he fell into the Abkhazian situation unprepared and under pressure from different interest groups, in this case from the Supreme Soviet to end the fighting and from a need to not alienate the North Caucasus. The goal of a 3 September 1991 meeting in Moscow was to find a path to peace which resulted in a cease-fire agreement.\textsuperscript{190} The ceasefire agreement was weak however and did not articulate a Georgian troop withdrawal timeline, a solution to remove North Caucasus fighting groups from the region, or even a provision on peacekeeping forces. As a result, the ceasefire was not upheld, and North Caucasus fighters continued to move into Abkhazia.\textsuperscript{191} These North Caucasus fighters eventually attacked Georgian troops in Gagri on 2 October 1992 and captured the city. The weak Yeltsin brokered cease-fire was further undermined by the increasingly nationalistic Supreme Soviet that passed a resolution on 25 September denouncing Shevardnadze for trying to solve inter-ethnic conflicts with violence and calling for Georgian forces to be withdrawn from Abkhazia.\textsuperscript{192} The Russian reaction is not surprising considering Georgia’s reluctance to join the Russian Federation brokered CIS.\textsuperscript{193} Shevardnadze mobilized 40,000 reservists and blamed the Supreme Soviet for directly contributing to the breakdown of peace following the loss of

\textsuperscript{188} The agreement also defined a zone of conflict that extended in a 15 kilometers circle around the capital of Tskhinvali and a security corridor both inside and outside South Ossetia where the peacekeepers could set-up checkpoints. Toal, 137–138.
\textsuperscript{189} Toal, 138.
\textsuperscript{190} Arbatov, 382.
\textsuperscript{191} A control commission set up under the agreement conducted a survey and found that the ceasefire provisions were not being upheld by either Georgia or Abkhazia. Arbatov, 382.
\textsuperscript{192} Arbatov, 383.
\textsuperscript{193} \textit{Ibid}, 388.
Gagri. Abkhazian troops and North Caucasus militias were also becoming emboldened and better armed through black market arms purchases and armaments coming from Chechnya. Tension started to rise even further directly between Russia and Georgia as Russian troops began to come under fire from Georgian troops in Abkhazia. First, officially, Russian troops were ordered by the MOD to not open fire or return fire on Georgian troops. However, by 27 October 1992, Russian Su-25 bombers conducted sorties against Georgian troops bombarding the Russian garrison of Eshery. Russian troops were also, unofficially, reported to be giving arms and ammunition to the Abkhazians in a similar fashion to troops in Transnistria. Second, Georgian troops under orders from General Karkarashvili started to expropriate weapons from Russian military depots in Georgia. Third, terrorist attacks were carried out against Russian troops in Tbilisi and other cities and the press office of the Transcaucasia Military District claimed that there was evidence that the attacks were carried out with the approval of Georgian leaders. Taken together, the conflict that began between Abkhazians and Georgians was confronting a similar third party as in Transnistria, the Russian armed forces.

During the fall and winter of 1992 and till the summer of 1993, Russia restricted itself to only conducting air and artillery strikes against Georgian attacks on military installations. During the summer of 1993, Abkhazian forces started to gain the initiative and by 27 September

194 Arbatov, 383.
195 Ibid.
196 Ibid, 384.
197 Hewitt, 137.
198 Arbatov, 384.
199 Another cease-fire was brokered in Moscow on 9 July 1993 and called for the withdrawal of Georgian troops and the withdrawal of all other armed groups but was also short lived. Arbatov, 385. This agreement also called for a multinational police force supported by Russian troops stationed in Abkhazia to enforce the cease-fire. Arbatov, 384. The agreement was finally signed after a string of Abkhazian victories in Sochi on 27 July and stated that within ten to fifteen days Georgian troops would withdraw from Abkhazia and armed groups in Abkhazia would also disperse. Arbatov, 386–387 and Hewitt, 139. Neither side complied with the agreement which was complicated by Gamsakhurdia’s rebels operating with impunity in Abkhazia and out of the control of the Georgian government. Once Russia and Georgia negotiated a lasting ceasefire, Yeltsin supplied Georgia with fuel, weapons, and protection of the Georgian rail lines and ports in support of Georgia’s fight and eventual victory against the Gamsakhurdia rebels. Toal, 101.
1993 Abkhazian forces recaptured the capital of Sukhumi, a crushing defeat for Shevardnadze and his credibility as a leader.\textsuperscript{200} The fall of Sukhumi was the turning point that brought Shevardnadze to the realization that without heavy Russian support for peace, the war would intensify further. On 10 October 1993, Shevardnadze met in Moscow with Yeltsin and other Caucasus leaders and announced that Georgia would join the CIS and that Russia was an integral part of ensuring security in the Caucasus.\textsuperscript{201} Most importantly, Georgia agreed to Russian peacekeepers stabilizing the situation in Abkhazia. Overall, Shevardnadze’s actions were the best worst option for keeping himself in power, calming tensions with Russia, and keeping Abkhazia in Georgia’s borders.\textsuperscript{202} He directly cited his break with Russia as the main reason that Georgia was unable to subdue Abkhazia and his subsequent pivot to join the CIS as the only way to maintain the countries frontiers.\textsuperscript{203} Georgia and Russia would sign the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Peaceful Coexistence between the Russian Federation and the Georgian Republic on 3 February 1994.\textsuperscript{204} The mandate for peacekeeping forces was to be provided by the CIS officially but realistically only Russia provided substantial forces.\textsuperscript{205}

\textbf{3.3.2.3 Summary of Russian Intervention}

While the events that took place in Georgia occurred during a time of turmoil in the Russian government, both before and after the collapse of the USSR, the Russians were able to secure a favorable position in Georgia that had wider geopolitical implications. Since the time of the Tsar, Georgia has been critical to Russian strategic interests in the region from its position

\textsuperscript{200} Arbatov, 387 and Hewitt, 142. The defeat of Georgian forces had the effect of Abkhazians exacting revenge on the ethnic Georgians in the region and resulted in nearly the entire population of ethnic Georgians, or 140,000 people, to leave Abkhazia. Arbatov, 388 and Toal, 101.
\textsuperscript{201} Arbatov, 388.
\textsuperscript{202} Toal, 101.
\textsuperscript{203} Arbatov, 389.
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{205} The peacekeeping forces consisted of the Russian 345\textsuperscript{th} parachute regiment, three battalions task organized with the Russian Transcaucasia Army Group, and 3 battalions from the Leningrad and Volgograd military districts that took up blocking positions along the Inguri River. Arbatov, 393.
between Eastern Europe and Western Asia and proximity to the Black Sea. Control or influence over South Ossetia could be used as leverage against North Ossetia, a Russian minority group, and suppress secessionist movements by promising de facto or de jure unification between the two regions. Influence over the levers of power in Georgia also gives Moscow a seat at the table over Caspian Sea gas pipelines that would run through Georgia to Europe through its peacekeeping missions in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. One way is by legitimately keeping the peace and deterring acts of sabotage against Georgian oil pipelines and infrastructure. This is only possible due to two things, Russia maintaining favorable relations with Abkhazians and South Ossetians and remaining a credible alternative to other militia groups in the Caucasus.

From an international point of view, Russia was able to assure the influence and control needed to secure its national security goals through the legitimate, legal stationing of peacekeeping troops in Georgia under an R2P mandate and through good relations with the minority groups in Georgia. In 1994 and the majority of the 1990s, these troops allowed Russia to control the border with Turkey, maintain the headquarters of the Transcaucasian Military District in Tbilisi, and, most importantly, develop closer ties with both Abkhazians and South Ossetians. Russia also prevented other countries like the US, Iran, or Turkey from gaining a foothold in the Caucasus region so Russia could maintain its “strategic borders” and sphere of influence. Russia’s control over Georgia was further demonstrated in Russia being able to keep its military bases in Georgia under a 25 year lease, access to Black Sea ports, use Georgian airspace for its war with Chechnya, and the appointment of a Russian general to the post of Georgian minister of defense in 1994. By the end of the 1990s, this type of boundless control

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206 Grigas, 107.
207 Ibid.
208 Mouritzen, 12.
210 Gahtron, 68; Mouritzen, 13; Toal, 101; and Souliemanov, 163. The Russo-Georgian Agreement on the Stationing of Military Bases drawn up in 1995 allowed for the basing of Russian troops on Georgian
by Russia was being challenged by Georgia developing close ties with the United States and the EU but not before Russia was able to realize the trump card to the Western-Georgian relationship, its control of two diaspora groups in Georgia. The limitations of American influence in the region was realized when Georgian President Saakashvili sent his American trained and armed forces to South Ossetia in April 2008 in another attempt at controlling the region. These forces were defeated by an inept Russian military that had the critical advantage of unwavering support from the South Ossetian population, many of them now passportized citizens of Russia. According to Russia, they responded to Georgian violence under the R2P mandate and in self-defense. The Russian victory further solidified Russia as the protector of minorities in the Caucasus, and compelled Russia to declare both Abkhazia and South Ossetia independent nations.

3.3.3 Russian Lessons Learned

3.3.3.1 The Power of Division

In the Georgian case, the seeds of division where hundreds of years in the making and lingered in the historical memory of both Abkhazians and South Ossetians and their individual identities as separate nations from Georgia. The division was characterized by violence perpetrated by both the minorities but most primarily by the Georgian majority in the past 150 years. It should also be remembered that after Georgian independence from the Russian Empire, both Abkhazia and South Ossetia also declared independence. Abkhazia was an independent territory at strategic points within the country. The treaty allowed for a lease of 25 years, but the Georgian Parliament never ratified the treaty. Not until 2007 did Russia withdraw all troops from its bases save one. Souleimanov, 163–164.


Toal, 159.

Ibid, 183.

Ibid, 182.
nation from 1918–1920 and South Ossetia in 1920.\textsuperscript{215} This independence and the subsequent “special” status of both during the period of the USSR would create further solidified divisions with Georgia. Of course, Abkhazia and South Ossetia had their individual and unique reasons for disavowal from Georgia. Abkhazian division stems from their religion as predominantly Muslim, their history of independence, and resentment of Georgian and Soviet ethnic cleansing.\textsuperscript{216} South Ossetia is far more linked to Georgia through marriage and religion (Christianity) but has a distinct class divide of Georgian rulers and Ossetian peasants that also happens to divide along ethnic lines which is further exacerbated by separation from North Ossetia and Georgian violence toward Ossetian independence.\textsuperscript{217} Both have also experienced suppression of their individual languages and cultures.

In a way, the Soviet legacies of establishing South Ossetia and Abkhazia as separate entities within Georgia allowed for decades of stability, interrupted by independence movements that were easily put down by Moscow. These special statuses allowed for security for the minorities but once Moscow’s ability to guarantee that security was weakened and Georgian independence was on the horizon, the divisions came to the forefront and violence ensued. As was the case in Moldova, Georgian nationalism was the spark that ignited the powder keg. Unlike in Moldova, Georgian forces had the upper hand compared to the minorities in military hardware, further exacerbating fears of renewed genocide.

In this case again, Russia benefited from the division once again. Abkhazia and South Ossetia both identified with the Russian Federation as the successor state of the USSR, the entity that had largely guaranteed their independent cultural and political status from Georgia.\textsuperscript{218} The Russian Federation also encompassed the peoples of the North Caucasus that both South Ossetia

\textsuperscript{215} Arbatov, 353.
\textsuperscript{216} Souleimanov, 120.
\textsuperscript{217} Ibid, 122.
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid, 121.
and Abkhazia identified with either on religious grounds like the Abkhazians or ethnic like the Ossetians. From Moscow’s position, they had to walk a fine line. Initially Yeltsin supported Georgia retaining its frontiers so as to not set a precedent that would also disrupt Russia’s borders, especially in light of Chechen demands for independence. Yet as the conflict evolved and Russian citizens in the North Caucasus became involved in the fighting and Russian troops came under attack in Georgia, the division worked in Moscow’s favor to both gain allies in Abkhazia and South Ossetia to pressure Georgia and stabilize the North Caucasus region. It was also from this conflict that Russia learned another valuable lesson: non-ethnic Russians or Slavs can be wielded by Moscow to achieve foreign policy objectives.

