The Empire Strikes Back:
Russian Troop Deployments in Eastern Europe Following the Cold War

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Abstract

In the aftermath of the Cold War, Russian military deployments have posed considerable challenges for the United States and Europe. This study analyzes the motivations of Russian military actions, of which research shows that most policymakers and scholars largely attribute military action to aggressive and expansionist motivations. My study aims to comprehensively analyze historical Russian troop deployments to discern factors that inspired its decisions to deploy troops. I employ process tracing methodology to qualitatively analyze the reasoning behind its troop deployments in Eastern Europe in the post-Cold War era. I have examined six cases of military deployments and applied specific scoping conditions in my analysis. My central argument posits that the logic of defensive realism best explains Russian behavior in Eastern Europe and its troop deployments in the post-Cold War era and is a result of Russia's external security concerns. However, I also acknowledge that the relevance of offensive realism and the potential of Russian expansionist goals provide valuable insight into Russian behavior.

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Introduction: Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2021 stands out as one of the most destabilizing military aggressions in Europe since World War II, and as a result, it garners global attention unparalleled to any Russian or Soviet interventions since the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan. Russia's historically contentious relationship with Western political powers is further complicated by its possession of the world's largest nuclear arsenal, posing significant challenges for the United States, NATO, and other Western allies.

This research analyzes Russian troop deployments in Eastern Europe in the post-Cold War era, aiming to provide context and insight into future Russian military intentions based on past behavior. While the intervention in Ukraine is a part of Russia's broader post-Cold War military efforts, this military deployment surprised the world and warrants investigation. As Russia modernizes and expands its nuclear capabilities, scholars continually debate its motivations, and the data suggests both offensive and defensive explanations.

This next section lays the groundwork for my research by providing critical background information and introducing my research question and its relevance, objectives, significance, and limitations.

Relevance: Understanding Russia's tendency to use military force in its periphery is crucial, as these actions consistently lead to instability and conflict and carry a significant risk of escalation. Throughout the War in Ukraine, Russia continues to state that it considers nuclear weaponry as a viable option for conflict with the United States and NATO. Moreover, Russia clearly states that it perceives its nuclear weapons as the most significant backstop that can guarantee Russian hegemony (Cordesman 2023). As a result of Russia's capabilities and hegemonic ambitions, if we want to secure a future without a nuclear conflict and if we plan to create a bilateral or multilateral peace agreement between Russia, Western Powers, and the United States, it is vital to consider Russia's objectives in addition to ours, as we look forward into the next decade and beyond.

It would be best for the United States, NATO, and Western Powers to understand Russian objectives and priorities in preparation for potential political negotiations. Accordingly, my central research question is: "What theory best explains Russian military deployments in Eastern Europe after the Cold War?"

Understanding the motivation for Russian troop deployments in Eastern Europe is critical for grasping the complex dynamics influencing that region's stability and geopolitical ramifications. Scholars and policymakers wrestled with two overarching theories in the post-Cold War era. These theories provide perspectives on Russian motivations while carrying significant implications for security and democracy in the international community.

The first theory contains little consensus among scholars and posits that Russian troop deployments are primarily defensive and motivated by a desire to maintain a delicate balance of power between Russia and its neighboring states. This perspective suggests that Russian deployments are reactionary and in response to perceived threats to their national security. John Mearsheimer, a prominent scholar who advocates this view, argues that NATO expansion is the best explanation for the annexation of Crimea and, as a result, a defensive reaction from Russia (Mearsheimer 2014).

However, the prevailing opinion suggests a different narrative, indicating that offensive motivations best characterize Russian behavior. This perspective suggests that Russian deployments are rooted in domestic ambitions to retake "historically Russian territory" or satisfy internal demands for conquest. Scholars like Michael McFaul posit that Russia's internal political dynamics are fundamental in explaining Russian military deployments, challenging the notion that Russian behavior is purely defensive (McFaul, Sestanovich, and Mearsheimer 2014).

These two contrasting perspectives offer rich ground for my research, allowing me to explore two political theories that significantly contrast each other. Kenneth Waltz's logic of

defensive realism stems from the theory that a state is insecure. In contrast, John Mearsheimer's logic of offensive realism builds from the concept that states are inherently expansionist. Both theories stem from the belief that the international community lives in anarchy due to having no governing body.

To appreciate the significance of this research, we must consider the potential consequences of confusing Russian intentions in Eastern Europe. In an era where the outcomes of conflict escalation can become catastrophic, an accurate comprehension of Russian intent is critical to maintaining global stability. Moreover, the diplomatic relations between Russia, Western Powers, and the US remain complicated, and having a nuanced understanding of Russian objectives is instrumental in negotiating future conflicts and thus potentially creating international policies while securing a future free of nuclear conflict.

Research Objectives: My thesis tests defensive and offensive theories by researching international relations literature, reputable news reports, and statements by government and state officials. Its purpose is to analyze empirical data about Russian military deployments in Eastern Europe. As a result, I posit that although defensive realism is the most prominent cause, offensive realism also affects Russian decisions; each reason is most salient under specific circumstances. In many instances, Russian behavior appears defensive, based on fear, and focused on preserving a relative power balance; however, subtle indications also suggest tendencies towards offensive and expansionist actions.

The ongoing debate among academics and policymakers tends to emphasize expansionist and offensive goals while overlooking the significance of defensive motivations rooted in fear. However, this perspective is insufficient for explaining all Russian military deployments in Eastern Europe. Instead, I suggest combining several theories applied to separate cases, which are necessary to explain troop deployments into Eastern Europe in the post-Cold era. One of the objectives of this thesis is to reveal the specific circumstances that

lead to each theoretical logic, thereby providing insights into the factors influencing Russian decisions to deploy troops.

I consider the following questions to understand Russian troop deployments. First, do Russian troops conduct defensive or offensive operations? Second, is there a correlation between external public threats and Russian military deployments? Third, is there a connection between NATO expansion into Eastern Europe and Russian troop deployments?

Thesis Overview: Following my research objectives, this thesis systematically explores Russian military deployments in Eastern Europe in the post-Cold War era. The study begins by establishing the historical and geopolitical context, followed by an in-depth review of two pertinent theoretical frameworks: defensive and offensive realism. A methodological chapter explains the process tracing technique used in my qualitative analysis. Subsequent sections present detailed case studies of specific Russian military engagements, examining each through the lens of the offensive and defensive realist theories. The thesis concludes by assessing the overall pattern that emerges from these findings and proposes both considerations for future Western policy towards Russia and directions for future research.

Literature Review: In academia, when analyzed by international relations scholars, two predominant narratives emerge when considering Russian military deployments. The first is rooted in defensive realism and argues that Russian deployments respond to perceived threats by adversarial states and alliances. John Mearsheimer employs this logic to interpret Russia’s annexation of Crimea. He argues that Russian actions were defensive, intending to prevent potential NATO expansion into Ukraine driven by the United States and Western powers (Mearsheimer 2014).

Conversely, The second but prominent perspective is that Russian deployments are motivated domestically by aggressive goals to retake "historically Russian territory" or satisfy internal demands for conquest. This perspective aligns with the logic of offensive

realism, and scholars such as Michael McFaul and Marek Menkiszak posit that this logic best explains Russia's military deployments. McFaul posits that Russian domestic goals and political motivations drive their military actions (McFaul, Sestanovich, and Mearsheimer 2014). Menkiszak expands on that argument and argues that Russian military actions are broader and not merely defensive but instead part of a long-term strategy to regain actual territory and geopolitical control of the area that the Soviet Union once controlled before it collapsed (Menkiszak 2016).

These two perspectives provide contrasting explanations for Russian military strategies, including troop deployments and objectives. According to the logic of insecurity within defensive realism, external geopolitical influences are pivotal in shaping Russia's actions and responses to international political and military dynamics.

Conversely, as articulated by McFaul and Menkiszak, the expansionist perspective that draws on offensive realism focuses on the internal motivations resulting from regime dynamics within the Russian government. This logic analyzes Russian internal politics, nationalistic sentiments, and Russian desires to reclaim the territorial losses gained by Russia due to the collapse of the USSR, thus offering a distinct explanation for the same set of Russian military behaviors. Moreover, offensive realists attribute expansionist goals as a means to deal with the anarchic state of the international community.

While these two views share similar tenets, they diverge significantly, providing a broad spectrum of debate. In my research, I aim to systematically explore the role of opposing theories behind Russian troop deployments, recognizing the influence of both internal political dynamics and external geopolitical factors. I argue that relying on one political framework is insufficient to explain Russian behavior. Instead, a more nuanced approach that blends elements of defensive and offensive realism is essential to understanding the motivations behind Russian troop deployments into Eastern Europe.

To answer my research question, I study two competing logics: Kenneth Waltz's logic of defensive realism and John Mearsheimer's logic of offensive realism.

Defensive realism is a subset of Waltz's theory on neorealism from his book *The Theory of International Politics* and is a major theory for scholars of international relations. Defensive realism provides a unique perspective on states' global operations (Waltz 2010).

In his book, Waltz articulates the core principles of defensive realism. Its central premise is that the state's primary concern is its security and stability in the global community, and it posits that states are rational and unitary actors. The international system is in constant anarchy, which does not mean it is chaos or disorder and merely means a lack of a governing authority (Waltz 2010). As a result of anarchy in the international system, states must depend on themselves to achieve their objectives, prioritizing their security and survival, which often leads to behavior aimed at pursuing their interests

Defensive realism diverges from other international relations theories by emphasizing the structure of the international system itself rather than focusing on the intentions, goals, aspirations, and personalities of states' leaders and legislators.

The core canon of defensive realism posits that pursuing security is a state's primary directive. Waltz explains that states are rational in their processes and seek to secure their survival and protect their interests in an unpredictable global environment. The primacy of the security concept and a balance of power sets defensive realism apart from other theories focusing on a state's goal of maximizing power (Waltz 2010, 118).

A global community with no global governing body creates a security vacuum, which is problematic for states and their safety. It requires states to be responsible for their safety, leaving them in a position of self-help. In a self-help system, when states do not help themselves or cannot help themselves as effectively as others, they leave themselves subject to international dangers. The aversion to such consequences inspires states to create policies

and behaviors that result in a better balance of power (Waltz 2010, 118). Their main concern is survival, and this desire to survive renders them risk averse, and as a result, their foreign policy is inherently defensive. Defensive realists believe that the priority of a state is to maintain its position in the international system and retain a balance of relative power. However, Defensive realists believe that power expansion is self-defeating and that the benefits of aggression and conquest typically do not outweigh the negatives; states still may take actions that appear offensive but with the intent to keep opponents from gaining additional power. Moreover, if a state aims to uphold a balance of power, its policies must aim to do so (Waltz 2010, 120).

According to Waltz, a primary model used to maintain security is the balance-of-power theory, which explains that as unitary actors, states, at a minimum, seek to preserve their autonomy and, at maximum, seek complete domination, and states use any means available to them to achieve their objectives. These resources include internal efforts that include increasing military capabilities, economic strength, and economic and military strategies to outwit potential adversaries. Moreover, they include external efforts, including but not limited to obtaining alliances with other states and then building and strengthening those alliances with allies while simultaneously attempting to weaken, shrink, or eliminate opposing alliances (Waltz 2010, 118).

Furthermore, through conquest, states can gain a buffer zone that sometimes has a net gain that helps retain a geopolitical balance and protect states from attack by another adversarial state, where the rival state could potentially use that territory to launch an attack against it (Mearsheimer 2003, 200). Buffer zones are critical to the logic of defensive realism.

To summarize, defensive realists posit that states pursue security to guarantee survival and strive to achieve this goal while risking as little as possible. Troop deployments and military action align with defensive realism. Still, contrary to offensive realists who believe

that the goal of a state is to expand actual power, territory, and relative power, defensive logic posits that a troop deployment purpose is to maintain a level of relative power and ensure a state's survival. Defensive realists emphasize the importance of deterrence as the primary inspiration to justify troop deployments, and states may potentially deploy troops to thwart potential actors from engaging in conflict. The critical difference lies in the objectives: offensive realists argue that the goal of a state is to achieve hegemonic status, while defensive realists contend that a state aims to maintain a balance of relative power to ensure its security.

Moreover, territorial defense is of utmost importance to defensive realists. They posit that protecting their borders is critical in protecting their Sovereignty, and troop deployments into geographically weak areas can deter potential adversaries' attempts at geopolitical expansion onto their borders. Buffer zones are a critical component in the logic of defensive realism, and their purpose is to create a protective barrier against potential threats.