3.3.3.2 The Power of Presence

The presence of Russian troops in Georgia once again proved vital to capitalizing on diaspora support in pursuit of Russian foreign policy objectives, namely the legal basis for stationing troops in the near abroad. Yeltsin’s adviser, Sergei Karaganov, aptly summarized the goals of Russian troop deployments to support the policy of “winning over local princes, dispatching forces, and rescuing people” to further Russian influence in the near abroad. Following the collapse of the USSR and the subsequent negotiations at Tashkent to divide the Soviet military hardware and formations, Russian came into possession of equipped troops in Georgia, a part of the Transcaucasian Military District headquartered in Tbilisi. Jurisdictionally, the formations were technically stationed on foreign soil with no treaty in place to make it legal. The Abkhazians and the South Ossetians gave Russia a reason to first place pressure on Georgia by supporting the armed militias in their fight against Georgian formations and then use the subsequent cease-fire to negotiate not only the stationing of peace-keeping forces

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219 Souleimanov, 121.
220 Toal, 82.
221 Gahrton, 69. The Treaty of Tashkent was signed by the former republics of the USSR to divide the Red Army in May 1992. Gahrton, 69.
but the remainder of other Russian formations in the 1995 Russo-Georgian Agreement on the Stationing of Military Bases.222

Russia then embarked on a series of policies that tied the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia to Russia while at the same time applying soft power on Georgia. For example, in the 1990s, Russia used its peacekeeping mission in South Ossetia to control illegal wheat and oil sales that traveled from Russia through the Roki tunnel linking North Ossetia and South Ossetia.223 South Ossetian would then charge a “transit tax” to Georgia and pocket the revenues.224 Russia also paid peacekeeping soldiers in rubles and not the Georgian lari, further cementing Russia as the economic benefactor for South Ossetia and sidelining Georgia.225 The next step of Russian military access to Abkhazia and South Ossetia was the implementation of compatriot policies. In the 1990s, ethnic Russians made up just nine percent and one percent of Abkhazia and South Ossetia respectively.226 Therefore, Russia pursued a Russian language program to assist in building a new national identity among the minorities that was directly linked to Russia culture. The language programs were also coupled with issuing passports to Abkhazians and South Ossetians who, for the most part, had not acquired passports from Georgia even though all citizens of the Georgian SSR were automatically granted citizenship after the collapse of the USSR.227 Russian passportization policies resulted in 30 percent of Abkhazians and 40 percent of South Ossetians receiving passports in 2002, 80 percent and 90 percent by 2006 respectively, and 90 percent in both regions by 2009.228 The passportization blitz over two decades was enabled by Russian control in the region. Interestingly, Russia capitalized on the initial Abkhazian and South Ossetian support to solidify unbreakable bonds between the territories and Russia through

222 Souleimanov, 163–164.
223 Grigas, 113.
224 Ibid.
225 Ibid, 114.
227 Ibid, 119.
228 Ibid, 120.
citizenship. The citizenship also brought with it pensions and allowances, factors that won loyalty from the populations. In the absence of an alternative in Georgia, Russia continued to solidify itself as the great benefactor of the Abkhazians and South Ossetians.

3.3.3.3 The Power of non-Russian Minorities and Soviet Legacies

During this period, both ethnic Russians in Transnistria and ethnic Abkhazians and South Ossetians were all clamoring for Russian security guarantees, inclusion within the Russian Federation, and Russians military hardware. Soviet policies created both Transnistria’s demographic make-up and privilege within Moldova and so too did Soviet policies create a loyalty to Moscow in Abkhazia and South Ossetia by allowing a separate status from Georgia. Soviet legacies, therefore, created the conditions necessary to once again lend local support to Russian intervention, showed the power of local support as an enabler for Russian troops, but also showed the power of non-Slavic minority groups. Simply put, Russia could serve as an alternative to titular governments that sowed division with their minority populations. Then, over time under the auspices as the great benefactor, Russia could russify the populations and establish cultural, economic, and political ties that were much stronger than just those built through Russian security guarantees. Soviet legacies also showed proof of practice in the Transnistria case where Ukrainians, Moldovans, Bulgarians, and Russians all saw Russia as the partner of choice after decades of russification. The South Ossetian and Abkhazia case proved that Russia both needed a compatriot policy to encompass the many minorities that could have conflict with their new titular governments and that such a policy could be successful.

Of course, realistically not all minorities are candidates for Russian compatriot policies such as the Gagauzians in Moldova and Ajarians in Georgia. For varying reasons, both of these minority groups did not meet Moscow’s criteria. In the Ajari example, Georgia successfully

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229 Grigas, 119.
230 Kolstoe [1995], 160.
placated the Ajars with autonomy in the 1990s and then central control in the 2000s.\textsuperscript{231} These policies were effectively executed in part due to Soviet legacies that did not promote minority nationalism in Ajaria but rather allowed Georgian assimilation efforts.\textsuperscript{232} Other factors also limited Russian involvement in these regions: (1) the ease with which the titular governments formed agreements with the minorities and avoided prolonged division that could be exploited; (2) lack of Russian military presence and subsequently the inability of the minorities to be easily armed to resist the titular government; (3) Soviet legacies that did not create favorable conditions for Russia; (4) low utility because other minorities in the region served the same purpose for Moscow. Some of these factors would prove to be the Achilles heel of Russian diaspora policy in the Baltic states, the next case study.

\textsuperscript{231} For a synopsis of the Ajari minority in Georgia, see Hughes, 127–128.  
\textsuperscript{232} Mouritzen, 14.
3.4 The Baltics

3.4.1 Background

Figure 4: Map of the Baltic States\textsuperscript{233}

\textsuperscript{233} Grigas, 139.
3.4.1.1 General Background and History

The Baltics, comprised of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, is a region that borders the Baltic Sea to the west and north, Russia and Belarus to the east, and Poland and the Russian oblast of Kaliningrad to the south. In short, a region that has been important to Moscow for centuries for historical, security, political, and economic reasons due to its proximity to Western countries for trade and influence, access to ice-free ports on the Baltic Sea for Russian oil and commerce, and as part of Russia’s security architecture. The Baltics have historically contributed to Russia’s security as a buffer zone between Russia and the West, offering depth as a defense to invading armies. Today, the Kaliningrad Oblast, surrounded by NATO allied countries, serves as the home port to the Baltic Fleet and is Russia’s only ice-free European port. The oblast also houses a piece of the Russian nuclear deterrent: the nuclear armed Iskander-M missiles. Since 2004, the Baltics have been a critical piece of the NATO alliance, bringing the boundaries of the military coalition to the borders of Russia. The countries give NATO the ability to forward position troops, NATO air-policing assets, naval forces, and the potential for air defense or even offensive missile systems. In a way, the region affords NATO the same strategic benefits that favored Russia for centuries.

Imperial Russia began its occupation of the region in the early eighteenth century. Under Tsar (later Emperor) Peter the Great, parts of Latvia and Estonia came under imperial control in 1721. In 1772, 1793, and 1795, Empress Catherine the Great incorporated parts of Lithuania into the empire after the break-up of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. However, scholars have noted that the Baltics are unique among the Russian imperial and Soviet republic lands in that they were able to retain their unique historical, political, lingual, and cultural identity even

234 Grigas, 146.
235 Ibid, 147.
236 Ibid.
237 Grigas, 146 and Arbatov, 226.
238 Grigas, 146 and Arbatov, 226.
through annexation and occupation.\textsuperscript{239} The separation from Russian culture and the titular Baltic culture was furthered through Tsarist Russia using German nobility to govern and Balts developing parallel institutions.\textsuperscript{240} The result is a region that had been heavily influenced by many Western European countries and cultures and a people that lived in a separate social world than the Russian one and vis versa.\textsuperscript{241} This separation and identity formation is furthered by language and will be discussed in more depth later but the Baltic language families are not Slavic.\textsuperscript{242} This further isolates the Baltic culture and people from that of Russia in a way not seen in places like Belarus and Ukraine.

Following the collapse of the Russian empire, all three countries enjoyed 20 years of independence from 1918 to 1940 before being re-occupied by the Red Army following the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact.\textsuperscript{243} Except for a brief period of Nazi occupation during World War II, the countries would remain under Soviet control for more than fifty years.\textsuperscript{244} However, the 20 year period of independence would be very formative in establishing a national identity and a separate political culture from that of Russia and contribute to the ease with which independence would be achieved from the USSR.\textsuperscript{245}

While imperial Russia pursued russification policies, it was not to the extent seen under Soviet control. The Soviet Union took long-established national identity control practices and magnified the affect through mass deportations of the local population coupled with an influx of Russians and Russian speakers.\textsuperscript{246} In a region that had resisted russification, coupled with a low

\textsuperscript{239} Batta, 112.  
\textsuperscript{240} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{241} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{242} Ibid, 114.  
\textsuperscript{243} Ibid, 112. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact negotiated between Germany and the USSR contained a secret provision that allowed for the occupation of the Baltics and parts of Poland, Finland, and Bessarabia (Romania) by the Soviets.  
\textsuperscript{244} Chinn, 93 and 96.  
\textsuperscript{245} Batta, 113.  
\textsuperscript{246} Grigas, 146.
ethnic Russian repopulation, this policy was designed to make up for lost time and crush the
independent culture of the Baltics, a threat to the USSR given its physical position. During World
War II through both German and Soviet extermination and deportations efforts, the populations
saw a loss of 20 percent Estonians, 30 percent of Latvians, and 15 percent of Lithuanians. These percentages were made-up for by Red Army soldiers and dependents and industrial
workers in the coming decades. Therefore, of all the case studies considered in this paper and
even those that were not assessed, the Baltic states host the second largest share of the total
population of ethnic Russians in the former Soviet states behind Kazakhstan. To put this in
perspective, today Estonia is 24 percent ethnic Russian, Latvia is 27 percent, and Lithuania is
under 6 percent. Yet, in the 1990s and the period of most concern to this study, Estonia was
30.3 percent Russian and Latvia 34 percent. While the 1990s are critical for the concentration
of ethnic Russians, today’s percentages are more nuanced between ethnic Russians and Russian
speakers, but both fit into the category of compatriot and also show the extent of russification to
suppress the titular languages. These proportions, regardless of census period, differentiates the
Baltics from the mixed ethnic-Slavic Transnistria and the non-ethnic Russian regions of Abkhazia
and South Ossetia and places the focus on Russians and Russian speakers. In this way, it made
the Baltics a prime target, and presumably, easiest target for Russian diaspora policies in the
1990s and even today.

To a significant extent, Soviet russification policies created favorable conditions not only
for establishing the tool but also for the success of diaspora policies to extend Russian control
over the Baltics given the concentration of Russian people near to the levers of power: around the

247 Grigas, 146.
248 Kolstoe [1995], 108.
249 Grigas, 138.
250 Kolstoe [1995], 108.
251 For example, present Russian-speaking populations in the Baltics increase the size of the compatriot
population in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania by 6 percent, 7 percent, and 2 percent respectively. Grigas, 138.
capital regions of Tallinn and Riga; around strategic points like the port city of Klaipeda, Lithuania, the border crossing point of Narva, Estonia, and the nuclear power facility in Visaginas, Lithuania. Perhaps equally as important as Russian population and concentration was the “type” of Russians residing in the Baltics: military and security professionals during the USSR. This is a consideration more so in Estonia and Latvia than Lithuania. Excluding the active component of the Red Army, and then Russian Army, stationed in the Baltics in the early 1990s under the North West Group of forces headquartered in Riga, Latvia, is the large retired community of Soviet officers, soldiers, and dependents. As was Soviet policy, those that retired from the armed forces where given the opportunity to retire anywhere in the USSR and many chose to retire in the desirable Baltic states. For example, in Estonia, Russian soldiers that retired or were discharged after Estonian independence, numbered 12,400 plus 35,000 dependents. In Latvia the number was much larger with 50,000 World War II retirees and 60,000–100,000 other Soviet retirees, not including dependents. The consideration for the Baltics and Russia was a massive concentration of people that had served as occupying forces in the Baltics, had been loyal to Moscow, and had the skills to resist the titular government. From a purely Russian calculation and following the success of troops in Transnistria, the retirees constituted an Army Group of troops that Moscow didn’t have to pay and favored the Power of Presence strength of the diaspora tool.

Yet, all three countries have successfully joined the EU and NATO, excluding Russia from economic and security control in the region. The Baltics serve to represent the only former Soviet republics to have successfully removed themselves from the Russian sphere of influence while at the same time bringing both the EU and NATO to Russia’s borders for the first time in

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252 Grigas, 139 and Melvin [1995], 31.
253 Chinn, 104.
254 Ibid, 105.
255 Ibid, 111.
2004. How did this happen when the conditions so often necessary and favorable for Russian control were present not only in the concentration of the diaspora but the militarized type of diaspora population? This case study offers the West the opportunity to discover defenses to diaspora policy but also allows Russia to better refine its strategy and pre-empt the conditions that would lead to a diaspora policy failure. While the Baltics are considered a loss for Russia and a hit to their near abroad sphere of influence policies, the inclusion of the Baltics into NATO and the EU does not make them invincible to the diaspora tool. The *Power of Division, Presence*, and *Soviet/Imperial Legacies* still exist to be exploited when the failures of the policy, which will be identified in this case study, are countered.

While the Baltic countries are grouped together as a region, they are very distinct lingually, culturally, and in some respects, historically. However, for the purposes of this case study, both Estonia and Latvia share a common characteristic, a large Russian diaspora community of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers. In Lithuania, this is a much smaller consideration, explained by Lithuania’s position between Russian Kaliningrad and Belarus and also serves as the gate keeper of the Suwalki Gap, the land route for uninterrupted Western access to the Baltic states. In this way, it’s much smaller diaspora population is magnified by proximity to Russia’s militarized Kaliningrad. While each country’s response to its diaspora community shows distinct weaknesses in the diaspora tool, only Estonia and Latvia will be given primary consideration moving forward in this study given their large diaspora populations.

257 Grigas, 136
258 Chinn, 96. Both Estonia and Latvia were part of German Livonia, and all three Baltic States were SSRs during the USSR. Grigas, 137.
259 Chinn, 122.
3.4.1.2 Perestroika

Unlike many of the former Soviet republics, the Baltics are unique for not only having achieved independence following the collapse of Tsarist Russia, but for the length of that independence, 20 years, during which time an independent political culture and identity was solidified. This distinction would prove instrumental to the Western position of never recognizing the Baltic states as part of the USSR and the strength and organization of nationalism that ensued during the period of perestroika.\textsuperscript{260} The Baltic independence legacy, compared to its Soviet/Imperial legacy, would position it to be a leader in independence movements among the Soviet republics in the 1980s and contribute to successful independence from Moscow after the 1991 August coup.\textsuperscript{261} Characteristically, the independence movements in the Baltics were as nationalistic as those in Moldova and Georgia in their goals and focused on protecting language and culture against minorities.\textsuperscript{262} In this respect, it would be language laws and citizenship status that would characterize conflict between the Baltic states and the Russian Federation in the 1990s. But this was not the situation initially during the 1990s independence movement when the Balts found an ally in President of the Russian SFSR, Boris Yeltsin, and the Russian diaspora itself.

In large part, the support of Yeltsin and the diaspora for Baltic independence was due to the character of the movements initially. Wholly nationalist rhetoric was largely in the minority as Balts sought independence in support of democratic values rather than ethnic domination. In Latvia, for example, independence slogans took a united bent: “Latvia our common home”, “Not people against people, but together against darkness”, and “For our freedom and yours.”\textsuperscript{263} Contrast this rhetoric with the slogans like “Georgia for the Georgians” and in Moldova “No to

\textsuperscript{260} Arbatov, 225.
\textsuperscript{261} Chinn, 93.
\textsuperscript{262} Ibid, 25.
\textsuperscript{263} Arbatov, 227.
the Russian Language” and “Russians go home!” On 11 March, 30 March, and 4 May 1990, Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia respectively adopted resolutions for independence from the USSR. Most likely to avoid a Soviet invasion along R2P justifications, all three Baltic leaders endorsed a joint resolution that committed the countries to “guarantee the rights of all residents of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, regardless of nationality, native language, and political and religious beliefs.”

In the spirit of unity and common cause against the USSR, Russians were supportive of independence. In a 1991 referendum on independence for Latvia, 87.6 percent of the population voted, and 64.4 percent were in favor of independence. Results were similar in Estonia and Lithuania on independence referendums. Given the large populations of Russians in Estonia and Latvia, the indication is clear that ethnic Russians favored independence and a considerable amount voted “yes” for independence. Perhaps even more telling was the Latvian 1990 parliamentary elections where more ethnic Latvians won seats than ethnic Russians showing that ethnic Russians trusted Latvians to represent them in the independence drive.

Starting in the late 1980s, Yeltsin as president of the Russian SFSR had pursued a policy to try and undermine Gorbachev and this was no less evident than in the Baltics. Yeltsin pursued a dual track policy toward the Baltics by supporting Baltic independence and trying to secure the rights of ethnic Russians residing in the Baltic states. Starting in the summer of 1990, Yeltsin

264 Arbatov, 354 and 157.
265 Kolstoe [1995], 114.
266 Kolstoe [1995], 114 and Arbatov, 228.
267 Arbatov, 229.
268 Arbatov, 229 and Kolstoe [1995], 118.
269 Melvin [1995], 35 and Kolstoe [1995], 118. While numbers of Russians that voted for independence is not available there are indicators. For example, in Latvia, citizens could choose from Latvian or Russian ballots and above 60 percent of ballots in Russian favored independence. Kolstoe [1995], 119.
270 Melvin [1995], 35. On 3 March 1991, 73.7 percent of those that voted supported independence in Latvia and no district or city voted “no.” The “no” vote to staying in the USSR was also high in majority Russian population centers as well. See also Kolstoe [1995], 117. Melvin [1995], 36.
271 Kolstoe [1995], 115.
began negotiations with Baltic leaders to secure the rights of the Russian minority. These negotiations resulted in Yeltsin and the leaders of Latvia and Estonia signing agreements on 12 and 13 January 1991 that also recognized the independence of Latvia and Estonia.\footnote{Melvin [1995], 51 and Kolstoe [1995], 115} The agreements, almost identical, agreed to the principle of \textit{inter alia}, also called the “zero variant,” that “all persons living on the territory of the RSFSR [Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic] or the Republic of Estonia [and Latvia] at the time of signing ’have the right to maintain or achieve citizenship in the RSFSR or the Republic of Estonia [and Latvia] according to their expression of free will.’”\footnote{Melvin [1995], 51 and Kolstoe [1995], 116.} At the same time, Gorbachev attempted a crackdown in the Baltics against the independence drive.

Yeltsin stood in opposition to these moves by the Soviet military and stood side by side with Baltic leaders condemning the violence as Soviet troops stormed the Vilnius television tower and Russians were reported to be manning barricades against Soviet internal security forces in Riga.\footnote{Melvin [1995], 36 and Kolstoe [1995], 115. In January 1991, Gorbachev ordered Soviet troops to quell the independence movements in Latvia and Estonia which resulted in 15 people dying at the television tower in Vilnius, now known as “Bloody Sunday.” Batta, 139 and Kolstoe [1995], 140.} The events of January 1991 also pushed the Baltic Russian nationalist movements, the interfront, to distance themselves from the USSR showing a shift in attitude of even the most separatist populations.\footnote{Kolstoe [1995], 118.} The Russian sentiment was also reflective in the March 1991 independence votes discussed earlier.\footnote{Arbatov, 229 and Kolstoe [1995], 118.}

However, the general unity between Yeltsin and the Baltics was short lived after the 1991 August coup attempt and subsequent end of the USSR in December 1991. As independence became more of a reality, the question of citizenship and language became a point of contention as Estonia and Latvia sought to protect their new sovereignty against the Russian “occupiers” and
Russia likened the policies to South African apartheid. As a result, while Yeltsin signed both “peace” agreements in January 1991, the Russian parliament would only ratify the Estonian treaty and not the Latvian version in December 1991 as Latvia took a harder line on citizenship than any other state in the Baltics. The new ethno-nationalist tendencies on both sides would characterize the Russian-Baltic relationship throughout the 1990s and take center stage in Russia as one of the driving factors in Yeltsin foreign policy change from an Atlantist to Statist viewpoint.

3.4.1.3 Flirting with the Power of Division in Estonia and Latvia

As the newly independent countries of Estonia and Latvia codified new laws on citizenship, they had to be sensitive to the large Russian population as a threat to national unity. Realistically speaking, it was not out of the question to be concerned about a Russian fifth column developing, who for centuries represented the colonizers with a policy of russification. As a result, Estonian and Latvian lawmakers began to take the stance that the ethnic Russians in the Baltics represented an illegal occupation and should therefore not have the same rights and privileges as the titular nationalities. Once independence was achieved in August 1991 and before the collapse of the USSR, the change in mood was evident in contrast to the early days of “Baltic solidarity.”

In September of 1991, the Tallinn, Estonia city council referred to post-World War II immigrants as “citizens of other states.” The interwar period between World War I and II when the Baltics were independent and the post-World War II period served to establish parameters

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277 Kolstoe [1995], 283.
279 Melvin [1995], 51.
281 Chinn, 98.
282 Kolstoe [1995], 120.
initially for identifying who was truly Estonian or Latvian and who was an “occupier.”283 With this in mind, Estonia passed a new Land Reform Law on 17 October 1991 that held until a new citizenship law was passed, only those people who had been citizens of Estonia in the inter-war period, with their descendants, could be permitted to participate in land privatization.284 By 26 February 1992, Estonia decided to revert to its 1938 citizenship law that required two years of residency status before applying for citizenship, knowledge of the state language based on a 1,500 word bank and speaking and reading requirements, and applicants must swear allegiance to Estonia.285 On its face, the requirements do not seem unreasonable except for the fact that people that had been born in Estonia, known no other homeland, and had no citizenship in another state, were not automatically considered citizens. The new Estonian constitution passed in June 1992 gave citizens the rights to unemployment benefits, pensions, social security benefits, and business rights, leaving out non-citizens.286 The new constitution left a lot of room to deny state support to non-citizens and keep the door open to unspecified restrictions.287

Estonia’s voting law was more liberal and allowed permanent residents and citizens of other countries to vote in the 1993 elections as long as they had resided in Estonia for five years.288 Yet, the language law was seen as discriminatory by Russian speakers who saw the language requirements as meant to keep them from gaining citizenship.289 Russian speakers found the Estonian language difficult to master unlike Romance languages and other Slavic languages. Further, many ethnic Russians found no need to learn Estonian or any other Baltic language during the USSR as Russian was the lingua franca of the empire. The language hurdle not only for citizenship but for job opportunities was a difficult obstacle to overcome, especially

283 Chinn, 99.
284 Kolstoe [1995], 120.
286 Kolstoe [1995], 122.
287 Ibid.
289 Ibid, 103.
for the older generations and pensioners.\textsuperscript{290} For example, of 200,000 Russians in Tallinn, only 15 percent could speak Estonian.\textsuperscript{291} Estonia did compromise with Russia after a time, especially on the question of Soviet military pensioners. Estonia agreed to consider the permanent residence of Soviet military pensioners on a case-by-case basis and amended the Law on Foreigners in November 1993 to grant residency to retired Soviet officers.\textsuperscript{292} All things considered, Estonia’s laws were not as controversial as Latvia’s, where the majority of ethnic Russians and military personnel resided. The subsequent battle over language and citizenship between Latvia and Russia that played out on the international stage would delay the Baltic countries’ admittance to the Council of Europe by several years.\textsuperscript{293}

Latvian independence nationalism expanded in a much more radical way to the point of being characterized as a war against the cultural occupation of Russian influence.\textsuperscript{294} Much of this attitude can be accounted for in the Soviet russification policies mentioned earlier that had threatened to reduce Latvians to a minority in their own country.\textsuperscript{295} In the spring of 1992, Latvia passed laws eliminating higher education opportunities in Russian, followed by mandating that education could only be conducted in Latvian, restricted Russian radio and television channels, uprooted statues to Soviet heroes to include Yuri Gagarin, and promoted Latvians that fought with the Nazis as “heroes.”\textsuperscript{296} The citizenship laws were the real source of ethno-nationalist division. In 1991, a draft citizenship law was written but never ratified but gives a sense of the direction of the Latvian government. The law allowed citizenship for an individual who could prove that at least one parent was a citizen of Latvia in the inter-war years and if not, then that

\textsuperscript{290} Chinn, 103.
\textsuperscript{291} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{292} Melvin [1995], 53 and Chinn, 105.
\textsuperscript{293} Arbatov, 246. Estonia was admitted to the Council of Europe in 1993 but Latvia was not admitted until January 31, 1995. Arbatov, 246.
\textsuperscript{294} Arbatov, 232 and Batta, 122.
\textsuperscript{295} Chinn, 109 and 112.
\textsuperscript{296} Arbatov, 231–233.
person needed to fulfill three requirements: “(1) demonstrate proficiency in the Latvian language, 
(2) prove continuous residence in Latvia for at least sixteen years, and (3) renounce all other 
previous citizenship.”