Defensive realism posits that crisis management is critical, and states may deploy troops to contain and manage conflict on their borders that could threaten their Sovereignty. These conditions may stabilize a situation, help implement or enforce ceasefires, or prevent a situation from escalating into an uncontrollable conflict. Additionally, they argue that alliances with neighbors are critical, and states may deploy troops to fulfill their responsibilities to their neighbors in the face of external threats. States may deploy troops to secure vital interests that they find essential, such as critical resources and trade routes. Lastly, a state may deploy troops to address an emerging unforeseen crisis or emergency on its border that might threaten its security.

John Mearsheimer's book *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* introduces offensive realism as an alternative to defensive realism. Both theories posit that states are rational, unitary actors operating within an anarchic international system without a global governing body. This condition creates continued security concerns for states and threatens their

autonomy and security. However, offensive realism diverges and emphasizes that a state pursues hegemony as the primary means to ensure its security.

Mearsheimer explains that having no governing body in the international community requires states to identify that actual power is the key to their survival. This identification results in a thirst for power, creating the separation between offensive and defensive realism. Thus, conversely to defensive realists, offensive realists feel that the anarchic nature of the international system encourages states to maximize their power and behave aggressively to protect their needs and interests (Mearsheimer 2003, 44).

Furthermore, according to Mearsheimer, the reason great powers vie with each other in attempting to reach hegemony is a result of five assumptions that states have about the international structure. First, the international system is anarchic and without a central authority. The second assumption is that great powers possess some offensive capabilities that give them the ability to act out offensively, which gives each of them the ability to harm or, in some cases, destroy each other. Third, it is impossible for states ever to have complete certainty about another actor's intentions or capabilities. A state may or may not have offensive intentions, but each state can't fully know the other actors' goals. The fourth assumption is that the primary goal of great powers is survival, and states must retain the territorial border and their domestic political autonomy. The fifth and last assumption is that great powers act rationally and strategically while considering their external environment and making political and military decisions (Mearsheimer 2003, 57).

When alone, none of these assumptions would suggest that great powers ought to behave aggressively, but the common objective we can apply to all states is that they strive to survive. When all five assumptions simultaneously come together, it can incentivize great powers to behave offensively concerning their interactions with other great powers. When these five assumptions correlate, it results in fear, self-help, and power maximization

(Mearsheimer 2003, 56–57). Consequently, great powers fear each other and always anticipate danger, which leaves little room for trust. When considering the international system, all great powers view all other great powers as potential enemies; this suspicion intensifies without a central authority to regulate various great powers in the international community (Mearsheimer 2003, 58).

Just as Waltz structures defensive realism, Mearsheimer structures offensive realism on the core principle that there is no central authority governing the international system, and without a central authority, states focus on fear; they realize there is no mechanism other than self-help methods, relying on themselves or bandwagoning by creating alliances with other powers to help protect themselves from potential external threats (Mearsheimer 2003, 58).

Subsequently, states know they are vulnerable and, as a result, prepare to protect themselves from aggressors. Mearsheimer says, “God helps those who help themselves.” Although self-help doesn’t preclude the formation of alliances, the concern is that alliances are temporary and made only for the convenience of both parties, and an ally today is potentially tomorrow’s adversary. Conversely, today’s enemy could potentially be tomorrow’s ally. Because it pays to be selfish in a self-help environment, states are primarily concerned with their interest and not that of their allies, and they won’t subjugate their interests to facilitate the interests of other states or the global community (Mearsheimer 2003, 60).

According to Mearsheimer, global powers are nervous about the intentions of other great powers, and realizing that they live in a self-help system, states know that the most efficient way to ensure unfettered security is to become a hegemon because a superior level of relative power keeps potential threats at bay. Consequently, the more significant the gap in military capabilities, the less likely the weaker states are to attack (Mearsheimer 2003, 61).

Thus, states continually analyze their relative power, trying to gain the most significant ratio of relative power compared to all other states, and, as a result, continually

attempt to increase their relative balance of international power. Ultimately, the best scenario for a state would be to decrease an opponent's power while increasing its own power. They do this through various mechanisms that include economic, diplomatic, and military tools they have at their disposal, and they use them even if they create the optics to the global community that they are acting aggressively. The objective to gain as much power as possible at another state's expense makes pursuing power a zero-sum game, but the goal is to achieve victory and dominate all other great powers. When states gain a clear advantage over an adversary, they continue to search for ways to increase their relative power, and the pursuit of power is only satisfied when a state has hegemonic status (Mearsheimer 2003, 60–61).

Furthermore, there are two reasons why offensive realists argue that states perpetually pursue hegemonic status and believe they never have an adequate amount of power. First, it is hard to ascertain how much relative power is required to be safe compared to other great powers. Will twice as much suffice, or three times? Equating is difficult, especially when a rival could join forces with another actor. Moreover, power is not the only determinant that decides who wins wars; for example, a great military strategy could find a militarily inferior force victorious over a superior opponent. Second, predicting future fluctuations concerning relative power in the international community is complicated. A great power today might collapse ten years from now; conversely, an inferior power today could rise to the level of a great power later. Thus, it is advantageous for states to accumulate as much power now as possible (Mearsheimer 2003, 61).

Beyond this, Mearsheimer explains that the well-known security dilemma concept used throughout international relations literature supports the basic logic described in offensive realism. He continues that states take extreme measures to gain more power and thus protect themselves, which generally comes at the expense of other states, making it complicated for one state to increase its capabilities and security without threatening the

security of the other states in the arena (Mearsheimer 2003, 63). John Herz explains the security dilemma in his article *Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma* and how states become affected by the security dilemma, which Mearsheimer aligns with his logic on offensive realism (Mearsheimer 2003, 63). Herz writes that insecurity and concerns about adversaries' potential subjugation, domination, and annihilation result from states living in a security dilemma. Consequently, states strive to gain more and more power to prevent such attacks from others. This quest to gain more power results in insecurity by other states and compels them to prepare for the worst possible outcome, and what results is competition for power (Herz 1950).

For states to survive in the international community, they must act aggressively, maximizing their relative power. States must be relentless in their pursuit of power and accumulate it at any cost. States working under the logic of offensive realism accumulate power to ensure their security and feel safe. Unlike defensive realists, whose goal is to maintain their balance of power, offensive realists believe that states always maximize their power as much as possible, which is usually at a cost to other states (Mearsheimer 2003, 44).

According to offensive realists, the goal of a state is hegemony and to become the most powerful actor in the region. States that are less powerful than others are less likely to attack the superior power; as a result, hegemons try to expand their power and suppress the expansion of their competitors (Mearsheimer 2003).

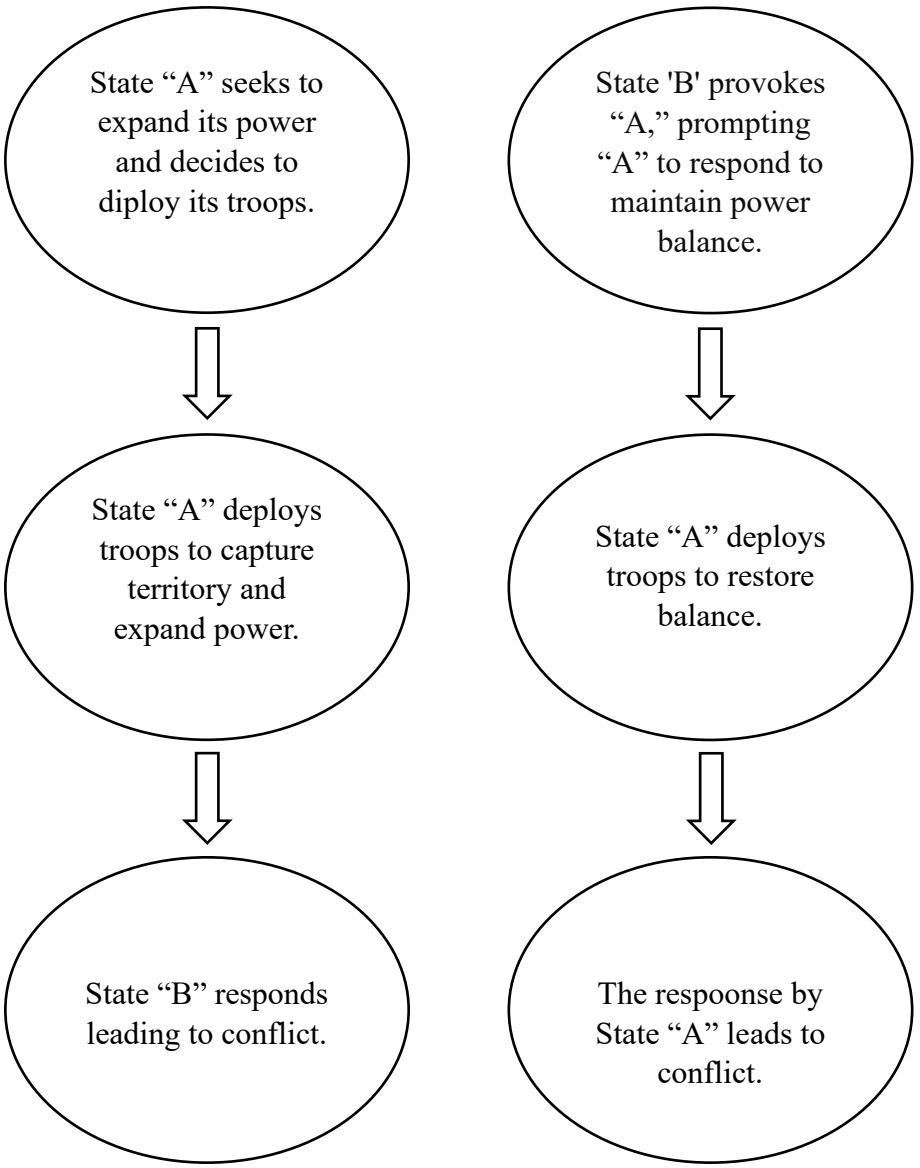
Both offensive and defensive realists believe that states are rational and unitary actors. Still, the world exists in anarchy due to the lack of global authority, which results in insecurity for states in the international system, leaving them in a position of self-help, and thus, they are responsible for their safety. Additionally, both logics consider the security dilemma but differ in their process of how to address it. The primary difference between offensive and defensive realism is that offensive realists posit that to protect itself from

exterior threats, a state's primary objective is to expand its military footprint and pursue power. In contrast, defensive realists posit that a state's behavior stems from insecurity.

Offensive realists believe the thirst for power and security primarily drives states. States are insecure, try to maintain a balance of power, and seek to maximize their relative power concerning other states. Offensive realists posit that states seek to balance global power to ensure security and survival. States may seek to expand their territorial control, and troop deployments could potentially assist in that effort. Offensive realists believe states may engage in preventative wars or military actions to thwart potential threats. Offensive realists argue that a state always seeks regional hegemony to establish dominance over a particular region. Lastly, they believe states deploy troops when they believe that the area of troop deployment retains resources they may desire to enhance their economic superiority. These resources could potentially include energy or agricultural resources or access to trade routes.

I argue that states may use military force while protecting their security and posit that defensive realism is the dominant cause for Russian troop deployments; it appears to be the most prominent explanation for Russian behavior. The current debate focuses mainly on Russia's expansionist motivations compared to motivations built on insecurity. However, that is inadequate to explain all Russian military deployments in Eastern Europe. Instead, I suggest combining multiple theories applied to separate cases, which is necessary to explain troop deployments best. In some cases, Russian behavior appears defensive, maintaining a relative power balance. In other cases, Russian behavior is aggressive, aiming to retake former Soviet territory to increase its influence.

Figure 1: Models of Offensive and Defensive Realism



Case Selection: In this study, I aim to systematically determine whether the motivations for Russian troop deployments in Eastern Europe in the post-Cold War Era better align with the logic of offensive realism or defensive realism. To accomplish this, I developed a set of coding parameters derived from defensive and offensive realism principles and theoretical ideas. I use these parameters as the foundation to develop a systematic coding

system based on observable indicators found in each instance where Russia deployed its military. Using these observable indicators, I examine whether the evidence better supports the conclusion that offensive or defensive realist motivations explain each troop deployment in the post-Cold War era.