The law failing to be voted on or ratified was due to international 
pressure, mostly Western, that found the law to be discriminatory, and jeopardized Latvia’s bid 
for Council of Europe membership. In 1994, a new draft law was debated that went through 
several drafts with pressure from the US also weighing in on how Latvia dealt with its stateless 
people. The 1994 citizenship law required that a person live in Latvia for five years, needed to 
be proficient in the Latvian language, and must renounce any previous citizenship. 

After Latvia adopted its 1994 citizenship law, Yeltsin characterized Latvia’s trajectory as a “dangerous drift 
toward militant nationalism…turning a young independent state into a hotbed of national 
intolerance and elevating [that intolerance] to the rank of official policy.” By the end of 1993, 
two-thirds of Latvia’s Russians or one-third of the total population had no citizenship rights like 
the right to vote, pensions, or residency status. By 1994, of the people living in Latvia that did 
not have citizenship, 80 percent were ethnic Russian.

3.4.2 Russian Actions After the Collapse of the USSR

One of only two, and perceived strongest, responses to the Baltic citizenship and 
language policies was linking ethnic Russian human rights guarantees to Russia troop 
withdrawal. Not accounting for the interlude of Nazi occupation, Soviet, and then Russian, troops 
had been stationed in the Baltics since the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1940. Troops were a

297 Batta, 122.
298 Ibid.
299 Both President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Christopher made negative comments about the 
Latvian citizenship law with Christopher calling for Latvia to “widen the circle of citizens and to grant 
voting rights to those Russians who wanted to live in Latvia.” Arbatov, 258–259.
300 Batta, 122; Chinn, 114; and Arbatov, 252.
301 Arbatov, 246.
302 Ibid, 234.
303 Ibid.
304 Batta, 113.
part of the North West Group of Forces headquartered in Riga that defended the Soviet northwest flank against NATO and ensured Soviet control of the Baltics, where loyalty was problematic.305 Yeltsin halted the withdrawal of nearly 120,000 Russian troops from the Baltics in October 1992 as the citizenship question was negotiated with Estonia and Latvia and decreed that withdrawing troops would depend on human rights guarantees.306 Also in the balance were tens of thousands of military and security pensioners and their dependents that had retired in the Baltics.307 Yeltsin doubled down on the troop withdrawal policy when addressing leaders of the Russian armed forces in October 1993 when he said that “Russia could not withdraw without citizenship for the Russians in the Baltics.”308 By all accounts this policy was followed as Yeltsin ordered the withdrawal of Russian troops from Lithuania in August 1993 due to Lithuania adhering to the zero variant policy toward its Russian minority.309 The Latvia and Estonia troop withdrawal issue could not be justified in Russian public and political opinion until the rights of ethnic Russians were guaranteed. Conversely, Estonian and Latvian politicians could not justify softening their stances on citizenship as long as troops resided in the country.310

Russia also tried to promote the interests of Russians in the Baltics through diplomatic speeches aimed at highlighting purported human rights abuses.311 This method of pressure was aimed at thwarting Baltic integration into Western European economic and political institutions. No other diaspora issue in the 1990s garnered more attention in Russian media than the plight of Russians in the Baltics.312 Initially, Russia’s response was tempered by its own bid for integration

305 Chinn, 104–105.
306 Grigas, 152 and Melvin [1995], 52.
307 Chinn, 105.
308 Melvin [1995], 52.
309 Chinn, 122. Note that Lithuania had a substantially smaller population of ethnic Russians and a smaller contingent of Russian troops due to its proximity to Kaliningrad. Lithuania also provides electricity and transit rights for fuel and supplies to Kaliningrad across Lithuanian territory. Chinn, 122–123. These factors made it both easier for Lithuania to justify a zero variant policy and for Russia to withdraw troops.
310 Kolstoe [1995], 284.
311 Batta, 139.
312 Kolstoe [1995], 283.
in Europe. Kozyrev tried to internationalize the Baltic citizenship question and stated at a March 1992 conference of Baltic states that “the democratic conviction of the citizens of Russia compels us to express our concern about the activities of some of our Baltic partners, all the more so as the democrats of Russia have stood together with them in the defense of their sovereign rights.” Russia furthered the human rights rhetoric by submitting a memorandum to the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in which Russia charged that the Baltics were engaged in violating ethnic Russian human rights and were violating the CSCE rules for minority treatment. Russia vocalized the human rights question in other forums to include the UN General Assembly in December 1992, at a session of the Council of Baltic Sea States in March 1993, the Russian–American Summit in April 1993, and at the Moscow International Symposium on Racism, Xenophobia, and Antisemitism in May 1993. The Russian Supreme Soviet resolved in July 1993 that Estonia violated “not only the...1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights[but also] the 1966 Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.” The result was a deliberate international assessment of the human rights questions by a number of international organizations at both the behest of Russia, Estonia, and Latvia. The most notable assessments were by Ibrahima Fall, director of the UN Center of Human Rights in 1992 and Max von der Stoel, High Commissioner of Ethnic Minorities of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1993. The general consensus from these reports was that there was no systemic human rights violations, although Stoel did provide some criticism and recommended some changes.

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313 Kolstoe [1995], 283.
315 Ibid, 286. Other rhetoric consisted of Yeltsin speaking at the UN stating that “Russia will take steps to defend its national interests in Estonia” and Kozyrev calling Estonian laws “apartheid [and] ethnic cleansing.” Melvin [1995], 52.
316 Arbatov, 246.
317 Grigas, 153 and Chinn, 114. See Arbatov, 251–253 for thorough discussion on the findings of various human rights groups into Latvia’s citizenship laws.
318 Grigas, 153.
319 Grigas, 153 and Kolstoe, 286. Stoel criticized Latvia’s naturalization quotas, conditions for granting citizenship, and language requirements. Arbatov, 251.
None the less, pressure from both Russia and the international community, coupled with Estonian and Latvian desires to distance themselves from Russia and integrate with Western Europe, resulted in concessions. Both Latvia and Estonia made legislative changes on the Russian citizenship question and were most influenced by the pressure from Western democracies, the CSCE, and Council of Europe. After Estonia agreed to residency status for the military pensioners and Latvia had made significant changes to its 1994 citizenship law, Yeltsin could stall no more. Russian, Latvian, and Estonian negotiators finally reached an agreement on Russian troop withdrawal in March 1994 and Russia settled to withdraw troops by 31 August 1994. After troop withdrawal and a calming of tensions, Latvia liberalized its citizenship law further after a national referendum in 1998 where half of voters agreed that a more liberal law would be beneficial and the parliament passed 16 amendments that lifted all restrictions to citizenship opening the door to every resident alien.

3.4.3 Russian Lessons Learned on Diaspora Policy Failure

3.4.3.1 The Power of Stability

First, one defining factor of the Baltic independence movements was initial political unity and solidarity that did not characterize Moldovan and Georgian movements. While Balts were nationalistic, they understood the initial need for ethnic Russian involvement in the process for separation and independence from the USSR. This inclusiveness prevented effective and organized separatist movements from taking hold and developing enough support to frame an actual human rights or discrimination crisis on the ground. For example, in Latvia, 63 organizations claimed to represent the ethnic Russian people, but none commanded more than 500 members. These organizations also only accounted for only ten percent of the non-Latvian

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320 Chinn, 117.
321 Ibid, 116. Latvia conceded to allow Russia to operate a radar station in Skrunda for four years and an additional 18 months for Russian dismantling. Chinn, 116.
322 Batta, 123.
323 Melvin [1995], 39.
population and illustrated the leaderless and divided nature of pro-Russian movements in the Baltics.\textsuperscript{324} This is partly explained by a lack of Baltic rhetoric or actions that would have suggested an existential threat to ethnic Russians and eliminated a rallying cry for separatism or Russian protection. Many ethnic Russians had also married Balts and had known no connection to Russia and therefore saw themselves as an integral part of the greater Baltic identity.\textsuperscript{325}

Transnistrians rallied around the suggestion of Moldovan nationalist that they would unite with Romania and Abkhazians and Ossetians through historical memory of Georgian extermination efforts. The Baltic trajectory neutered any pro-Russian nationalist tendencies and then advanced a truly titular agenda after independence. Yet, even the more radical Baltic movements were short lived due to Western European pressure and a Baltic mission to join European institutions and comply with European laws on democracy and minority rights.\textsuperscript{326} Due to a lack of crisis on the ground, Russia could not find justification for any type of R2P mission.\textsuperscript{327} To be sure, the concentration of Russian troops gave Russia the benefit of \textit{Power of Presence} but these troops never lent support in arms or men to any type of separatist movement or “protection” operation. Again, this highlighted the lack of a pretext in the Baltics. Tension over language laws and citizenship that only ever escalated to political debate is a far cry from titular armed militias marching on diaspora enclaves, popular rallies against diasporas, and radical high-level rhetoric that characterized other independence movements in the former Soviet republics.

The Baltic adherence to the democratic process, the close scrutiny and recommendations by international organizations and leaders on minority rights, and a lack of aggressive rhetoric or actions allowed for a cooling of inter-ethnic tension. These characteristics are rooted in the Baltic

\textsuperscript{324} Melvin [1995], 39.
\textsuperscript{325} Kolstoe [1995], 119 and Chinn, 106.
\textsuperscript{326} Batta, 123.
\textsuperscript{327} A 1993 survey in Estonia showed that 71 percent of Russians thought relations were good with Estonians, three percent voted very good, and only one percent described relations as bad. Chinn, 106.
experience in the 1980s to gain independence from the USSR. These movements were peaceful and symbolized by the 600 kilometer Baltic Way chain of humans across all three Baltic states, the “Singing Revolutions,” and the peaceful protests during the Gorbachev incursions in 1991. As a result, the Baltic people came to understand themselves as “progressive, democratic, civilized, and European.” In effect, a lack of strong Power of Division conditions, neutralized the Power of Presence. Of course, the presence of Russian troops did much in the way of liberalizing citizenship laws but not to the extent of acquiring any right to base Russian troops in the Baltics.

The critical lesson learned for Moscow is that division is an important pretext for diaspora mobilization and organization. Conceivably, division that is deep-seated in the historical memory of the diaspora is also critical. The Balts were able to control their own repressive tendencies against the ethnic Russians and in this way prevented the diaspora from having an enemy to counter and even the more radical nationalistic tendencies were short lived to prevent effective organization of separatism. What’s more, with a lack of division and conflict, Yeltsin could not find a legal reason to keep troops in the Baltics. In both Moldova and Georgia, Russian troops were attacked, diasporas were attacked, and Russian troops were eventually critical pieces to cease-fire negotiations that resulted in a legal basis for keeping troops in Georgia and Moldova. This speaks to the Yeltsin foreign policy at the time that was focused on European integration and at least trying to establish a legal basis for Russian troop deployments.