The selected universe comprises the six cases in which Russia deployed troops into Eastern Europe in the post-Cold War era. I chose these cases carefully because they represent the heart of Russian troop deployments in the region during that period and serve as a balanced spectrum to shed light on instances of Russian military conflicts both within and outside the territory that the Soviet Union once occupied. Each case on its own serves as a unique perspective and can provide insight into Russia's geopolitical goals. The universe of cases include:

1. The 1991 Georgian Civil War: I included this case to illustrate Russian objectives at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, highlighting a critical period of transition for Russia concerning foreign policy concerns. Moreover, it provides a different perspective because it proceeded Vladimir Putin.
2. The 1994 Conflict in Chechnya: This case provides insight into Russia's domestic geopolitical concerns and responses to separatist movements within its borders and provides insight into Russian objectives concerning foreign policy.
3. The Second Chechnyan War in 1999: This case expands on the 1994 case study and underscores Russian tensions in Chechnya, further emphasizing the complicated Russian military engagements in the region.
4. The 2008 Georgian Conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia: This case is critical to understanding Russia's willingness to deploy troops into a neighboring country and challenge that state's sovereignty.

5. The 2014 Annexation of Crimea: I chose this case because it is crucial to comprehend Russian security concerns concerning access to the Black Sea, Russia's most significant naval base.
6. The 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine: This case offers valuable insight into Russia's security concerns, especially concerning Ukraine. It underscores the significance of NATO expansion in Eastern Europe and what it means to Russia.

I analyze these cases, examining a series of observable indicators spanning the build-up to the deployment, the deployment itself, and its aftermath. Through the analysis, I assess whether Russia's primary objective in each case aligns more closely with offensive or defensive realist predictions. I selected these cases because they represent Russian troop deployments in Eastern Europe in the post-Cold War era and thus are the most relevant to my research question and provide the most potential to contribute a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of Russian behavior in that region.

Coding Schema: To systematically analyze each case and determine which motivations were the most critical for Russia in determining whether to deploy troops, I have developed a coding schema to evaluate Russian motivations. I employ this system to analyze each case individually, using several indicators to assess whether Russia's actions are predominantly offensive or defensive and whether they are motivated by insecurity or expansionism. I have based each specific observable marker on whether it aligns best with offensive or defensive logic.

Defensive realism posits that states maintain a stable level of security and only pursue aggressive actions when they believe their survival requires it and in response to perceived threats; thus, a state acts primarily out of insecurity when acting defensively. Contrarily, offensive realism posits that states inherently seek expansion and are constantly maximizing their power due to their belief in the anarchic state of the international system. Thus,

offensive goals always motivate states to expand their power, regardless of intentions or threats posed by other states.

In this coding schema, I focus on five distinct areas of analysis. The first category is the presence or absence of verbal provocations from actors such as the states on Russia's border, an alternate hegemon such as the United States, or a military alliance like NATO. These actions include the threat to deploy troops onto the Russian border or NATO stating that they intend to bring a Russian border state into its alliance. When verbal provocation precedes Russian troop deployments, it suggests defensive motivations on the part of Russian leaders. Conversely, the absence of verbal provocation would indicate a higher likelihood of offensive motivations.

The second area of analysis is whether or not there is a specific military provocation before Russian military deployments. This provocation could originate from a neighboring state of Russia, an alternate hegemon such as the United States, or a military alliance like NATO. Military provocations include troop movements or military expansion on Russia's border and could encompass military cooperation between neighboring states, hegemonic powers, or military alliances, such as NATO.

These actions could include processes aimed at integrating neighboring states into military alliances perceived as adversarial by Russia. Examples include creating Membership Action Plans (MAPs) for NATO accession and Western powers assisting those states in meeting NATO's stringent standards for membership. Russia is a superpower and retains a sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, and Russia perceives NATO expansion as an erosion of that influence.

Furthermore, this provocation could encompass joint military training exercises involving adversarial military alliances and neighboring states. What's more, under certain circumstances, I consider conflicts on the Russian border to be provocations, even if neither

actor is directly targeting Russia, because the instability still poses a security risk to Russia. If Russia deployed military forces in response to an observable military conflict, I viewed that deployment as defensive intent, whereas I viewed deployments without observable provocation as having expansionist intent.

Thirdly, I assessed whether Russian troop deployments coincided with diplomatic efforts aimed at finding resolutions to disputes with neighboring states or the international community through negotiation. Troop deployments before an attempt at diplomatic resolution indicate offensive intent, while troop deployments after an attempt at diplomacy display defensive intent because Russia tried to resolve its security issues diplomatically instead of simply deploying troops and securing an area.

Fourth, I examine Russia's intent by analyzing its behavior after it reached its military objectives. I am explicitly searching for indicators that illustrate Russia's objectives were temporary and in an attempt to resolve a specific security concern, or was their deployment open-ended, with permanent intent, resulting in Russia seizing control of the military institutions of the area. If Russia left its military stationed in the area where it deployed troops or if Russia seized complete control of the military of the state in which it deployed troops, I assessed offensive intent. If Russia left its troops in the area or retained control of that military, it sought to change the balance of power. On the contrary, I assessed defensive intent if Russia withdrew its forces after reaching its objective because it did not indicate expansionist intent.

Lastly, I identify Russia's intent by analyzing its behavior after reaching its military objectives. I am searching to see if Russia took control of the political institutions of the area where it deployed troops when it resolved its security concerns. If Russia seized control of the government where it deployed troops, I assessed this to be offensive behavior.

Conversely, I assessed that motivations had defensive intent if Russia did not assert control over that government because that does not indicate expansionist intent.

Using these categories of indicators, I can asses each case of Russian military deployments to determine whether Russian behavior aligns more with offensive intent and desires to expand Russia's geopolitical footprint or if they are defensively motivated, rooted in concerns about insecurity, and aimed at maintaining a stable balance of power along its border. To best adjudicate between each explanation, I assigned each indicator a numeric value, from which indicators point to a positive result indicating offensive intentions and indicators that result in a negative number signal defensive intentions. In each case, I determine which indicators are present and whether they are offensive or defensive, and based on the sums of the indicators, it would indicate offensive or defensive intent by Russia. Therefore, after summing all five categories, an overall negative value would point to defensive intent or insecurity to explain troop deployments, while a positive sum indicates offensive or expansionist intent, and a zero indicates neutral intent. I have graded these assessments at scale depending on their provocation severity, intent, and actions. The tally of each case provides an overall assessment. This approach helps categorize each case to determine if Russia is acting out of concern for its security or if they are trying to expand its power. It also systematically allows me to compare each case to one another. Next, I define my coding schema and explain my categories and the scale I use to score each.

1. Troop deployments concerning verbal provocations (-10 to 10 points):
    - Troop deployments resulted from verbal provocations of NATO enlargement.
    - Troop deployments resulted from verbal provocations to place military troops or weaponry on Russia's border.
        i. 0 points: Category does not apply.
        ii. -1 to -5 points: Moderate or substantial verbal provocation observed.

iii. -6 to -10 points: Significant or complete verbal provocation observed.

iv. 1 to 5 points: Limited or partial verbal provocation observed.

v. 6 to 10 points: No or minimal verbal provocation observed.

2. Troop deployments concerning actual provocations (-10 to 10 points):

- Troop deployments resulted from actual provocations of NATO enlargement, including implementing a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for states on the Russian border or the initial step of implementing a MAP.
- Troop deployments resulted from joint training exercises between neighboring states and states or military alliances that Russia perceives as adversarial.
- Troop deployments resulted from actual provocations of troop deployments onto the Russian border.
- Troop deployments resulted from actual provocations through military weaponry added to the Russian border.
- Troop deployments resulted from fighting on Russia's border between other forces, creating a security concern for Russia.

i. 0 points: Category does not apply.

ii. -1 to -5 points: Moderate or substantial actual provocation observed.

iii. -6 to -10 points: Significant or complete actual provocation observed.

iv. 1 to 5 points: Limited or partial actual provocation observed.

v. 6 to 10 points: No or minimal actual provocation observed.

3. Troop deployments relative to diplomatic efforts to resolve Russian security concerns (-10 to 10 points):

- Troop deployment without any effort to resolve Russian security concerns through diplomatic negotiations.

- Troop deployment with minimal effort to resolve Russian security concerns through diplomatic negotiations.
- Troop deployment with significant effort to resolve Russian security concerns through diplomatic negotiations.
    i. 0 points: Category does not apply.
    ii. -1 to -5 points: Moderate or substantial diplomatic effort.
    iii. -6 to -10 points: Significant or complete diplomatic effort.
    iv. 1 to 5 points: Limited or partial diplomatic effort.
    v. 6 to 10 points: No or minimal diplomatic effort.

4. Following Russia's resolution of its security concerns, did it take control of the military institutions of the area where it deployed troops? (-10 to 10 points):
    - Russia seized control of military operations where it deployed troops.
        i. 0 points: Category does not apply.
        ii. -1 to -5 points: Limited or partial military control achieved.
        iii. -6 to -10 points: No or minimal military control achieved.
        iv. 1 to 5 points: Moderate or substantial military control achieved.
        v. 6 to 10 points: Significant or complete military control achieved.
5. Following Russia's resolution of its security concerns, did it take control of the state's political institutions in which it deployed troops? (-10 to 10 points):
    - Russia seized control of the political institutions in the state where it deployed troops and now runs that area's government.
        i. 0 points: Category does not apply.
        ii. -1 to -5 points: Limited or partial political control achieved.
        iii. -6 to -10 points: No or minimal political control achieved.
        iv. 1 to 5 points: Moderate or substantial political control achieved.

v. 6 to 10 points: Significant or complete political control achieved.

Russian Background: Russia's history provides ample reasoning for its leaders to be cautious of exterior threats that could potentially result in an armed invasion. Russia emerged when a Varangian prince named Oleg of Novgorod (879–912) took control of the territories later known as Russia. He famously moved the capital of Russia from Novgorod to Kyiv. Kyiv is Ukraine's present-day capital (Britannica 2024b).

Following Oleg of Novgorod was Vladimir I (965-1015), also known as Vladimir the Great. By 980, Vladimir had consolidated power from Ukraine to the Baltic Sea and fortified his position against Bulgarian and Baltin incursions. Vladimir was baptized into Christendom in the Crimean city of Sevastopol in the tenth century. He was instrumental in the Christianization and the development of the early Russian state. This event consolidated the Slavic people in modern-day Russia, Ukraine, and Slavic Eurasia under a single monarch (Britannica 2023b; Clark et al. 2020).

Following that, in the 13th century, Genghis Khan's Mongols conquered the area that is now Russia and occupied the homeland of the Slavic people for 200 years, exposing a weakness in the surrounding protective terrain and, thus, in their ability to protect themselves from military aggression (Clark et al. 2020).

After realizing that Kyiv's location in the central Eurasian plain was militarily weak and indefensible, the political and religious seat of the Slavic people moved from Kyiv to Moscow in the 14th century. In the fifteenth century, the Grand Duchy of Moscow liberated the Slavs from the Mongols. However, the Ottoman Empire stifled further Russian expansion and overthrew the Byzantine Empire in 1453. They captured Constantinople and dominated much of the Balkans throughout that period (Clark et al. 2020).

From the 1500s to the present, Russia suffered a multitude of expansions and collapses as it tangled with neighboring powers. From within, various monarchs attempted to

restructure Russia and mimic the cultural and educational examples happening in progressive Europe. Peter I the Great attempted a dual approach to Westernize Russia internally while expanding its geopolitical footprint externally and transitioning his dynasty into a European hegemon. He captured Central and Eastern Ukraine; he attacked the Ottomans to the south and the Asian tribes in Siberia to the East (Clark et al. 2020).

Following Peters's attempts at Russia's transition, Catherine II the Great followed his efforts to join the enlightenment movement occurring in Europe. Her efforts yielded her the northern Caucuses and the Black Sea Region, including "Estonia and Livonia in 1721, Latgale in 1772, Lithuania in 1793, and Courland in 1795" (Anderson 1962). Unfortunately, an internal uprising from Russian peasants motivated her to transition to authoritarian rule (Anderson 1962; Clark et al. 2020).

After Peter and Catherine II, Alexander I fended Napoleon's invasion in 1812 in the Battle of Borodino, and although Napoleon captured and occupied Moscow for a short period, he eventually retreated to Poland. Following the Napoleonic Wars, Russia transitioned into a hegemonic military power throughout the nineteenth century and began to absorb non-Slavic Muslim tribes on its border, which the Ottoman Empire and Central Asia controlled. Russia faced an Ottoman, French, and British alliance during the Crimean War (1854-56) when they attacked territories throughout the Balkans. This conflict had a heavy economic burden for Russia, and even more, it was politically costly. The War crescendoed with Russia losing the Crimean port of Sevastopol, a critical military outpost (Clark et al. 2020).