3.4.3.2 The Power of Quality of Life

Next, the Baltic minority Russians are a relatively new community in the Baltics, having formed in substantial numbers in the post-war period. While the re-population of the Baltics was from the military and industrial populations, insofar as Soviet citizens had the choice to choose

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328 Graney, 184.
329 Graney, 184 and Smith, 514.
where they lived and worked, many chose the Baltics. Indeed, the evidence shows that many security personnel who served in the Baltics chose to stay when they could have lived anywhere in the USSR once they retired. This trend is explained by the superior quality of living and economic opportunities found in the Baltics compared to other regions of the USSR. The Soviet newspaper, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, reported that:

For most newcomers to Latvia, migration is a normal process associated with the chance to improve one’s standard of living. For them the Baltic republics are attractive...Many migrants consider that they are simply taking advantage of their rights as Soviet citizens when moving from one part of the USSR to another...

Attempts to maintain the quality of life in the Baltics as the USSR collapsed explains partly the ethnic Russian support for Baltic independence. In fact, economic considerations may have been the decisive factor in how Russians voted in independence referendums. Ethnic Russians correctly predicted that the Baltics shedding communism and transitioning to a market-economy would be most probable in the Baltics than in other regions of the former USSR. These considerations would also take place as Russians in the new Russian Federation suffered under the economic hardships of the 1990s and shock-therapy.

The protection of quality of life also played out in Transnistria as Transnistrians sought to safeguard their economic privilege against the Moldovans. Economics as a factor in sustaining a good quality of life once again shows the *Power of Division* between those that are prosperous and those that are not. In the Baltic case, a series of factors did not contribute to conflict erupting over resources as in Transnistria due to a lack of identity with Russia by the ethnic Russians, a lack of separatism, a lack of titular radical nationalism, and the triumph of democratic values. In short, Russia did not represent a viable positive alternative to the titular Baltic governments.

330 Chinn, 110.
331 Kolstoe [1995], 119.
332 *Ibid*.
333 *Ibid*.
334 Arbatov, 235 and Chinn, 102.
Ethnic Russians not finding a need for Russian intervention decided to participate in the political and economic process of the Baltics rather than forge an alternative with Russian assistance. In the same way that Russia assumed the role of USSR in Georgia and Moldova as a positive force, it was seen as a negative, backward force in the Baltic case in regard to quality of living.\(^{335}\) Ethnic Russians didn’t want to “think and live like Russians in Russia.”\(^{336}\) This trend of preferring to live in the Baltics and not Russia also contributed to ethnic Russians pursuing citizenship in the Baltics and in turn take advantage of the state benefits provided to citizens.\(^{337}\) A 1993 poll showed that 56 percent of non-Estonians preferred to become Estonian citizens.\(^{338}\)

The Russian and Western lesson learned is that if diaspora communities enjoy a high quality of living and economic opportunities, then Russia cannot serve as a benefactor or protector.\(^{339}\) Conversely, this is also a significant reason that many diaspora communities are passportized by Russia in the hopes of benefitting from Russian citizenship when the titular government does not pose a better alternative. In the case of the Baltics, the short-lived discrimination based on language and ethnicity was not sustained long enough to affect the quality of life of the diaspora. In a way, the Yeltsin government’s policy of fighting for human rights contributed to solidifying the Baltic nation as the more desirable country to domicile than Russia. Yet, the division that comes from economic disparity can still be a precursor to Russian intervention. The indicators and warnings for this precondition for Russian intervention were present in the Donbass region of Ukraine in the early 2000s and are present now to varying degrees in regions like Narva, Estonia, and Daugavpils, Latvia. Increased nationalistic rhetoric from the Baltic governments coupled with economic hardship and a Russian disinformation

\(^{335}\) Chinn, 106.  
\(^{336}\) \textit{Ibid}.  
\(^{337}\) \textit{Ibid}, 107.  
\(^{338}\) \textit{Ibid}  
\(^{339}\) The Baltic states had the highest Human Development Index score of all the former Soviet republics and helped protect the Baltics from the political and economic fragmentation that plagued the rest of the former USSR. Graney, 184.
campaign can sow the seeds of division and set conditions for a Russian intervention into a NATO country.  

3.5 Chapter Two Conclusion

The three case studies of the diaspora policy employed by Russia in the nascent stages of a new Russian foreign policy in the 1990s show the strengths and weaknesses of this approach. Transnistria and Georgia show how important division is between the diaspora and the titular government to result in inviting Russian presence inside the sovereign borders of nations in the near abroad. These two case studies also show how both ethnic Slavic and non-Slavic communities can be appropriated and effectively used to justify Russian intervention. These type of early experiences with varying groups of people would expand the utility of the diaspora tool to groups outside purely the ethnic Russian or even Russian speaking peoples. The Georgia and Moldova case studies also demonstrate how critical Russian military presence is to supporting, emboldening, and, eventually, protecting diaspora populations in the name of peacekeepers. These strengths of the diaspora tool would be present in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 and in preventing effective Moldovan bids to reincorporate Transnistria into Moldova and later, the Crimea Annexation of 2014.

On the other hand, the tool has limitations. The Baltic case study shows that the presence of Russian military forces and division between diaspora and the titular government can be neutralized. Estonia and Latvia demonstrate how resisting the urge to foment division, tempering ultra nationalist tendencies, and working to include diaspora into the fabric of the nation can counterbalance the seeds of ethnic tension. Second, eliminating Russia as a viable alternative to the titular government is also critical to nullifying separatist movements and Russian intervention under the auspices of R2P. Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and the Donbass, Ukraine, all

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found Russia to be a preferred alternative to peaceful coexistence with their titular governments. Some of this reaction stems from fear originating in division but also from believing that a better way of life is possible by allying with Russia. The Baltic states, historically, and after the collapse of the USSR, continued to show that citizenship or even just residence in the Baltics was preferable to citizenship in Russia. Russia also failed to provide better economic opportunities or the promise of a better way of life if Russia intervened on their behalf. As a result, separatist organizations and movements in the Baltics were weak and unpopular.

However, the diaspora tool continues to be underestimated for its effective utility by the US, NATO, the EU and individual countries like Ukraine, the Baltic states, and Kazakhstan. As the war in Ukraine wages on into its second year, renewed nationalism can be sensed in places like the Baltics, who so skillfully avoided the diaspora tool being utilized in the 1990s. As I traveled through the Baltic states in the summer of 2022, ethnic Russians could be seen rallying around World War II memorials in Riga and Narva while the governments of Latvia and Estonia debated tearing down these points of cultural and historical pride for Russians. Ethnic Russians and more generally, Slavs, expressed a newfound sense of tension on the streets of Daugavpils, Riga, Visaginas, Tallinn, and Narva. The seeds of division can still be watered by the ebb and flow of nationalism coupled with seeing Russia as an alternative benefactor.

In the Baltic case study, regions such as Narva, Estonia, and Daugavpils, Latvia, pose renewed opportunity for Russian intervention, even as the Baltics are guaranteed Article V protections under the NATO charter and through their NATO membership.341 Both of these regions are majority ethnic Russian and border Russia. Russia can, and does, attempt to sow division in these groups through disinformation campaigns through different social mediums, capitalize on the cross-border familial connections of Latvians and Estonians, and could easily

show presence through cross border arms infusions. In Ida-Viru County on the border with Russia and location of Narva, Estonia’s, third largest city, ethnic Russians account for 73 percent of the population. Russia has been able to capitalize on its proximity to Narva and through a 10 percent unemployment rate to passportize an estimated 36 percent, or 23,000 people, of the Narva population. Russian passports come with benefits that the Narvans find desirable such as Russian pensions, university access, and visa free travel to Russia for business or visiting family. Equally poor and ethnically Russian is Latvia’s Latgale County where Daugavpils is located. Ethnic Russians make up 54 percent of the population of Daugavpils and Russian speakers make up 79 percent of the population. Yet, Russian passportization has not been as successful in this region at just two percent of the county population and four percent of the main city. Interestingly though, after the 2009 Latvian economic crisis, passportized Latvians increased. The reason being that Russia has a lower retirement age coupled with pensions. Still, historically speaking, Latgale has resisted separatist movements and influences across the 1990s and twenty-first century far better than Ida-Viru.

These case studies offer a view of the execution of Russian policies developed in the 1990s discussed in Chapter One. While Russia continues to fight conventionally in Ukraine at present, the diaspora tool offers a cheap alternative to military pressure to keep influence over countries in the near abroad and develop new opportunities in places like the Baltics. Russia continues to use disinformation and misinformation campaigns to sow division across the near

342 Grigas, 157.
343 Ibid. Narva also saw strong separatism in the 1990s due to 25 percent unemployment following the collapse of the USSR. Narva’s economy was strongly linked to the Soviet planned economy and after the fall, Narva lost its close ties to Russia. Batta, 135.
344 Grigas, 157.
345 Batta, 137 and Grigas, 157.
346 Grigas, 159.
347 Ibid.
348 Ibid.
349 Batta, 137–138.
abroad, recognizing the continued necessity of division. Countries who wish to maintain their sovereignty and independence from Russian pressure would do well to guard against division with minority groups, refrain from ultra nationalist rhetoric, and guard against individual manifestations of Soviet legacies that could be co-opted by Russia. Finally, while Russia’s performance in their SMO is not impressive, it should not encourage countries to see Russia as weak. This was the mistake of the West and near abroad countries in the 1990s when Russia capitalized cheaply on diaspora and minority issues at a time of weakness to secure the intervention of troops in Moldova and Georgia, and undoubtedly could have done the same in the Baltics had similar conditions existed as in Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia.
4. Conclusion

In Chapter One of this thesis, I laid out the historical evolution of Russians foreign policy in the near abroad in the context of Russians new global and regional position in the 1990s. The result of Russians domestic conditions and international footing is a foreign policy that focused on establishing a sphere of influence through primarily military intervention in diaspora communities. This policy was successfully applied in Georgia and Moldova and unsuccessfully in the Baltic states. Through a targeted cross-regional case study analysis, I assessed the Russian diaspora policy at work in Chapter Two, revealing lessons learned about both the strengths and weaknesses in using diaspora as a foreign policy tool. Taken together, the lessons learned in the case studies and the strategy development and refinement into state policy, laid the foundation for Russia to effectively use the policy in the twenty-first century to punish EU and NATO expansion.

The results of this work, therefore, point to several indicators and warnings (I & W) for Russian intervention using the diaspora in the near abroad. These I & Ws could allow policymakers, defense planners, and strategists to identify and anticipate Russian military intervention and soft and hard power shaping operations. Two indicators are specifically linked to assessing diaspora conditions that allow for intervention: (1) regional conditions in a diaspora community that cause separatism, civil war, and ethno-nationalism, and (2) the real or potential for a separatist movement that supports Russian intervention, especially if that movement is militarized. The third indicator considers Russian military disposition and composition in tandem with diaspora conditions: (3) Russian conventional force proximity to the diaspora that allows for a low-cost ground, sea, or air intervention and gives Russia a tactical and operational advantage vis-à-vis titular government forces. Further, these indicators are specifically meant to highlight conditions that could make a diaspora focused intervention possible but not the geopolitical indicators that would inform Russian strategic reasoning for an intervention.
Russia does not always intervene when the diaspora conditions are present to do so, a diaspora intervention is merely a tool to support a larger grand strategy just as they do not always intervene when specific geopolitical drivers of intervention are met.¹ The RAND Corporation identifies in a report potential geopolitical signposts for intervention that when overlayed with the diaspora conditional indicators in this paper can offer a more holistic assessment of the type and potential success of intervention Russia could pursue.² For instance, the geopolitical signpost for intervention was present in Ukraine in 2013, namely the potential for a regional balance of power shift away from Moscow through an association agreement with the EU.³ In response to this general shift westward, Russia annexed Crimea, a situation where both the geopolitical and diaspora indicators were present for intervention. However, Russia rejected continuing their intervention where the diaspora tool was also present in southeastern and eastern Ukraine opting for military aid to Donbass militias and non-intervention in oblasts bordering the Black Sea. One critical factor, I argue later, is that the conditions present in the diaspora of southern Ukraine were not sufficient enough to allow for a successful Russian intervention and geopolitical goals were met in exclusively annexing Crimea.⁴ The Ukraine example shows the varied application of the diaspora tool in relation to geopolitical goals and the deliberate assessment Russia makes in the success or failure of using diaspora to achieve foreign policy objectives.

Indicators that show a diaspora-based Russian intervention are even more relevant now that Russia is anticipated to be engaged conventionally in Ukraine for many years to come while also undergoing a military reconstruction similar to the goals of its New Look after the Russo-

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¹ Charap, 137.
² RAND argues that Russia is most likely to intervene due to national status concerns, regional power balance changes, external threat to sovereignty, and due to military capabilities. Charap, 132–133.
³ Charap, 137.
⁴ Toal, 264.
Georgian War but ideally with better outcomes. Therefore, soft and hard power tactics like economic pressure, energy manipulation, disinformation campaigns, and passportization become effective cheap alternatives. However, the diaspora tool is ideal for leveraging against countries that are not easily subdued by these tactics and gives Russia a low-cost, high-yield intervention option. Take for example the Moldova and Georgia case studies where a mere few thousand troops with diaspora support have been able to exert the necessary influence over the titular governments and deter Western institutional advances. The diaspora tool is also versatile enough to be utilized in either a soft or hard power application. In Baltic state diasporas, for example, Russia is perceived as setting conditions for intervention through the use of passportization, cultural outreach, language centers, and civil engagement and as a soft power tool to influence these governments. By using the threat of intervention, or being perceived as setting the conditions for potential intervention, Russia is able to remain relevant in how those governments behave. A threat in and of itself is also not singularly credible without the titular government recognizing the conditions within a diaspora community that would allow for Russian intervention, a mistake that many governments within the near abroad have made.

Additionally, the indicators for intervention are developed from the capabilities identified in this paper synthesized from a cross-regional case study analysis: division, local support, military presence, Soviet and imperial legacies, and non-Russian minorities. Conversely, conditions that combat Russian intervention through the diaspora tool are stability and a high quality of life in the target community. Other Russian tools used to create conditions in diaspora

communities are soft power, humanitarian policies, compatriot policies, passportization, and information warfare and can be valuable in combatting the powers that prevent diaspora use. For example, Russian passportization attempts in Narva, Estonia, and Daugavpils, Latvia, endeavor to establish a more economically favorable union for Baltic Russians with Russia and compete with the Baltic states ability to maintain control. Even though the results have been mixed, the mere attempt to create a capability in the Baltics can have an influence over Baltic foreign policy, and not always in a way that favors Russia. For instance, increased Russian disinformation campaigns, coupled with Russian actions in Ukraine resulted in more NATO forces deploying to the Baltics. Russia’s obvious intent to create exploitable conditions in the Baltics also resulted in an influx of NATO Special Operations Forces assets designed to combat disinformation campaigns, prepare populations to resist, and increase civilian resiliency capabilities against Russia. However, Russia is much more effective at capitalizing on conditions that are not engineered by Moscow but rather created by states where the diaspora resides. This ability to quickly execute the diaspora policy when the opportunity presents itself is due to the tools decades long integration into Russia’s grand strategy discussed in Chapter One. For example, while Russia had been executing soft power and passportization operations in Crimea for years prior to the 2014 annexation, the light that lit the powder keg of division in Crimea and eastern Ukraine was the Maidan Revolution born from a grass-roots movement in Ukraine.

The division between ethnic Ukrainians and ethnic Russians, which had been simmering for years, was quickly co-opted by Russia to annex Crimea. Georgia also presented an opportunity to capitalize on titular government actions to further solidify Russia’s position. President of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, attacked South Ossetia and prompted a Russian

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7 Grigas, 37–50.
8 Ibid, 43.
9 Ibid, 246.
10 De La Pedraja Tomán [2021], 193.
11 Ibid, 194.
response that, while displaying the ineptness of the Russian military, was successful in reinforcing Russia’s position in the region as hegemon.12 The Ukrainian example is especially instructive in how quickly the capabilities discussed in Chapter Two set conditions for Russian intervention and how the policies in Chapter One allowed for a speedy execution by the Russian state. Therefore, the Crimea Annexation of 2014 will serve as a twenty-first century example to demonstrate the indicators that informed Russian intervention through the diaspora tool. This knowledge will then be applied to Narva, Estonia, as a theoretical wargame for future diaspora intervention which is a commonly discussed epicenter for eventual Russian annexation. In order to scope the indicator analysis, I will only focus on the actual events surrounding the annexation of Crimea primarily and not directly the diaspora separatism in the Donbass region of Ukraine.

4.1 Indicator One: Regional Conditions

The first indicator is regional conditions that are consistent with political upheaval, civil war, ethno-nationalist rhetoric and policies, and separatist movements. This indicator flows from the power of division lesson learned by Russia in Chapter Two. These conditions must have the effect of pitting a diaspora community against the ruling elite or national government in a way that results in the real or perceived threat of violence against the diaspora. In Latvia and Estonia following the collapse of the USSR, brief discrimination could be felt in the diaspora community through language and citizenship laws, but that discrimination never manifested into the potential for violence. The threat of violence or actual violence alone is also not a complete rendering of the indicators characteristics. The indicator is also influenced by ethno-cultural survival. The Moldova case study in particular illustrated the divisions that formed through language and national orientation toward Romania by the new titular government. The real or perceived

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12 De La Pedraja Tomán [2021], 130. There is much debate about who started the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, but the fact is clear that Georgian forces attacked South Ossetia before Russia responded with force. De La Pedraja Tomán [2021], 130–131 and Toal, 167–168.
extinction of cultural identity can be a driving factor in creating conditions for regional upheaval that preempts violence such as occurred in Georgia.

The Baltic states, however, continue to combat these conditions in the twenty-first century. In 2014, following the annexation of Crimea, both Latvia and Estonia made improvements to the treatment of stateless children. The Baltic states have historically been plagued by Russian claims of human rights violations against the ethnic Russian minority that does garner sympathetic audiences. To combat these narratives, the Baltic states’ stateless children policy was an attempt to acknowledge the division and counter the narrative. Earlier signs from Lithuania in 1990 showed that inclusion resulted in a net gain for inter-ethnic stability and peace as all ethnic Russians were given the option of Lithuanian citizenship and 90 percent accepted. This does not mean that automatic citizenship is the solution to quelling division. Both Moldova and Georgia offered citizenship to anyone within their national boundaries upon gaining independence from the USSR, but this gesture was not enough to overcome other contentious attributes of the minority-titular relationship.

In the case of Ukraine, the division between ethnic Russians, who reside predominantly in southeastern and eastern Ukraine, and ethnic Ukrainians, who make up the rest of the country, was on full display in late 2013 and early 2014 surrounding the Euro-Maidan protests. Following the flight of former president of Ukraine, Victor Yanukovych, and the apparent victory of the Ukrainian nationalists, interactions turned increasingly more hostile between ethnic Russians and Ukrainian nationalists. In this environment, ethnic Russians in Crimea, which is the only majority Russian oblast in Ukraine, disproportionally saw the new government in Kiev as

13 Batta, 145.
14 Ibid, 131.
15 Melvin [1995], 87 and Toal, 202–204. See De La Pedraja Tomán [2021], 192–193, for a synopsis of the Euro-Maidan Revolution and aftermath.
antagonistic compared to the more split response in other ethnically mixed oblasts. On 23 February, the Ukrainian Rada (parliament) passed a bill banning the Russian language which was widely viewed in ethnic Russian communities as the victory of Ukrainian nationalism and an indicator of more repression to come. Politically and ethnically motivated attacks on the Russian language are often the first sign of ethno-nationalist policy and a common thread across all the case studies in Chapter Two. This type of policy has the effect of heightening the cultural survival instinct in diaspora communities which quickly turns violent. To be sure, equal amounts of ethno-nationalism were present on both sides of the ethnic divide in 2014 but were exacerbated by Ukrainian nationalism during and immediately after Maidan, not Russian nationalism in Crimea.

The language law provocation was compounded by Ukrainian nationalist ascending on Crimea after their victory in ousting Yanukovych. On 19 February in what has become known as the Korsun pogrom, right-wing Ukrainian nationalists stopped buses with anti-Maidan protestors heading back to Crimea. The nationalists “beat the passengers, subjected them to humiliations, spread gasoline, and threatened to set them on fire.” The result was the destruction of four of the eight buses, seven people killed, and twenty missing. The violence, ethno-nationalism, and the real or perceived attack on ethnic Russian culture, had the effect of solidifying a new stage of ethnic Russian and Ukrainian existence from that of passive cohabitation to active resistance. It would be these types of conditions that offer Moscow the ability to intervene in R2P missions historically.

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16 Toal, 202.
17 De La Pedraja Tomán [2021], 193. The bill never became law but was enough to express the character of the new governments policy toward Russian culture in Ukraine.
18 De La Pedraja Tomán [2021], 193.
19 Ibid, 193.
20 See Toal, 223–224 for a complete recounting of Ukrainian actions that inflamed tensions between ethnic Russians and Ukrainians in Crimea.
Whether this indicator was ignored or overlooked in 2014 is irrelevant to what the future application can offer. In the contemporary case, Narva, Estonia, the case study revealed the most successful Russian passportization operations, which is not so much a Russian success as an indicator of pro-Russian sentiment in the region.\(^{21}\) After the collapse of the USSR, both Crimea and Narva, Estonia, experienced separatist movements.\(^{22}\) The Narva case is perhaps more characteristic of separatist movements in the Donbass as both regions depended on the Soviet planned economy.\(^{23}\) When the USSR fell, both Narva and Donbass lost their economic status and needed to maintain links to the Russian economy to remain solvent.\(^{24}\) Therefore, Narva sought economic autonomy to better integrate with the Russian economy in the early 1990s.\(^{25}\) While this autonomy never came to fruition, economic hardship did and explains partially the success of passportization. Nonetheless, the economic disparity, real or perceived, between ethnic Russian Narvans and the rest of Estonia can be a source of division that could fuel neo-separatist movements today. Crimea narrowly voted for Ukrainian independence from the USSR and Russian nationalism in the region, heavily supported by Russia, remained a simmering movement that came to the fore when the conditions were present during the Maidan Revolution. The question, therefore, is separatism festering in Narva? If it is, this would be an indicator for intervention if it overlays with a geopolitical goal in Moscow. An effective deterrent available to Tallinn is to not exacerbate potential sources of division like tearing down Russian cultural symbols.

While I was in Narva in the summer of 2022, Narvans were conducting sleep-ins around a T-34 tank on the Neva River, a monument to the Red Army’s liberation of the city. Two weeks after I visited the tank and witnessed the crowds, the tank was removed by the Estonian

\(^{21}\) Grigas, 157.
\(^{22}\) Batta, 134–135.
\(^{23}\) Toal, 203.
\(^{24}\) Batta, 135 and Walker, 188.
\(^{25}\) Batta, 135–136.
government. While it may seem like a small, inconsequential act, it does not contribute to combating division but further adds to divisive narratives. While the long-term effect of these types of policies is uncertain, the short-term effect can be decisive for separatism. After Yanukovych fled Ukraine, Kiev ordered the destruction of the statue of Lenin in the city of Simferopol, Ukraine. This resulted in local militias finding a focus and mission to protect the statue and speaks to another indicator of intervention, a diaspora support base that can be co-opted by Russia.

4.2 Indicator Two: Diaspora Support Base

The second indicator is the potential for or existence of a diaspora movement that supports Russian intervention. A critical factor that increases the probability of Russian intervention is if the movement is militarized or is easily applied to purpose. Russia, historically, prefers low human and financial costs when using the diaspora tool. This type of low-cost outcome is most probable when the diaspora is the means to do the brunt of the fighting or support Russian forces as to give them an advantage in a conventional fight. Recall that in Bender, Transnistria, diaspora militias were instrumental in setting conditions for a 14th Guards Army advance on the city that ultimately resulted in a cease-fire in Russia’s favor. Abkhazian and South Ossetian too employed militias that did most of the fighting to oust Georgian forces from their respective regions. Conversely, Russia did not have a diaspora movement in the Baltics that supported intervention while also possessing enough momentum to be an asset. Fundamental to the strength of the movement, is the capability to inflict physical costs on the titular government. Costs could include economic paralysis, separatism, political process disruption, civil war, or terrorist acts. Indeed, Russia had the military trainers and weapons in the Baltics to arm separatist movements had they existed in numbers to make them anything other than a fledgling insurgent

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26 De La Pedraja Tomán [2021], 193.
force. Yet, as the Baltic states case study showed, the Baltics successfully, and somewhat
indirectly, suppressed pro-Russia movements and sentiments to deprive separatists from gaining
any measurable momentum. This was not the case in Crimea.