In the aftermath of the Crimean War, Russia spent much of the 19th century trying to industrialize its country. These efforts and foreign investments helped build the Russian industry. However, it also stimulated internal problems amongst agricultural peasants and newly emerging industrial workers. Before the First World War, these internal problems exploded during the Revolution of 1905-1906. Additionally, immediately preceding WWI,

between 1908 and 1913, the Russian industrial market saw a fifty percent increase in production, but workers' living conditions remained the same (Bagchi 2018).

Ultimately, Russia was instrumental in triggering World War I through its support of its ally Serbia following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne. Adversaries killed Ferdinand while he was visiting Serbia. Russia's support for Serbia following Austria-Hungary's declaration of war on Serbia triggered a Europe-wide escalation of conflict. On August 1, 1914, in response, Germany declared war on Russia, marking a significant escalation that contributed to the outbreak of World War I. (Bagchi 2018; Clark et al. 2020). At the outset, Russia benefitted from a large army, but it was poorly trained and had poor direction, leading to numerous military defeats at the battles of Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes (History 2009).

Consequently, in 1915, Germany had a firm grasp on Russian Poland, Lithuania, and most of Latvia. By 1916, Russian casualties and injuries mounted to nearly seven million combined, and citizens were displeased. Consequently, the anger continued to surge, and in March 1917, a revolutionary uprising ousted the Tzarist regime, leading to the collapse of the Romanov dynasty that had controlled the Russian Empire for three centuries. An interim government emerged in Petrograd, which Alexander Kerensky dominated; however, in November 1917, this government was ousted by a radical political party, the Bolsheviks (Bagchi 2018; Kramer 2019).

The Bolsheviks were a Russian political faction and part of the wing of the Russian government that supported the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party, which Vladimir Lenin led. In October 1917, the Bolsheviks seized control of the Russian government and became the dominant political power (Rabinowitch 2017). Initially, internal opponents created issues for the new Bolshevik government; they immediately had to struggle for power internally, and in March 1918, it signed with Germany the Brest-Litovsk treaty, which handed

Russia some territorial losses, giving control of those areas to Germany and its allies (the Central Powers) (Bagchi 2018). Following the loss to the Central Powers in November 1918, the Bolshevik government sought to reextend its control of the Baltic States and Ukraine, fighting wars with local nationalists, anarchists, and the emerging state of Poland. By 1922, the Communist party formally constituted the Soviet Union, and their Red Army had retaken former territories, including Ukraine, and brought them into the newly established state. The Bolsheviks would go on to win the Russian Civil War and consolidate their rule over most of the territory of the former Russian Empire. Once consolidated, they reorganized the area as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or the Soviet Union (Kramer 2019).

The start of the Soviet Union was not smooth, and it included several power struggles between Soviet elites and the major campaigns that supported collectivization and industrialization. The battle cost thousands of lives as the Soviet Union struggled to reach political stability and economic success. Additionally, conflict in Europe loomed once again after the expansionist Nazi Party under Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany. Soviet leader Joseph Stalin sought to contain Germany diplomatically, and on August 23, 1939, Hitler and Stalin signed a non-aggression pact, and they jointly invaded Poland in September of that year. Unfortunately, Germany was not satisfied and ultimately wanted expansion, and in June 1941, German forces invaded the Soviet Union. The fighting cost the lives of over twenty million Russians (Clark et al. 2020; Gompert, Binnendijk, and Lin 2014; Koch 1988). The U.S.S.R. and its allies emerged victorious following WWII, but the war inflicted tremendous damage on the U.S.S.R. and destroyed many of its cities (Budhwar 2006).

After the Second World War, distrust and conflicting security and ideological objectives emerged between the United States and the Soviet Union, which led to the Cold War. This era was marked by a prolonged military and political rivalry between the two superpowers, lasting until 1989 (Budhwar 2006). The frontline of this competition was

Europe, where the United States and the Soviets created military alliances, with the US forming the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Soviets forming the Warsaw Pact (Budhwar 2006). This thesis later presents the explanations of the NATO and Warsaw Pact. The original purpose of NATO was to contain and confront the Soviet threat.

Domestically, the Soviet Union transitioned from Stalin's repressive rule in 1953 and entered a more open period under Nikita Khrushchev. However, Khrushchev's efforts to revitalize the USSR were unsuccessful, and they ousted him in 1964. Leonid Brezhnev's successor focused on preserving the Soviet system and did not alter previous policies and structures, resulting in a period of nepotism, corruption, and stagnation, which some describe as the "locust years" (Budhwar 2006). By the early 1980s, economic problems were piling up for the Soviet leadership (Budhwar 2006).

In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev became Secretary General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and sought to remedy the stagnation and economic problems that had set in under his predecessors. Part of this effort included economic and political reforms, and he sought out officials, such as Boris Yeltsin, whom he believed would also advance these reformist efforts (McFaul 2000).

Gorbachev began to steer the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (C.P.S.U.) into a reform period with policies such as perestroika, which decentralized economic control and encouraged enterprises to become self-financing. While implementing reform, he attempted to repair and bolster relationships with the US and reduce the tension between the states. Still, his efforts were slow and eventually failed (Gidadhubli 1987; Robinson 1992).

Gorbachev had lofty goals, including ameliorating stagnation and political corruption, antiquating industrial and commercial industries, and relinquishing control of state media outlets. Long-standing institutions such as the Party, the military, and the K.G.B. were all corrupt, and in Gorbachev's perception, they needed reform. The consensus within the

U.S.S.R. was acceptance of his ideas, and his popularity began to soar. Gorbachev's call for change quenched a thirst for the Soviet people, but ultimately, he tried to accomplish too much too quickly. He exposed and publicly admonished too many actors beholden to the old system, and they began to push back, and their aversion to Gorbachev's policies began to gain support. The military did not agree with his willingness to release its control over Eastern Europe or his emerging alliance with the West, which they perceived as a threat to Soviet Sovereignty.

Moreover, there was dissatisfaction with the depletion of geopolitical power the USSR had gained after WWII. Critics disapproved of and blamed the leader for squandering these gains. His attempts to implement changes too swiftly faced substantial opposition and led to a domestic decline in approval. This policy approach ultimately failed, paving the way for a contender (Budhwar 2006).

Initially, Gorbachev enlisted Boris Yeltsin to become the First Secretary of the Moscow Communist Party, one of the most formidable jobs in the U.S.S.R. This idea was a new political schema for Yeltsin. Still, he transitioned into the role and started to administer Gorbachev's reform agenda, thus ameliorating corruption within the party. Unfortunately, Yeltsin implemented a more determined approach than Gorbachev desired. Yeltsin became critical of Gorbachev's reduced approach to fighting corruption, which did not sit well with Gorbachev, and a divergence formed between the two; as a result, Gorbachev relieved Yeltsin of his position in 1987 (McFaul 2000).

In 1989, Yeltsin began to connect with the Russian grassroots democratic leaders of the informal neformal'nye movement to persuade them to democratize the U.S.S.R. The early non-communist party's goals included getting officials elected to the Russian parliament to represent their goals, and they intended to let Yeltsin lead the charge into the 1989 parliament

elections. To fight the Soviet Union, they tried to attack it locally, focusing on political positions within Russia and undermining Gorbachev from below (McFaul 2000).

In 1990, they found success, which launched the demise of the Soviet Union. The anti-communist movement in Russia became exhausted from Gorbachev's slow approach to attacking change, and they reacted by voting for local Russian politicians to serve in Russia's Congress. With Yeltsin steering the campaign, they captured one-third of the seats in Russia's Congress, and when paired with the seats held by Russian nationalists with similar goals, it allowed them to elect Yeltsin as chairman of the legislative body. His first act was declaring Russia an independent state (McFaul 2000).

A struggle erupted between the Soviet state and the Russian government, and a power struggle ensued between 1990 – and 1991. Following eighteen months of negotiations, Russia and the Soviet Union agreed to sign a new Union Treaty on August 20, 1991 (McFaul 2000).

Before signing the treaty, Valery Boldin, along with Oleg Baklanov, the first deputy chairman of the USSR Defense Council; Oleg Shenin, the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU); and General Valentin Varennikov, the Chief of the Soviet Army's ground forces, demanded a meeting with Gorbachev. They came representing the State Committee for the State of Emergency in the U.S.S.R., demanding that Gorbachev hand over power as President of Russia to Vice President Gennady Yanayev, but he refused. Consequently, they placed him under house arrest while attempting a coup and blocked the treaty's signing (Britannica 2023a). The State Committee for the State of Emergency publicly announced that it had control of the Soviet Union and would not sign the treaty and that extremist forces were at work trying to destroy the Soviet state and its economy. A conflict ensued, and popular pressure forced those plotting the coup to back down (McFaul 2000).

Consequently, what came from the August 1991 conflict was Russian democracy with Yeltsin in control of Russia, but they found that removing a communist regime was considerably easier than constructing a democracy. No one knew what Russia would look like concerning its political regime and economic system. Ultimately, Yeltsin made three decisions about political and monetary policies that shaped Russia for the next decade. What scholars came to understand was that those decisions were inadequately structured and did not harden a democratic Russian future. Yeltsin's team initially determined that their ability to thwart an attempted coup meant that democracy was stable. Thus, they focused on the economy and building Russian independence, and while they attempted to implement a more capitalist economy and build their independence, they avoided establishing a Russian constitution (McFaul 2000).

The Collapse of The U.S.S.R.: Before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the U.S.S.R. was an asymmetric federation made up of territorial components with various levels of status within that structure. The first level consisted of fifteen Union republics, Sovetskaya Sotsialisticheskaya Respublika (Soviet Socialist Republic SSR) which included Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus (Bleorussia), Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan (Kirgiziya), Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova (Moldavia), Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan (Nations Online n.d.; Zürcher, Baev, and Koehler 2005). According to the constitution of the Soviet Union, the territories with SSR status were First-order units. They retained all requirements for statehood, including political institutions, a constitution, borders, citizenship, and a titular nationality, and could legally maintain a military and secede from the Soviet Union (Zürcher, Baev, and Koehler 2005).

Moreover, within these Union republics were units of the second-order Avtonomnaya Sovetskaya Sotsialisticheskaya Respublika (ASSR), or "Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics." These were autonomous territories made up of national minorities and had

political institutions, borders, a constitution, and titular nationalities, but unlike the SSRs, they did not retain the right to secede from the Soviet Union. These areas maintained the right to use a minority language. This structure was stable until the ultimate collapse of the USSR in 1991. (Zürcher, Baev, and Koehler 2005).

Consequently, the Soviet Union collapsed on December 25, 1991. The collapse began earlier that month when Ukraine voted overwhelmingly to secede from the Soviet Union on December 1, 1991 (Arms Control Today 1992). On December 8, 1991, in Brest, a pivotal meeting involved Belarusan Supreme Soviet Stanislav Shushkevich, Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk, and Russian President Boris Yeltsin, where they declared that the Soviet Union was "ceasing to exist" due to international law and geopolitical circumstances and the group announced the formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The CIS was the preamble to the Minsk Agreement, which declared independence from the Soviet Union (Arms Control Today 1992; Sorokowski 1996).

Later that month, on December 22, 1991, another meeting occurred in Alma-Kazakhstan, where the remaining former Soviet republics, except the three Baltic States and Georgia, joined the CIS (Arms Control Today 1992).

Separately, the four Commonwealth states that held nuclear capabilities, including Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Ukraine, agreed to consolidate nuclear forces into a single entity and created the Joint Strategic Armed Forces, later renamed the United Strategic Forces—the agreement aimed to ensure the collective security of the entire CIS alliance. In the agreement, Belarus and Ukraine agreed to become non-nuclear states, disarm, and join the Non-Proliferation Treaty (N.P.T.), but Kazakhstan did not.

Consequently, on December 25, 1991, following these meetings and agreements, Mikhail Gorbachev conceded power, handing over the codes to the Soviet Union's military

and nuclear arsenal to Boris Yeltsin. This transfer marked the official dissolution of the Soviet Union (Arms Control Today 1992).

On December 30, 1991, at Minsk, the Commonwealth leaders signed the Minsk Pact, where they agreed that the President of Russia would be the only individual with authority in conjunction with the heads of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine to use nuclear weapons (Arms Control Today 1992; Stimson Center 1993). Consequently, Russia is the only nuclear power that emerged from the former Soviet Union after its collapse.