First, Crimea in many ways is different than the diaspora populations in the Baltics and
other near abroad countries. Through Soviet russification policies, the Crimean Peninsula is
majority Russian due to Stalin’s expulsion of the titular population, the Crimean Tatars, a
continuation of imperial russification policies.27 Contributing to the uniqueness of Crimea outside
of the purely ethnic makeup, is the length of time it was a part of the Russian state in both
imperial and Soviet form. This connection for Crimeans to Russia is not just a historical memory
but a lived reality for many. Crimea was a part of the Russian empire and then the RSFSR until it
was gifted to Ukraine in 1954 in what Ambassador Jack Matlock describes as “a paper transfer
of no practical significance…since all constituent parts of the USSR were ruled from Moscow.”28
Strategically speaking, Russia, and then the USSR, have maintained their only warm water naval
base in Sevastopol, Crimea since 1783.29 Not only does this fact speak to the importance of the
region to Russia but also to the status of the region for Crimeans stemming from association with
Russia and not Ukraine.

The historical links between Crimeans and Russia are further demonstrated through
modern day survey data gauging the strength with which Crimeans identify with Russia. A 2014

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27 Toal, 202.
28 Matlock, Jack, “Ukraine: The Price of Internal Division,” JackMatlock.com, Jack Matlock, March 1,
Macmillan, 2015, 29 and See Hall Gardner’s book for a discussion of the history of Crimea: Gardner,
There were several reasons for the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine. First, it was considered a good will
gesture to mark the 300th anniversary of Ukraine’s “merger” with Russia in 1654. Gardner, 43. Second, the
transfer of Crimea, with a 75 percent Russian population, would ensure that the Russian SSR could
influence politics within the Ukrainian SSR. Gardner, 43. Third, the move was seen as a rapprochement
between Ukrainians and the government for the millions of people killed in Ukraine during the Stalinist Era
agricultural collectivization. Gardener, 43. Finally, the union seemed like a natural fit administratively
because Crimea and the Ukrainian SSR were both driven by agriculture. Gunawan, 213.
survey of Crimean Tatars, Crimean Russians, and Crimean Ukrainians showed that 90 percent of Russians and 80 percent of Ukrainians saw the annexation of Crimea as the correct outcome.\textsuperscript{30} Surveys also showed that 65 percent of Russians and 60 percent of Ukrainians in Crimea saw the Euromaidan protests as a fascist coup.\textsuperscript{31} These survey results are an indication of the political and cultural leanings of not only ethnic Russians but also ethnic Ukrainians residing in Crimea toward Russia. This was a community that was not only physically but also historically separate from Ukraine and linked to Russia and this division when coupled with evidence of real ethno-nationalism in Kiev served as a factor in the development of separatism.

Second, in response to Euro-Maidan and the flight of Yanukovych, Crimeans formed militias. This is the single most critical characteristic of a diaspora movement that will strengthen the probability of Russian intervention. Strong diaspora militia formations in both Transnistria, Moldova, and Georgia pre-empted Russian conventional involvement. In the case of Crimea, militias captured both the Sevastopol and Simferopol airports on 24 February 2014 to prevent Ukrainian nationalists from entering Crimea. These operations were also coupled with blockades at the Perekop Isthmus and the Chongar Peninsula, choke points along the axis of approach from mainland Ukraine to Crimea.\textsuperscript{32} Militia formations were also joined by Crimean police forces and Berkut units that refused to follow orders from Kiev.\textsuperscript{33} Not surprisingly, the majority of the Berkut in Crimea were ethnic Russian, recruited from the majority ethnic Russian population, an issue that would also plague Ukrainian army formations stationed in Crimea.\textsuperscript{34}

These actions were all indicators to Moscow about the strength and effectiveness of para-military forces to either assist or resist Russian intervention. The calculation in Moscow was that

\textsuperscript{30} Toal, 235.  
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{32} De La Pedraja Tomán [2021], 193.  
\textsuperscript{33} De La Pedraja Tomán [2019] 263–264.  
\textsuperscript{34} De La Pedraja Tomán [2021], 194.
Russian forces were not going to be hindered by militias, police, or security services in securing objectives on the ground in the event of an incursion. Further strengthening diaspora militias in Crimea was an infusion of motorcycle gangs and Cossack formations from mainland Russia that were welcomed by the majority of Crimeans. These types of outside assistance were characteristic of both the Georgia and Moldova cases as well. The willful acceptance of support from Russian para-military groups was a further indication for the potential success of intervention.

The final indicator characteristic is explicit calls for, and empirical evidence supporting, Russian intervention which Russia can use as justification for both domestic and international audiences. Prior to Russian intervention in Crimea, polling of the Crimean population took place to gauge Crimean support for annexation, a typical practice in Russia that reveals topics of concern or vulnerability to the Kremlin. One survey asked Crimeans if they wanted to join Russia and the results were 75 percent approval. Prior to popular polling in Crimea, Russia had met with the political leader of Crimea in December 2013, the head of the Supreme Council of Crimea and the local Party of Regions leader (a pro-Russia party)–Vladimir Konstantinov. He was emphatic that “Crimea would be ready ‘to join Russia’” and authorized polling to survey public opinion in Crimea. Then in February 2014, the pro-Russian city council of Sevastopol voted to replace the Kiev-appointed mayor. In no uncertain terms, Russia not only had the political and domestic backing for military intervention but also the support to engineer a referendum after intervention on the annexation of Crimea–an important consideration. While the

35 Toal, 215 and De La Pedraja Tomán [2021], 194. Cossack formations helped militias dig trenches and fortify the land bridge from Ukraine to Crimea and were mistaken for Russian army by Ukrainian forces. De La Pedraja Tomán [2021], 194.
36 Frye, 54–56.
37 De La Pedraja Tomán [2021], 195.
38 Toal, 216.
39 Ibid.
40 De La Pedraja Tomán [2021], 193.
referendum on annexation in March 2014 had many characteristics that made it unfair, the overall domestic Crimean pre-referendum polling showed the majority of Crimeans favored annexation.\textsuperscript{41} In this case, Russia could not depend on Kiev to grant the permanent stationing of peacekeeping forces or fully trust that the 2010 Yanukovych brokered Black Sea basing lease would be honored.\textsuperscript{42} However, a Crimean referendum and annexation did fit into a Russian legal narrative couched in a retooling of Kosovo’s justification to seek independence from Serbia. On 16 March 2014, Crimea declared itself an independent state and the same day Russia both recognized Crimean independence and unification with Russia.\textsuperscript{43}

In the case of Narva, there has never been a militarized separatist movement or any indication that Narvans have supported or will support Russian military intervention. Perhaps tellingly, 1990s separatism focused on economic autonomy but not political autonomy, indicating a preference for Estonian governance while benefiting from the Russian economy. Yet, passportization numbers can continue to serve as an indicator of support for Russia that could also prove to be a warning to Estonia of the loyalty in the region. Over time if Russia continues to serve as an economic alternative to Estonia and ethno-nationalism intensifies, the region could descend into militarized separatism as quickly as Crimea did. Once again, Estonia should suppress the urge to revert back to protectionist strategies vis-à-vis the ethnic Russians and work to improve the quality of life for Narvans as a resiliency measure to defend against Russian disinformation campaigns.

4.3 Indicator Three: Conventional Force Proximity to Diaspora

Indicator three is Russian conventional force proximity to the diaspora that allows for a low-cost ground, sea, or air intervention. The disposition and composition of Russian forces

\textsuperscript{41} Toal, 222.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid, 215.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid, 222–223.
should also give units an advantageous tactical and operational superiority vis-à-vis titular
government forces. This indicator has been present in all the case studies assessed in Chapter
Two and in Ukraine. Of all Russian interventions where the diaspora is a factor, Moldova is the
furthest from Russian borders. This distance, however, was offset by the 14th Guards Army
already stationed in the country exhibiting how Russia can use Cold War era basing to its
advantage, including the Black Sea Fleet as seen in 2014. However, this indicator may be the
most restrictive when assessing the possibility of a Russian intervention if indicators one or two
are at play but indicator three is not present. Russia does not prefer and, traditionally, does not
have the capabilities for expeditionary interventions. In fact, the most expeditionary intervention
that Russia has undertaken did not use the diaspora tool but rather national government support in
Syria. 44 However, this intervention was predominantly an air campaign and did not have the
logistical constraints that a land offensive would entail, analogous to the Russian invasion of
Ukraine. Still, Russia is well positioned to capitalize on prepositioned troops as either a base of
operations or as an actual intervention force in many near abroad countries. Consider that Russia
currently has bases in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and owns the lease to an aerodrome in
Kazakhstan. 45 This does not include Russian troop deployments in Crimea, Georgia, and
Moldova or its close military partnership with Belarus. In total Russia has elements of its armed
forces in no less than nine of the fourteen former Soviet republics. Russian proximity to near
abroad countries, using its massive territory and alliances should also be considered as a factor in
Russia’s decision to intervene. For instance, the Russian mainland and Kaliningrad surround a
good portion of the Baltic states and, as was seen during the early phases of the invasion of
Ukraine, Russia was able to use allies like Belarus as a line of departure for attack.

44 Charap, 136.
In the case of Crimea, Russia had both proximity and pre-positioned forces. The Russian garrison in Crimea not only included the Black Sea Fleet but also two airbases totaling 12,000 military personnel.\(^\text{46}\) These troops were stationed in Crimea under a 1997 lease agreement that restricted the types of equipment and amounts of soldiers Russia could place on the peninsula.\(^\text{47}\) The treaty restricted Russia from possessing heavy weaponry specifically and thus, Russia had to import much of the defensive equipment needed to include tanks, artillery, and surface-to-air-missiles after intervention was approved.\(^\text{48}\) This was not difficult considering the proximity factor to Russia. Yet, perhaps the most advantageous factor benefiting Russia in neutralizing Ukrainian forces on the peninsula, was that the majority of Ukrainian armed forces were local conscripts.\(^\text{49}\) While tactical speed, surprise, and maneuver were instrumental in defeating the 24,000 strong Ukrainian garrison on Crimea, it would be the ethnic Russians and Soviet legacies that were the Achilles heel. This situation is similar to the composition of the 14\(^{th}\) Guards Army in Moldova, largely recruited from the local ethnic Russian population. Crimea is 90 percent ethnic Russian and as a result, two-thirds pledged allegiance to Moscow. Putin also decreed that those who swore loyalty would retain their rank.\(^\text{50}\) The Crimea annexation is therefore consistent with previous diaspora interventions.

Consider for a moment another example from Ukraine in 2014 that shows the importance of the indicators working together to increase the possibility of Russian diaspora intervention. The post-Maidan events in spring 2014 not only heightened Ukrainian nationalism but also Russian nationalism. As a result, Russian nationalists revived the prospect of the *Novorossiya* project in the southeastern six (SE6) oblasts of Ukraine where a substantial Russian minority

\(^{46}\) Toal, 215 and De La Pedraja Tomán [2021], 195.  
\(^{47}\) *Ibid.*  
\(^{50}\) *Ibid.* For a complete synopsis of how the Russian forces subdued the Ukrainian garrison in Crimea, see De La Pedraja Tomán [2021] 194–197 and De La Pedraja Tomán [2019], 264–268.
resides.\footnote{Toal, 240.} The project called for the autonomy of these oblasts, a region that derives its name from the moniker given it by Catherine the Great after it was captured from the Ottoman Empire.\footnote{Ibid, 240–241.}

Following the events in Maidan, pro-Russian separatist movements started to manifest in much of the SE6 and Donetsk and Luhansk (SE8).\footnote{Walker, 205.} One of these movements resulted in what would become known as the Odessa Massacre on 2 May 2014.\footnote{Walker, 205 and Toal, 264.} Pro-Russian protesters marching through Odessa, were overpowered, and pursued by Ukrainians through the city. The pro-Russians sought refuge in the trade union building and Ukrainians threw Molotov cocktails through the windows, lighting the building on fire. Forty-two pro-Russians died in the massacre.