What followed was a meeting on June 6, 1992, where eight countries, including Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan, signed the CIS agreement, which was later followed by Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Turkmenistan (NTI 2007). Of the fifteen previous states, all but Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania joined the CIS agreement. Georgia eventually withdrew in 2009, Ukraine never ratified its membership, and Turkmenistan is only an associate member (NTI 2007).

Subsequently, upon taking power, Yeltsin neglected critical steps in establishing a new regime, such as holding elections, forming new political parties, and drafting a new Russian constitution. This neglect fueled doubts among Russia's outer regions, the executive branch, and Congress, hampering Yeltsin's efforts for the next decade and obstructing his ability to implement financial reforms. (McFaul 2000).

Ultimately, in 1993, Yeltsin established and signed the Russian constitution, which cleared up some of the uncertainties within the Russian government, but the document was poorly structured. However, during his tenure, Yeltsin accomplished multiple milestones. He abolished the Soviet Communist Party and introduced a democratic electoral system that, although it is under constant scrutiny and relatively weak, still exists today. Lastly, Yeltsin eliminated the state's media manipulation, transforming it into a free press. Still, he never installed provisions to safeguard the democratic system he installed, and Russia never wholly

democratized. At the end of Yeltsin's tenure, the state lacked a healthy multi-party system and a robust civil society, and Russia had a brittle rule of law. Lastly, the media remained independent of the state but relied on oligarchs' revenue (McFaul 2000).

Consequently, due to financial instability, the pro-socialist government Yedinstvo, a faction of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party (R.S.D.L.P.), found enormous success in the 1999 parliamentary elections (Ross 2002a). Following their success and due to political conflict, Boris Yeltsin resigned, laying the groundwork for Vladimir Putin to win the Russian Presidential election on March 26, 2000 (German and Lewis 2000).

During Putin's first term as President between 2000-2004, he began consolidating power while capitulating to everyone and simultaneously concealing his structural goals for Russia. In retrospect, we now see his vision for Russia, which he masked from the world during his first term (Åslund 2019).

Throughout the years, Putin has regularly praised democratic values while acting contrary to public statements. Putin skillfully satisfied everyone's political needs during his first term while appearing to some as a hard-core nationalist when others felt he was leading Russia toward complete democracy, but most believed he was ambivalent in his ideas and unsure what his objectives were (Åslund 2019).

Putin's inner circle primarily has three components. First, his top national security officer, Sergei Ivanov, serves as the Special Presidential Representative for Environmental Protection, Ecology, and Transport. Second, Nikolai Patrushev is the Secretary of the Russian Federation Security Council, and Alexander Bortnikov is the Director of the Federal Security Service. Wealthy state enterprise managers Igor Sechin, Sergei Chemezov, and Alexei Miller make up the balance. Lastly, the third cadre comprises Gennady Timchenko, Arkady Rotenberg, Yuri Kovalchuk, and Nikolai Shamalov, wealthy cronies and close allies with Putin (Åslund 2019).

Putin only appoints those he knows well and trusts entirely and does not rely on strangers. When elites in Putin's inner circle step out of line and criticize him publicly, they are ousted (Åslund 2019). Vladimir Putin places associates in powerful positions in industries and political roles. The capacity to select and place allies in critical institutional roles is crucial for Putin to personalize his.

In 2000, Putin began consolidating the media by first seizing Vladimir Gusinsky's television channel, N.T.V., through a false legal claim and justifying it to the public as a bankruptcy. Second, he seized ORT, another leading television outlet, from Boris Berezovsky, stating that it was an unlawfully privatized company. Putin slowly took control of more and more television stations, always claiming mismanagement while hiding his actual agenda of creating a massive propaganda outlet for the state. Puitin slowly began omitting unpleasant news, and adverse reporting eventually vanished entirely. The Russian news institution is now a propaganda mouthpiece for the state and an essential tool for Putin and his personalization of the regime (Åslund 2019). The consolidation empowered Putin to control the political and military narrative the media distributed to the Russian citizenry. It empowered Putin to act with autonomous authority when making military decisions without the public having a clear understanding of what Russia does militarily, thus skewing their perception concerning Russian troop deployments into Eastern Europe.

Immediately following his inauguration, Putin eliminated the regional governors from the Federation Council, consolidating control over Russia's eighty-nine regions. He allowed governors and chairs of the regional legislatures to select senators to sit on the Federal Council, and they became based in Moscow, becoming compliant with Putin and rubberstamping his legislation (Åslund 2019; Ross 2002b). Having this much legislative control was just another tool for Putin to personalize the regime and strengthen his control and autonomy over the military and, as a result, troop deployment.

Moreover, he developed a new administrative layer consisting of seven federal super-districts, each led by a presidential envoy of a dozen or more federal subjects. As a result, he imposed federal law over the entire country (Åslund 2019; Ross 2002b). In 2004, he altered the election method used to elect regional governors, allowing him to appoint them directly by allowing Putin to dismiss an elected governor and dissolve regional assemblies if those governmental bodies violated the laws of the Russian constitution (Åslund 2019; Ross 2002b). Another act that further consolidated Russian power under Putin's control.

Moreover, Boris Yeltsin established commercial courts in 1992, and the constitution he signed in 1993 preserved an independent judiciary, but it was a weak legal structure and, as a result, left an opening for Putin to fuse power even further. In 2000, Putin declared his goals for judicial reform, which he branded the "dictatorship of law," and said it guaranteed property rights by creating universal rules, laws, and regulations. He said that to comply with these goals and ensure their survival, the state must not command business, but he did not abide by this statement (Åslund 2019).

In 2002, Putin passed the Criminal Procedure Code, strengthening the judges' power and allowing them to sign search and arrest warrants, making judges dependent on the executive branch instead of regional governors and beholden to the President. Even more than that, in 2014, Putin signed a law merging the economic court with a much inferior ordinary court system and, as a result, placed the entire system under political control, solidifying his goal of personalization even more and giving him complete autonomy over Russia's military institution (Åslund 2019).

NATO & The Warsaw Pact: To understand the relationship between Russia, NATO, and the West, we must first have a deeper understanding of what The North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the Warsaw Pact are and what they represent.

NATO is a military alliance established in 1949, comprising twelve founding member countries: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Most of the initial twelve nations had democratic political systems in stark contrast to the socialist system of the Soviet Union. Since its inception, nineteen more states have joined the alliance. In 1952, Greece and Turkey joined, Germany followed in 1955, and Spain in 1982. In 1999, Czechia (the then Czech Republic), Hungary, and Poland joined the alliance, followed in 2004 by Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and three former Soviet states, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. NATO admitted Albania and Croatia in 2009, followed by Montenegro in 2017 and North Macedonia in 2020, while in 2023, Finland became a member. Lastly, in 2024, Sweden was the last member state admitted into the alliance. NATO now has 32 members, and Russia has slowly become surrounded by NATO powers, with Estonia, Finland, Latvia, and Norway, all border states that now fall under the protective veil of NATO (NATO n.d.).

NATO's political statement says, " NATO promotes democratic values and enables members to consult and cooperate on defense and security-related issues to solve problems, build trust, and, in the long run, prevent conflict." Its military statement says:

> "NATO is committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes. If diplomatic efforts fail, it has the military power to undertake crisis-management operations. These are carried out under the collective defense clause of NATO's founding treaty – Article 5 of the Washington Treaty or under a United Nations mandate, alone or in cooperation with other countries and international organizations" (Durhin 2020; NATO n.d.).

NATO is still strong and continually adding new states to the alliance, including states in old Soviet-controlled territories.

The Warsaw Treaty Organization of 1955, known as the Warsaw Pact, was a political and military alliance between Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic

Republic (Soviet-controlled East Germany), Hungary, Poland, Romania, and the Soviet Union. The original members pledged to protect each other militarily while staying out of each state's internal politics. During the 1980s, the Warsaw Pact became brittle from the economic slowdown in Western European countries and political changes in its partner states, which left the Pact essentially toothless. East Germany left the Pact in September of 1990 as they prepared for reunification with West Germany. Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland withdrew from the Pact by that October, and the Pact ultimately disbanded the following year when the Soviet Union dissolved (Office of the Historian n.d.).

Case Studies: After providing background on Russian history and the operational structure for my coding schema, I turn my focus to the heart of this paper- the case studies. Each of these cases offers a complex piece that helps explain the overarching complexity of Russian foreign policy regarding their decision-making process. These case studies offer insight into those decisions and are in an attempt to assist future policymakers.

The 1991 Georgian Civil War: This case study aims to analyze the 1991 Georgian Civil War and focuses on two conflicts that occurred in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. I first provide background on the Georgian Civil War, examining the historical, political, and ethnic factors that played significant roles in both sub-conflicts. I then compare historical events within this case to my coding schema to determine the underlying causes of Russian involvement in the Georgian Civil War.

The 1991 Georgian Civil War encompassed two distinct conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, each characterized by political and ethnic tensions that profoundly influenced the outcome of the region (Wilson Center 2008). Georgia was part of the USSR since its inception in 1921 and included several ethnic populations, including Abkhazia, an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), and South Ossetia, an Autonomous Oblast (AO). Both regions have distinct national identities and, as an ASSR and an AO, have limited

political autonomy but significant oversight from Georgian authorities. Throughout the Soviet era, the Georgian Communist Party (GCP) controlled these areas, exerting influence and administering policies that favored Georgian interests. The GCP administered massive amounts of forced policies trying to Georginize the Abkhaz and Ossetians through ethnic discrimination, forced migration, and population displacement, which led to tremendous suffering and impoverishment. These policies, marked by ethnic discrimination, led to tremendous resentment among both regions concerning Georgia's rule (Demetriou 2002).

In addition to the ethnic concerns regarding Abkhaz and South Ossetia, Georgia also had fears about the Soviet military presence within its border from the Cold War era. During the Cold War, the Soviets organized military outposts called the Transcaucasian Military District (Zakavkazskii voennyi okrug, or ZakVO). These areas were crucial for staging and resupplying the Soviet military during the war in Afghanistan. The staging areas were within the Georgian border, and Russia stationed an estimated 100,000 ZakVO troops at the war's peak in those areas. As a result of the Soviet military structures located in the autonomous areas of Georgia and the troop deployments, resentment spawned among those regions, creating a divergence between those nations and the Georgian government (Demetriou 2002).

As a result of Gorbachevs's policies of perestroika and glasnost through the 1980s, nationalist movements for greater autonomy and independence took hold of Georgia and, as a result, led to independence in 1991. Unfortunately, institutionalized Soviet policies fostered division to support the goals of the Soviet Union and fomented ethnic tensions and political fragmentation, thus creating a divide between the non-Georgian populations, such as South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and the Georgian government. The Abkhaz and Ossetians believed that the aspirations of the Georgian government served as a precursor to more oppressive political control. As a result, South Ossetia and Abkhazia met the Georgian demands for independence with their demands for greater autonomy within the Soviet Federal System (Demetriou 2002).

What eventually unfolded was an armed conflict that began in the autonomous oblast of South Ossetia. At the time, South Ossetia's population was close to 100,000 and consisted of ethnic Ossetians and Georgians, of which 66 percent were South Ossetians and 29 percent were Georgians. In 1989, Nationalist movements began calling for South Ossetia to gain an elevated status upgrade to an autonomous republic. This uprising culminated in clashes and skirmishes between nationalistic South Ossetians and Georgians outside Tskhinvali (the Capital of South Ossetia). The conflict contained ad-hoc military formations on both sides and quickly dissipated but increased political tensions in Georgia (Demetriou 2002).

Consequently, on December 11, 1990, further attempts by South Ossetians to gain autonomy from Georgia led to the Georgian Supreme Soviet abolishing the South Ossetian AO status, generating a political reaction that spawned widespread fighting between Ossetian and Georgian militias that lasted for several months (Demetriou 2002).

Once the USSR collapsed, South Ossetia's political ambitions shifted, and on January 19, 1992, it created a referendum to unify with North Ossetia; as a result, Georgia renewed the fighting, but in this round, Russia joined the conflict targeting Georgia forces, and all sides struck a ceasefire agreement on July 14, 1992. From that agreement, South Ossetia was no longer under the control of the Georgian government (Demetriou 2002). Russia ultimately deployed more than 1000 peacekeeping troops and created a buffer zone for them on their border, which issued a stark warning that if anyone violated that ceasefire, Russia would not hesitate to respond with vigor (Hiatt 1992).