This could have given Russia the opportunity for an R2P intervention, especially after Russian state media amplified the events which served to continue to drum up division between Ukrainians and Russians. When wildly distorted, it looked like the beginnings of a fascist extermination of ethnic Russians. However, polling in April 2014 showed that the majority of SE8 respondents were not in favor of joining Russia.\footnote{Toal, 263.} Russia might have had the flame but not the powder keg to justify an intervention or at the very least other indicators that would have made the intervention a long-term success. This would not be the case in Luhansk and Donetsk where covert Russian intervention commenced and the same poll showed the highest support, but not a majority, for joining Russia.\footnote{Ibid.} Further, Russia did not have proximity to be able to effectively intervene in the SE6 where division was high but local support low. Although NATO Supreme Allied Commander, General Philip Breedlove, believed that Russian forces on the border with Ukraine could reach Transnistria if ordered, this decision was not taken.\footnote{Ibid, 264.} At this
time, strong consideration was given to not only the terrain to traverse but the lack of local militarized diaspora support and division.

Finally, in the Narva case, Russia does not have any military forces or bases in Estonia. However, Russia does have proximity. Narva is located adjacent to Russia connected by several road bridges crossing the Neva River, which is a few hundred meters in width. When I visited Narva, the closeness of Russia to the city was uncomfortably evident as Narva’s city limits end at the rivers bank, the border with Russia. The border is also not guarded, save for the bridge crossings, and has no natural or manmade defenses apart from the river. Considering the ease with which “little green men” appeared in Crimea, which at the time had no bridges connecting it to Russia and was isolated by the Sea of Azov, how quickly and easily could Russian forces occupy Narva? Another factor is Narva does not have 25,000 soldiers in the city as Ukraine had on Crimea. Of course realistically speaking, Russia would be hard pressed to mount a successful military campaign in Narva today but consider if other conditions were met like a militarized separatist movement, a supportive local populace that blockaded the one highway and rail line into the city, and a referendum of autonomy from the city council. How would NATO respond? Would an assault start World War III? Who would be the casualties, Estonians and Russians? Take into account if NATO did nothing and the legitimacy of the alliance was severely diminished as a result or responded with force and killed Estonian and EU citizens. These are the same questions that are considered with the prospect of NATO intervention in Ukraine. In this case, the best defense has very little to do with military force on the part of Estonia and everything to do with civil engagement. Without the support of the people, Russia has very little chance of successfully occupying Narva as indicator one and two would not be present.
4.4 Final Thoughts

“George, you do realize that Ukraine is not even a state. What is Ukraine? Part of its territory is Eastern Europe, but the greater part is a gift from us!”—President Putin to President George Bush.58

Too often countries in the near abroad will pursue protectionist or ethno-nationalist tactics to defend against Russian diaspora initiatives, especially since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in countries like Kazakhstan and the Baltics. Defenses to the powers inherent in the diaspora discussed in Chapter Two and prevention of conditions that would signal an indicator can be found in countering these powers, mainly through the capabilities used by the Baltic states. Although the sample size is small, Russia has never had a successful intervention in the near abroad when either the national government was not an ally or Russia did not have a strong diaspora option. The Baltic states and the SMO operations in Ukrainian oblasts without a significant diaspora, are two instances where Russia has failed. This failure is also evident at present to Russia, as it amended its war aims to consolidate territory in eastern Ukraine where ethnic Russians are a strong minority.

Another factor to consider is how to neutralize diaspora policy where it is already at work in Moldova and Georgia and perhaps Ukraine as conditions develop. Unfortunately, the regions that Russia has the diaspora tool well established will not be resolved while the current governmental and military systems exist in Russia as the decades long interventions in Moldova and Georgia indicate. I suggest an alternative strategy: that these countries should embrace what is widely considered to be Chamberlainian appeasement, of the kind seen before World War II with the annexation of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia, and accept that these territories are lost. However, this acceptance should be quickly coupled with ascension to the EU and NATO or

58 Toal, 199.
their preliminary membership programs to guard against further expansion by Russia. Of course, the counter arguments to this are substantial and stem predominantly from the results of pre-World War II appeasement: Hitler was not deterred or satisfied with the gains he made. Today, many fear that this would cause even further provocation, would not find political support in countries with separatism, would establish a new modern and dangerous precedent, or embolden Russia to act even more aggressively.

Generally, these fears are well founded. But in the current environment where Russia is decisively engaged in Ukraine, and NATO is even more united against Russia, there may be an opportunity to outmaneuver Moscow. NATO found no issue with expansion sufficiently convincing to deter growth eastward in the 1990s and early 2000s. It even went as far as to eventually include former Soviet republics in its ranks and pledge Membership Actions Plans (MAPs) to Ukraine and Georgia, perceived by Russia as highly antagonistic on the part of NATO. A prevailing factor in support of NATO expansion was the weakness of Russia after the collapse of the USSR and its inability to respond in a meaningful way to expansion until Russia found new footing after the 2008 Bucharest Summit. Once again, Russia is a diminished power suffering from both economic and military deficiencies and presenting NATO with an opportunity that it has historically capitalized on in the past to expand.

Admittedly, the weakest aspect of this strategy is not related to Russian reactions, but in the ability to obtain a unanimous consensus for new members in NATO and/or the EU to admit Moldova and Georgia as members. One prevailing factor that has been decisive to preventing Georgia and Moldova from joining both the EU and NATO is its decades long struggle with separatist movements. These issues with borders, Russia’s peacekeeping troops, and the resulting domestic instability are real threats to either country receiving a MAP from NATO, let alone an offer of membership and are also liabilities for the alliance.
However, the divorce of separatist territories will be a net positive for the geopolitical
stability of these regions and support membership in the EU and NATO. As former Ambassador
to the USSR Jack Matlock said of the annexation of Crimea, “Ukraine is almost certainly better
off without Crimea than with it. Nothing weakens a nation more than holding territory whose
residents prefer to belong to another country.”59 This is not to say that this is a solution for all
territorial disputes in the world but near abroad separatism has proven to be unresolvable when
Russia is involved, and titular and minority communities cannot find peaceful solutions.
Ambassador Matlock also points to a relatively modern example of ceding territory in favor of
stability in post-WWII Finland.60 Finland accepted the loss of land to the USSR, and proceeded
to establish partnerships with NATO, joined the EU, and has now been offered NATO
membership with little meaningful Russian response. After independence too, Latvia and Estonia
did not dispute territorial loses to Russia as a result of their annexation by the USSR in any
significant way.61 Latvia signed a border treaty with Russia in 2007 and Estonia has not pursued a
desire to move its border eastward.62 Both are productive and protected members of the EU and
NATO. Considering the weakness of Russia, a break with separatist liabilities that have largely
precluded membership in NATO and the EU could prove to be a powerful counterpunch to
Russian revanchism.

But would not Russia be even more emboldened to intervene further if Georgia and
Moldova cede territory, exploiting perceived weakness? Possibly but this probability is relegated
to zero if these countries join NATO and gain Article V mutual defense guarantees. All
indications from the ongoing war in Ukraine are that Russia is deterred by Article V which
explains its behavior in preventing Ukraine from joining NATO and the EU in the first place.

60 Ibid.
61 Batta, 141.
62 Ibid.
Additionally, Russia has never attacked a NATO ally even as arms flow through fixed points therein to its enemy in Ukraine. This possibility is further lowered by Russia’s invasion in Ukraine that has greatly depleted its combat fighting capacity and power. A further deterrent is of course the diaspora factor argued in this thesis. Russia has not intervened on territory where the diaspora capability is not present. This should serve as a valuable indicator to Georgia, Moldova, and NATO of the possible success and mitigated risk to ceding territory and then admitting these countries as members.

Another important aspect is not so much the political will in Georgia and Moldova to cede territory but the domestic will of Russians to want to fight in Georgia and Moldova outside of separatist territories. As political scientist Timothy Frye argues, the Kremlin is extremely sensitive to domestic public opinion especially when foreign policy detracts from domestic policy. Overwhelmingly, Russians prefer to live in a country with a high standard of living than in pursuit of great power status. Only in 2014 post-annexation of Crimea did Russians poll nearly even in their preference for great power status or quality of life. Further polling as early as 2020 showed that Russians are much more ambivalent to countries joining NATO and in seeing the US as a threat, rejecting Kremlin “besieged fortress” narratives. While the Kremlin may want great power status and a desire for a privileged sphere of influence, the majority of Russians do not support this trajectory. Part of the success of Russia’s involvement in Transnistria and Georgia is precisely because the intervention does not affect Russians with the same consequences that they are now shouldering due to the SMO.

On the other side of the equation is the question of political will in Georgia and Moldova. Considering the constant threat that both countries are subject to from Russian peacekeeping

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63 Frye, 168.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid, 170.
forces, the prospect of admission to NATO and the EU should be welcome. Both nations already enjoy substantial partnership with NATO and trade with the EU, but neither is afforded any real guarantees for protection if Russia invades. Providing that kind of stability for the public should be a victory for the political elite and the loss of disloyal territory a justified price to pay.

The other viable option short of Russia vacating these countries, which is not likely, is for the titular governments to present themselves as a viable alternative. Critical to this would be a shift in diaspora support for the Russian troop presence and passportization operations and a demand for Russia to leave. At the moment, considering how weak economically Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova are, I do not see this as a realistic path. Not only that, but these countries would have to convince domestic audiences that more inclusion of diaspora communities and culture is good for the state and not a further threat to stability. The other side of the coin is convincing the diaspora communities to reject the privileged status and benefits they receive through being allied with Russia and overcome their own ethno-nationalist tendencies. This is another tall order considering the power of Transnistria in relation to the rest of Moldova and the historical trauma felt in George’s minority communities. However, there has been a massive influx of predominantly military-age male Russians fleeing the draft into the countries of Georgia, Armenia, and Kazakhstan since near the beginning of the SMO.66 This immigration of Russians could form a new diaspora in these countries apposed to Russia that might prove to be either destabilizing or an opportunity for engagement between the titular government and this population. What has yet to be seen is if this group will indeed form a permanent community in

these countries, support titular government rule, and not cause resentment or conflict either
between the current diasporas or titular population at large. Depending on how the titular
governments engages with these new populations could prove to be an opportunity to show how
ethnic Russians can benefit in these states or confirm long held negative perceptions of the titular
governments in the legacy diaspora communities. Additionally, this population could be a
liability over the long run for titular governments who must still balance their geopolitical
position between East and West, domestic opinion, and inter-ethnic relationships.

While the idea of allowing annexation or allowing separatism to triumph may seem
abhorrent, it may be the most viable way to finally bring nations in the near abroad into Western
European institutions and further isolate Russia. This plan would support the current NATO and
Western European strategy to isolate Russia globally in an attempt to change behavior and punish
Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Admitting new members would continue to deny Russia a sphere of
influence for both economic benefit and global status. Perhaps in the absence of countries to lord
over, coupled with a domestic drive for a better quality of life, Russia will see the merits of
engagement with the West and the disadvantages of waging war. Additionally, countries with
diaspora communities like Estonia, Latvia, and Kazakhstan, should continue to develop and
refine policies that engage with these communities and include them into the fabric of the nation.
Even when economic conditions are weak, as was the case in the early 2000s in Latvia, these
communities can still resist seeing Russia as an alternative through resiliency measures that
promote inclusion in the titular state. While it may seem tempting and rational to take a more
protectionist stances toward diaspora since the SMO, as was seen in post-independence near
abroad countries, I would encourage these countries to reject responses couched in fear. Fear
breeds division, and division is a benefit for Russia—and an important indicator of potential
intervention.
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