Later that year, fighting began in Abkhazia, an ASSR, which had a population of approximately 537,000, of which only 17 percent consisted of ethnic Abkhaz people, 44 percent were Georgian, 14 percent were Russian, 14 percent were Armenian, and the remaining 11 percent consisting of various ethnicities. Unlike the situation in South Ossetia, where the conflict stemmed from a desire for independence, the relationship between

Abkhazia and Georgia was more structured and characterized by a disposition towards negotiation and compromise. Consequently, between 1989 and 1992, both sides wanted a federal or confederal status for the ASSR. On August 25, 1990, despite declaring independence from Georgia, Azbkhaz authorities did not pressure Georgia to grant them independence after the USSR collapsed (Demetriou 2002).

Ultimately, what followed Georgian independence was a new quota-based system in Abkhaz that gave the Abkhaz nation over-representation in the Abkhaz parliament. Following the conflict in South Ossetia in 1991, Abkhaz submitted a proposal to the Georgian State Council for a new treaty between Georgia and the Abkhaz concerning their confederal relations, to which Georgia had no response. As a result, the Abkhaz parliament reinstated the 1925 Abkhazian constitution but continued to negotiate with Georgia (Demetriou 2002).

Consequently, Georgia responded by deploying troops, which Abkhaz viewed as a direct invasion of their autonomy, and the deployment led to an all-out war beginning with the invasion of the Abkhazian capital of Sukhumi on August 18, 1992. Although Georgia took the initial lead in the conflict, the Abhkaz managed to reverse momentum and gain control through mercenaries, volunteer troops from the Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucuses, and Russian military assistance. In February and March 1993, Russian forces joined Abkhazian forces and brought 70 Russian tanks, and with their help, Abkhaz regained control of its entire geographic footprint by September 30, 1993 (Hopf 2005). The Moscow agreements of April 4 and May 14, 1994, marked a pivotal moment in the conflicts in Georgia, particularly in regions in regions like South Ossetia and Abkhazia. These agreements led to a ceasefire, with Russia deploying troops as peacekeepers. As a result, Abkhazia, much like South Ossetia, was no longer under Georgian control (Demetriou 2002).

The 1991 Georgian Civil War included Russian involvement, which was instrumental in securing both regions' independence. Although Russia remained an observer in the initial

negotiation and conflict, it eventually became actively involved. Succeeding the military conflict, Russia actively participated, helped negotiate ceasefire agreements, and continued as a peacekeeper, ensuring political autonomy for both regions. Although neither of these regions retains high levels of resources, they are an essential strategic partner for Russia and serve as a buffer zone against potential adversaries.

Coding Russian Motivations During the Georgian Civil War: The first criterion of my coding schema is to assess the presence or absence of verbal provocations that either preceded or did not precede Russian military troop deployments. While studying this case, I determined that Russia deployed troops without verbal provocation from any other actors in any capacity (Demetriou 2002). Hence, I assessed this category with a score of (10).

The second criterion of my coding schema is to assess the presence or absence of military provocation due to troop movements or coercion with exterior powers or alliances that either preceded or did not precede Russian military troop deployments. While coding my second criterion, I determined that there was a limited amount of provocation that stemmed from military fighting between Georgia's two ethnic regions that were vying for autonomy, thus creating instability on the Russian border. As a result, Russia deployed its troops when the fighting became unstable (Hiatt 1992; Hopf 2005). Because the parties fighting did not direct their aggression directly at Russia, I assessed this category with a score of (-5), but it was a modest provocation, making this deployment only slightly defensive.

The third criterion of my coding schema is to assess whether the Russian troop deployment occurred before the attempt or conclusion of or without any attempt to find a diplomatic resolution. While coding my third criterion, I assessed this case a (-2). Russia deployed troops without engaging in prior diplomatic negotiations. However, it's important to note that Russia was not in a position to actively participate in negotiations before entering the conflict, as the dispute did not involve them directly. Moreover, once the fighting

concluded, Russia played a significant role in brokering a ceasefire between South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Georgia (Demetriou 2002).

The fourth criterion of my coding schema is to assess markers that illustrate whether Russian objectives were temporary or permanent and to determine if Russia seized control of the military institution where it deployed its troops or whether its troops withdrew. While coding my fourth criterion, I assessed this case a (3) because Russia did not remove its military entirely, but it remained only as a means of peacekeeping and did not seize control of either region's military institutions.

The fifth criterion of my coding schema is to assess markers that illustrate whether Russian objectives were temporary or permanent and to determine if Russia seized control of the political institution where it deployed its troops or whether its troops withdrew. While coding my fifth criterion, I assessed this case as a (-10) because Russia did not seize control of either region's political institutions.

In conclusion, the 1991 Georgian Civil War in South Ossetia and Abkhazia was complex and precipitated by ethnic tensions between the two regions, Georgia and Russia. The political disruption stemming from the fragmentation of the Soviet Union, coupled with Georgia's aspirations for independence, only exasperated the conflict, while desires for autonomy by South Ossetia and Abkhazia expanded tensions.

Although late, Russia's involvement in the conflict proved instrumental in both regions, assisting them in securing their independence. While Russia at first maintained a role as an observer, it eventually became actively involved in fighting, suppressing, and defeating the Georgian military. Moreover, Russia was instrumental in negotiating a ceasefire and remained in the area as a peacekeeper while supporting the independence and ensuring the autonomy of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

The coding schema assessed a final score of (-4), depicting a modest defensive posture. The analysis depicted Russia's primary objectives of maintaining regional stability and only entering the conflict when stability became unmanageable. Moreover, Russia was instrumental in negotiating a ceasefire.

Case 1: Coding Analysis of the 1991 Georgian Civil War		
Precipitating Event:	Analysis: Yes/No	Score: In the analysis, a yes response indicates an expansionist (offensive) act and receives a positive score. In the analysis, a no response indicates an insecure (defensive) act and receives a negative score.
Did Russia deploy troops without verbal provocation?	Yes	10
Did Russia deploy troops without any actual provocation, including military or weaponry advancements, military exercises directed at Russia, or political coercion between other powers?	No	-5
Did Russia deploy troops before the conclusion of or attempt to conduct diplomatic resolutions?	No	-2
Did Russia assume complete control of the military institutions after reaching its objectives?	No	3
Did Russia assume complete control of the political institutions after reaching its objectives?	No	-10
Final Score:		-4

The 1994 First Chechen War: This case study aims to analyze Russian military deployments during the First Chechen War (1994 -1996) through the lens of offensive and defensive realism. The first Chechen War is partly due to the failure of Gorbachev's reforms in the late 1980s. As a result of those failures and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Boris Yeltsin put himself into a position to emerge as President of the new Russian Federation.

One of Yeltsin's positions was encouraging national republics within Russia to attain more autonomy. The Chechen people seized this opportunity and began implementing a plan for Chechnya secession (Kipp 2001).

Chechnya was an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) under the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR). Due to Yeltsin's objectives for Russian autonomy, he motivated Chenya to push back against the Soviet Union. As a result, Chechen leaders held a national conference in Grozny in November 1990. At that conference, every ethnic group that lived in Chechnya was represented. The conference resulted in a declaration of independence from the Soviet Union. On November 27, 1990, the Soviets of the Chechen-Ingush Republic unanimously dissolved the Union of Chechnya and declared their independence and sovereignty from the Soviet Union (Kipp 2001).

At first, Russian and Chechen nationalists moved in lock-step against Soviet power. Moreover, during the Russian presidential elections, Yeltsin received 80 percent of the vote from the Chechen people. Following a failed coup against Gorbachev in August 1991, the Chechens voted for their independence and elected General Dzhokhar Dudayev to the presidency of Chechnya. In December 1991, Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus presidents voted to abolish the Soviet Union (Kipp 2001).

Following the collapse of the USSR, Yeltzin's Russia was weak, and authority in Chechnya, especially in the capital of Grozny, had deteriorated as crime and corruption took hold at an overwhelming rate. Yeltsin perceived Chechen independence as an existential threat to the integrity and sovereignty of the Russian territory and feared that other areas that felt subjugated by Russian control might also strive for their independence. Still, unfortunately, due to more pressing problems, like establishing a new independent Russian government, creating a free market economy, and privatizing public goods, Yeltsin initially placed very little importance on his concerns about the Chechen people. Russian forces

abandoned massive amounts of military apparatus in Chechnya during the withdrawal of the Soviet military, and Chechnya was able to seize, distribute, and implement that weaponry to its people, although they struggled to create an effective military (Kipp 2001).

Consequently, as a result of this deficient military, public order in Chechnya slipped into crime and terrorism, which ultimately threatened to spill over and harm Russia's economic and political interests (Kipp 2001). Boris Yeltsin issued an ultimatum stipulating that Chechnya could either control the internal conflict itself or Russia would ultimately need to intervene (BBC News 1994). The Russian population in Chechnya began to leave the state, and a cohort of disgruntled Chechnyans who were opposed to Dudaev and his corrupt government erected an alliance against him. Leading that opposition was Ruslan Khasbulatov, a political rival of Yeltsin stemming from his time in the Russian parliament, but Khasbulatov was Chechen-born, and his potential rise in political power scared Yeltsin.

In December 1994, Russia resorted to military force and listed the threat of Chechen instability as the reason for the intervention and deployment of troops. They stated that the deployment intended to gain control of the area, that troops should act as peacekeepers, and that the purpose was primarily a peacekeeping mission, mirotvchestvo. Troops were to restore constitutional order, isolate the two factions at war, and reestablish Russian authority in Chechnya (Kipp 2001).

Russia deployed troops into Grozny near the end of 1994, and its efforts to show force were staggering and included tanks and ground infantry (Oliker 2000, 5). Russia had tremendous knowledge of urban warfare dating back to WWII but had pared back its training from preparing for it. However, Russian special forces units, the Spetsnaz, continued training for these situations, focusing primarily on urban situations, but following the Cold War, Russia felt that urban warfare would consist primarily of small-scall counterterrorist conflicts. It did not believe the military would participate in a large-scale urban battle (Oliker 2000, 7).

Consequently, Russia underestimated the efficacy of the Chechnyan resistance; in November 1994, a Russian-sponsored anti-Dudaev assault on Grozny failed. Unfortunately, the Russian Minister of Defense, Pavel Grachev, believed that the airborne brigade responsible for the covert assault would need only two hours to topple Dudaev's government. However, leadership underestimated the support for Chechnyan's independence. The covert operation slowly became public knowledge that Russia was responsible for the assault on Grozny, and as a result, the credibility of Russian leadership suffered. The solution to repairing the political damage was for Russia to use military force in Chechnya, and the Russian Security Council voted to deploy Russian troops into Chechnya and overtly initiate a full-fledged military assault (Kipp 2001).

Consequently, in December 1994, Boris Yeltsin ordered tanks and troops into Chechnya, and hundreds of tanks and armored personal carriers converged on the Chechen Capital of Grozny (BBC News 1994). Russia deployed 23,000 troops into Grozny, attacking from three separate directions: the northeast, the west, and the south. The Russian assault was disjointed and slow, leaving an opening for Chechnya to organize a defense, and it did so by erecting three concentric circles of troops, with the presidential palace in its center. The inner circle had a radius of 1.5 kilometers. It used the building structures around the Presidential Palace as a defense. The bottom floors were modified, allowing forces to employ anti-tank weapons against the invaders. The second defense ring was five kilometers wide and focused on bridges and highways, making them strong points that stunted Russian advancement. The exterior ring encircled the city and protected populated areas (Oliker 2000, 17).

Chechyan forces reportedly acquired copies of Russia's strategic plan of how it intended to assault Grozny, thus providing an enormous advantage to the Chechens (2000, 18). Chechen fighters operated in small units of 10 – 12 soldiers, each engaging with Russian forces from buildings while using commercial communication devices they pulled directly

off the shelves of stores. Typical Chechen squads consisted of two men with RPG-7 or *Mukha* (RPG-18) shoulder-fired anti-tank grenade launchers, two more men with machine guns, and a possible fifth man as a snipper. The structure was instrumental in the effectiveness of the Chechen resistance. Opposed to attacking Russian forces using traditional tactics and flanking them, guerrillas searched for soft spots in Russia's military line and set up firing positions anywhere from 50 – 250 meters away. This strategy enabled Chechnya to attack Russian forces but remain safe from artillery and rocket strikes (Oliker 2000, 19–20). Russian forces took significant losses, losing 1500 soldiers, 100 of the 120 BPSs that Russia dispatched, and 20 of the 26 tanks (Kipp 2001).

The Chechyan defense stymied and humiliated Russia, causing Russia to withdraw into the countryside to assert control and pacify the rural areas (Kipp 2001). This change in tactics potentially thinned out Chechyan forces, seized and secured supply lines, and attempted to demoralize Chechyan forces by demonstrating that Russia could sustain a military conflict on multiple fronts.

Responding to Russia's withdrawal, Chechen forces followed suit, withdrew, and mounted a protracted partisan war in the Chechen countryside. Russia tasked General Anatliy Kulikov with the responsibility of pacifying the countryside. Still, Kulikov could not identify a Chechen faction willing to serve as an agent for Moscow, and as a result, Moscow began preparing to concede and initiated communications to stop the conflict. Moreover, Russian morale became decimated, and Russian forces fell ill with hepatitis as a result of poor field hygiene. Additionally, corruption and poor morale resulted in Russian forces selling their arms to Chechen rebel fighters (Kipp 2001).

Because Yeltsin had made so much progress in establishing a free press in Russia, Russian media reports about the conflict were accurate, and the Russian people were aware that the conflict in Chechnya was not going smoothly. In June 1995, Shamil Basaev led an

assault on a hospital 90 miles inside the Russian border in the village of Budennovsk in Stavropol' Krai and took hostages. The Russian government failed to free those hostages and, as a result, were relegated to negotiating the hostage-takers' release and providing their passage back to Chechnya. The Russian media provided a detailed account depicting the attack for the Russian people, and coverage eventually was distributed worldwide, drawing attention to the incompetence of the Russian government and thus discrediting their cause. After escalating tensions, Russia underwent a drastic internal shakeup, leading Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin to initiate negotiations to end the fighting (Kipp 2001).

Subsequently, Chechen forces continued to pressure Russian forces through raids, terrorist attacks, and several assassination attempts on Russian officials stationed in Chechnya. In October 1995, Chechnya forces bombed and severely wounded Russian General Lieutenant A Romanov, the MVD commander, who was primarily responsible for negotiating an end to the fighting. Russia attempted to create an alternate Chechen government by integrating Chechnya into the Russian political process by including them in the Russian parliamentary elections held in December 1995. Still, Chechen fighters regrouped and mounted daily attacks on Russian field posts and military convoys, including dangerous raids into Grozny (Kipp 2001).

After fighting for one year, Russia had made no ground in subverting Chenyan's authority and seizing Chechen control, and it was not any closer to ending the war and winding down the conflict (Kipp 2001). Chechen forces had prepared for the Russian invasion and ultimately were better prepared, had better tactics, and could initially defeat the poorly trained Russian military, who were also understaffed (Oliker 2000, 22).

As the 1996 presidential elections approached, Yeltsin's administration lacked a clear grasp of their objectives regarding Chechnya, often wavering between repressive measures and attempts at accommodation. Russia was unsure if they should even hold the presidential

elections and considered postponing them and outlawing the communist party entirely. Gennadiy Zyuganov bound the opposition together and led the charge to hold the elections. Zyuganov understood that the war in Chechnya was a weakness for Yeltsin and was a significant cause for the discontent within the government (Kipp 2001).

On April 21, 1996, Russian intelligence provided its military with coordinates for Dudaev using the signal from his cell phone, which provided Russia the ability to launch two laser-guided missiles from a Su-25 aircraft, killing the Chechen president. From that, Yeltsin's administration implemented a ceasefire, which Yeltsin used to help him win the presidential elections in Russia. Then, in July of that year, as Yeltsin began making preparations to restart the fighting in Chechnya, the Chechens were able to mount a preemptive strike against Russia and, in early August, retook control of Grozny (Kipp 2001; Malek 2009). Yeltsin's administration realized defeat and allowed General Alexander Lebed to negotiate a final ceasefire. The Russian forces withdrew, and Lebed and Maskhadov signed the Khasavyurt Accords on August 31, 1996. After that, Chechnya's status did not change until the Second Chechen War, which began in 1999 (Kipp 2001).

Coding Russian Motivations During the First Chechen War in 1994: The first criterion of my coding schema is to assess the presence or absence of verbal provocations that either preceded or did not precede Russian military troop deployments. While coding my first criterion, I determined that Russia deployed troops without any verbal provocation; as a result, I assessed a score of (10).

The second criterion of my coding schema is to assess the presence or absence of military provocation due to troop movements or coercion with exterior powers or alliances that either preceded or did not precede Russian military troop deployments. While coding my second criterion, I determined that Russia did deploy troops without a significant provocation. Although there was a tremendous amount of crime and corruption occurring in

Chechnya, which was a concern for Russia, I determined that it only played a minimal part in Yeltsin's decision to deploy troops. The primary provocation came from the independence movement in Chechnya out of concerns that other areas would follow. Consequently, I assessed deployment with a score of (3) (Kipp 2001).

The third criterion of my coding schema is to assess whether the Russian troop deployment occurred before the attempt or conclusion of or without any attempt to find a diplomatic resolution. While coding my third criterion, I assessed this case a (1). Boris Yeltsin warned Chechnya, giving them advanced notice that the internal conflict must end or Russia would intervene. However, Russia made a minimal effort to resolve its security concerns once the conflict began.

The fourth criterion of my coding schema is to assess indicators that illustrate whether Russia's objectives were temporary or permanent and to determine if Russia seized control of the military institution where it deployed its troops or whether its troops withdrew. While coding my fourth criterion, I assessed this case a (-5) because Russia removed its military forces, but only after defeat, and we can not determine if Russia would have left a military force in place after reaching its objective.

The fifth criterion of my coding schema is to assess indicators that illustrate whether Russia's objectives were temporary or permanent and to determine if Russia seized control of the political institution where it deployed its troops and retained that control after it eliminated its security risk stemming from internal instability within Chechnya. While coding my fifth criterion, I assessed this case as a (-10) because Russia did not seize or co-opt control in any capacity of the Chechen government. Russia ultimately withdrew its troops following a defeat (Kipp 2001; Oliker 2000).

The First Chechen War was an intricate case study that provided insight into the complexity of Russian military objectives and troop deployments into Eastern Europe in the

post-Cold War era. My analysis revealed a nuanced perspective of Russian objectives during this conflict. While their initial objectives had some security concerns vis-à-vis regional stability from within Chechnya, there was a more significant concern regarding Chechen secession. Russia ultimately needed to stabilize its border and, as a result, deployed its troops in the region.

The coding schema assessed a final score of (-2), depicting a slightly more defensive posture. This result points to a slightly higher role of defensive realist ideas, rather than offensive realist ideas, in the decision-making process.

Case 2: Coding Analysis of the 1994 First Chechen War		
Precipitating Event:	Analysis: Yes/No	Score: In the analysis, a yes response indicates an expansionist (offensive) act and receives a positive score. In the analysis, a no response indicates an insecure (defensive) act and receives a negative score.
Did Russia deploy troops without verbal provocation?	Yes	10
Did Russia deploy troops without any actual provocation, including military or weaponry advancements, military exercises directed at Russia, or political coercion between other powers?	Yes	3
Did Russia deploy troops before the conclusion of or attempt to conduct diplomatic resolutions?	No	1
Did Russia assume complete control of the military institutions after reaching its objectives?	No	-5
Did Russia assume complete control of the political institutions after reaching its objectives?	No	-10
Final Score:		-1

The 1999 Second Chechnyan War: This case study evaluates the Second Chechen War in 1999 and analyzes Russia's troop deployments. What's more, it aims to identify the

underlying motivations for Russia's decision to deploy its troops in Chechnya again to identify if they align more with offensive or defensive realism.

Following the First Chechen War, the Russian government could not decide what policies to pursue in Chechnya. It started when Yeltsin became ill with a severe heart condition, which sprung an internal power struggle within the Kremlin. With immense support and popularity, General Alexander Lebed mounted a presidential campaign to test Yeltsin's prowess. Yeltsin loyalists identified the threat and acted; as a result, the Minister of Internal Affairs led a successful campaign discrediting the General and ending his campaign. During Yeltsin's illness, Russian policy concerning Chechnya fell under the control of oligarch Boris Berezovsky, who chaired the Security Council. Moreover, General Ogor Rodionov, the Minister of Defense, tried to reform the Russian military but found no support and was removed in May 1997. Igor Sergeev, the Marshal, replaced Rodionov and focussed on reforming Russia's strategic nuclear arms (Kipp 2001).

General Anatoliy Kvashnin was appointed Chief of General Staff in June 1997. Kvashnin was responsible for preparing the Russian Army and Internal Forces for further conflict in Chechnya. Kvashnin supported reform efforts to revitalize the Russian armed forces and wanted to enhance their conventional military and modernize forces to prepare them to fight regional wars (Kipp 2001). Russia retained a significant presence in the Northern Caucasus, and these forces continually trained for combat, priming them for a conflict in Chechnya. The training included large-scale counterinsurgency exercises, simulations involving "bandit" group scenarios, and individual terrorist attacks. Due to Chechnya's urban warfare tactics during the First Chechen War, Russia shifted its training to focus on communication capabilities and hostage rescues and improve urban defense strategies, including tactics concerning building-to-building combat (Oliker 2000, 36).

Concurrently, the Chechen military and political institutions gained strength under Colonel Aslan Maskhadov's leadership. Maskhadov served under President Dzhokar Dudaev and was instrumental in engineering the victory in Grozny in the First Chechen War. In 1997, Chechnya elected Maskhadov to the presidency, but he had limited power, and his personal, ideological, and religious objectives created conflicts and stymied Chechyna. As a result, Chechnya appeared to have no one in control of the "bandit republic." The government lost control of crime, and law and order vanished, leaving kidnapping and extortion a widespread problem in Chechnya (Kipp 2001).

Furthermore, religious disputes split the leadership, and two individuals created a divergence in Chechen power. Khattab, whose full name was Samir Saleh Abdullah Al-Suwailem, was an Arab who fought in Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Khattab brought foreign Mujahideen (foreign fighters), money, and Wahhabi fundamentalism to the leadership in Chechnya. The second was Shamil Basayev, a Chechen militant leader and the most charismatic leader in Chechnya. Khattab and Basayev challenged Maskhadov's administration and leadership by promoting a new and expanded war and drawing on Islamist political ideas (Kipp 2001).

Between feckless Russian efforts to resolve the Chechen situation through diplomacy, Russian military reforms, spiraling chaos within Chechnya, and rising pressure for further fighting from Khattab and Basayev, it set the stage for Russia and Chechnya to re-engage in conflict (Kipp 2001).

During the spring and summer of 1999, conditions aligned, priming additional conflict between these two powers. NATO activities, such as its intervention in Kosovo on March 24, 1999, known as 'Operation Allied Force,' and its inclusion of the first former USSR states into the alliance, caused considerable unease among Russians regarding NATO expansion. Many viewed these actions as potential precursors to intervention in the Caucasus.

(Kipp 2001; Michta 2009; NATO n.d.). Even more than that, the Radical Islamic elements in Chechnya used the success of the Kosovo Liberation Army as a model for how to administer their armed conflict. The fighting began with Khattab and Basayev leading their forces into Dagestan, a Federal Subject of Russia located in the northern Caucuses, and igniting an Islamic insurgency (Kipp 2001).

Consequently, Russia had a small but aggressive response to the incursion, and although they responded with heavy artillery, they merely attempted to push Chechen fighters back into Chechnya. The Military of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation (MVD) commanders aimed to impose as much damage as possible on the Chechen fighters with indirect fire to avoid close conflicts and, therefore, limit Russian casualties. The initial Russian perspective was that Chechnya was a contained security concern, but this changed in September 1999 when Yeltsin replaced Sergei Stepashin, the Russian Prime Minister, with Vladimir Putin (Kipp 2001).

Coincidently, in September, just after Putin became Prime Minister, a series of bombs rocked Russia. Coupled with two bombings in the previous two weeks, on September 16, a truck bomb in Volgodonsk killed 17, and the next day in the same city, another bomb destroyed a nine-story 144-unit apartment building. The four explosions killed nearly 300 people. A prominent and experienced Chechen journalist stated that he had direct knowledge of Chechen plans to bomb 10 buildings in Russia in response to Russian attacks on Chechnya. Although the perpetrators behind the bombings were never conclusively identified, they remain shrouded in mystery. The result was that the people of Russia believed it to be Chechnya, leaving ample justification for Putin to attack (Hoffman 1999). What's more, Ex-Premier Stephashin stated in March 1999 that Russia had planned to launch an attack on Chechnya before the assault on Dagestan and the Russian bombings (Pain 2001).

Accordingly, Putin began his assault on Chechnya, vowing to dismantle the Maskhadov administration and eliminate the terrorists who wanted to inflict harm on Russia (Kipp 2001). In October 1999, Russia initiated "Operation for the Neutralization of Terrorism," which was the official name of the Russian government, but political commentators termed the conflict the "Second Chechen War" (Pain 2001).

Thanks to efforts by Shevtsov, coordination among Russian forces had made vast improvements since the first Chechen conflict, and this time, the Russian government applied heavy forces to the initial campaign. Shevtsov coordinated Internal Troop and Army operations and set out a plan to seize Grozny (Kipp 2001). Russia reached Grozny in mid-October, and although troops did secure some key targets, they largely remained outside the city while operations relied on heavy artillery. In mid-December, large quantities of troops began to enter Grozny for reconnaissance purposes, and by December 23, Russia had launched a full-scale assault on the city (Oliker 2000, 43). Three days after launching its assault, Russia gained the upper hand in Grozny (BBC News 1999).

Following only two months of combat, on February 2, Russia quickly seized Grozny (Oliker 2000, 73). Unfortunately, while doing so, Russia destroyed most of the city with heavy artillery and rocket strikes (BBC News 1999; Kipp 2001). The Russian advance was slow and calculated, dividing the city into isolated sectors that pushed the Chechen resistance out, which led to Russian forces trapping them in minefields. This strategy caused significant damage to the Chechen fighters, including Shamil Basayev, who sustained severe injuries due to a minefield. (Kipp 2001; Oliker 2000).

Following the seizure of Grozny, the majority of fighting slowed and slipped into an insurgency in place of a conventional war, and while Russia had essential control over the area, it was not a secure environment. Moreover, political circumstances differed significantly in Russia compared to the first Chechen conflict, which had a massive effect on Chechnya.

Under President Putin, Russia had a new kind of democracy, a "managed democracy," he began to retake media control, which eliminated Chechnya's chance of receiving accurate news coverage concerning their efforts, and the rebels quickly lost the fight over information. Putin's tight control over the media allowed for limited information dissemination, dampening internal pressure within his administration and reducing the likelihood of negotiations with Chechnya. (Malek 2009).

Throughout the fighting and regardless of Russian achievements, it was unable to find credible Chechen leaders that they could use to form a proxy government to rule Chechnya, and Russia could not suppress insurrections (Kipp 2001). In light of its recent gains, Vladimir Putin announced in the spring of 2001 that Russia would begin drawing down troops in Chechnya, but it proved to be premature, and as a result of Chechen raids and insurgent activities, the government paused its drawdown (BBC News 2000; Kipp 2001). It was not going smoothly for Russia, and in the Spring of 2001, Colonel-General Gennadiy Troshev suggested that Russia should begin to execute Chechen rebels publically (Kipp 2001).

The longer the second conflict continued, the more apparent it was that Chechnya could not repeat its success from 1996; thus, it could not force the Kremlin back to the negotiating table. However, Chechnya made it difficult for Russia, and rebels continuously proved that they could strike Russian forces all over Chechnya, including Grozny and Khankala, where Russia had its military headquarters located. Chechen rebels ambushed Russian forces with sniper fire, portable antitank and air defense weaponry, mines, and remotely ignited bombs. Moreover, although suicide attacks did not play a significant role in the first Chechen War, they did in the second, and on June 27, 2002, the Chechen rebels loaded two trucks with explosives in Grozny and ignited them in front of the buildings that housed the Russian backed Chechen administration. The explosion killed more than seventy

people, but the highest wave of suicide attacks happened in the summer of 2003 and included attacks in Chechnya and Moscow (Malek 2009).

Ultimately, by August 2003, and after a decade of unsuccessful attempts by Chechnya to gain autonomy, its status remained as part of the Russian Federation, just as it had been since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia finally had a firm grip on Chechnya. In 2007, Putin nominated a former rebel fighter, Ramzan Kadyrov, to the presidency of Chechnya. Kadyrov is now one of Russia's most influential and feared men, and Moscow relies heavily on him to maintain stability in Chechnya (BBC News 2012).

Coding Russian Motivations During the Second Chechen War in 1999: The first criterion of my coding schema is to assess the presence or absence of verbal provocations that either preceded or did not precede Russian military troop deployments. While coding my first criterion, I determined that there was a verbal provocation by Chechnya, but there was provocation from both sides, and I determined that the provocation was equal; as a result, I assessed this case a (0) (Kipp 2001; Oliker 2000).

The second criterion of my coding schema is to assess the presence or absence of military provocation due to troop movements or coercion with exterior powers or alliances that may have preceded Russian military troop deployments. While coding my second criterion, I determined that Russia did not deploy troops without military provocation. Although there are reports that Russia planned to launch an assault on Chechnya and Russian forces were training for a conflict that would apply to Chechnya, the Chechen forces were also training for a conflict with Russia, providing indications from both sides that conflict was imminent. Ultimately, Chechnya engaged Russia first with their assault on Dagestan, and although not wholly proven true, Chechnya potentially followed that attack with four bombings in Russia, thus provoking Russia into conflict. As a result, I assessed deployment

with a score of (-5), indicating that Chechnya had a moderately more offensive role in the conflict than Russia (Kipp 2001; Shah 2002).

The third criterion of my coding schema is to assess whether the Russian troop deployment occurred before the attempt or conclusion of or without any attempt to find a diplomatic resolution. While coding my third criterion, I assessed this case as a (5) because, before the conflict, there were no efforts to seek a diplomatic resolution, and throughout the conflict, Russia made only limited attempts to address its security concerns diplomatically. Furthermore, when attempting diplomacy, Russia was unwilling to cede power and grant autonomy to Chechnya (Kipp 2001; Shah 2002).

The fourth criterion of my coding schema is to assess indicators that illustrate whether Russia's objectives were temporary or permanent and to determine if Russia seized control of the military institution where it deployed its troops or whether its troops withdrew. While coding, my fourth criterion assessed this case a (-5) because Chechnya was already part of the Russian Federation and Russia had already controlled the area before Chechnya attempted to secede, so I determined that Russia was not expanding but, in contrast, Russia was trying to maintain its geopolitical footprint.

The fifth criterion of my coding schema is to assess indicators that illustrate whether Russia's objectives were temporary or permanent and to determine if Russia seized control of the political institution where it deployed its troops or whether its troops withdrew. While coding my fifth criterion, I assessed this case as a (5). Russia did take control of Chechnya in 2007 with a president that Putin appointed, thus giving Russia soft proxy control over Chechnya, but I determined that Russia was protecting its stability in the region. Consequently, I assigned a slightly offensive score to this category by determining that Russia had a reasonable security concern on its border.

The coding schema resulted in a final score of (0), indicating a neutral stance regarding Russia's defensive and offensive objectives. Despite the presence of offensive attitudes, I concluded that Russia's primary goal of preserving its geopolitical influence undermined the core of its offensive posture. This determination was based on factors such as Chechnya's initial attack on Russia, the bombings within Russia, and the recognition that Chechnya was effectively under Russia's soft control at the onset of the conflict.

Case 3: Coding Analysis of the 1999 Second Chechen War		
Precipitating Event:	Analysis: Yes/No	Score: In the analysis, a yes response indicates an expansionist (offensive) act and receives a positive score. In the analysis, a no response indicates an insecure (defensive) act and receives a negative score.
Did Russia deploy troops without verbal provocation?	No	0
Did Russia deploy troops without any actual provocation, including military or weaponry advancements, military exercises directed at Russia, or political coercion between other powers?	Yes	-5
Did Russia deploy troops before the conclusion of or attempt to conduct diplomatic resolutions?	No	5
Did Russia assume complete control of the military institutions after reaching its objectives?	No	-5
Did Russia assume complete control of the political institutions after reaching its objectives?	No	5
Final Score:		0

The 2008 Georgian Conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia: The 2008 Georgian conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia is a pivotal point in recent history that marks territorial tensions that remain in Eastern Europe following the collapse of the USSR. This case study analyzes a brief but brutal war highlighting Russian objectives when considering

the balance of power and territorial ideas. The study aims to provide insight into the complex relationships between Russia and its neighbors by analyzing this conflict. As we dive into the analysis of this war, we aim to provide a critical analysis for policymakers to utilize when considering future policy and military interventions concerning Russia.

The 1991 Georgian Civil War resulted in a fragile ceasefire upheld by Russian peacekeepers to protect the two regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia from Georgian intervention. A decade after the fighting ended, Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze prepared to retake the two areas it lost in 1991. In doing so, Shevardnadze understood that support from Western powers, including the United States, was critical for success. Following Shevardnadze's presidency, Georgia elected Mikhail Saakashvili to office in 2004, and Saakashvili continued to expand on Shevardnadze's policies for retaking lost territories. Moreover, Saakashvili did not conceal his objectives concerning South Ossetia and Abkhazia insofar as retaking both areas. Not only was he prepared to confront Russia, but he also relished the opportunity. (Galeotti 2023, 6–7).

As a result, Georgia sent a small force of 70 soldiers to join Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 and began shaping a relationship with NATO and the United States. Realizing the importance of demonstrating to the United States that Georgia was a critical ally, it increased its support the following year, sending 300 in 2004, then 850 in 2005. By 2008, Georgia increased the deployment of another 2000 soldiers, consisting of a large portion of Georgia's 1st brigade and 2600 of the 17,000 Georgian soldiers (Galeotti 2023, 7).

Moreover, in 2002, Shevardnadze instituted a short-lived joint program with the United States called the US Georgia Train & Equip Program (GTEP). The program consisted of US military advisors from the US 10th Special Forces Group who trained 1,600 Georgian soldiers over 18 months. The Georgian trainees included Border Guards and interior troops (Galeotti 2023, 8). The short-lived GTEP program was replaced in 2004 with the Georgia

Sustainment & Stability Operations Program (GSSOP). The GSSOP transferred the responsibility of training Georgian forces to the US Marine Corps and British Army, but the focus was on small-unit leadership. Alongside the training of Georgian troops, the military was reforming their stash of weapons, which increased to an impressive size and consisted of an ad-hoc cache that included tanks, Russian BMPs, BTRs, MT-LBs, Turkish APCs, Czech DANA SP guns, and US-made 5.56 riffles (Galeotti 2023, 9).

Consequently, as a means to pay for the increased military expenditures, Saakashvili began to increase Georgia's defense budget from a paltry $18 million in 2002 to $780 million in 2007, marking nearly a 4300% increase in defense spending. Georgia spent more on defense alone in preparation to retake South Ossetia and Abkhazia than the state was generating annually (Galeotti 2023, 6). This commitment made Georgia's geopolitical aspirations clear to the world.

In 2008, a conundrum began in Georgia between military and political institutions when military leaders believed Georgia would lose in a conflict with Russia. The Georgia National Military Strategy foresaw a defensive approach aimed at repelling aggressors, highlighting the limited size of Georgia's territory, operational space, and strategic locations of targets that adversaries might find advantageous. These concerns posed significant challenges for Georgian forces to defend against them effectively. As a result of the limited resources and space, the Georgian Armed Forces (GAF) determined that military success against Russia was unlikely and that defeat would be imminent (Galeotti 2023, 11).

Contrarily, and at odds with his military advisors, Saakashvili's administration's objective was to retake the territories, making that the government's official policy. The continuous tension between Georgia's military and political institutions resulted in confusion between offensive and defensive objectives. Moreover, with an already unbalanced budget, the Georgian parliament voted in 2006 to expand their military force from 28,000 soldiers to

32,000 with an end goal of 37,000 by the end of 2008, but when the war began in 2008, the GAF had only 30,000 soldiers (Galeotti 2023, 12).

As a result of Saakashvili's unwillingness to accept the *de facto* autonomy status of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2004, he deployed police and Interior Ministry special forces in villages in South Ossetia, which resulted in conflicts between security forces and Georgian militants fighting with South Ossetian militias (Galeotti 2023, 15).

That year, Georgia attempted a failed power grab while trying to expand its control over customs transactions that passed through the border of South Ossetia and Russia. Ossetian authorities thwarted the effort, resulting in a declining relationship between Russia and Georgia (Macfarlane 2020).

Subsequently, Moscow followed suit, adding tension to the relationship by issuing passports to citizens from both areas, which indicated that they were, in a sense, Russian citizens, thus giving Russia the right to defend them. In 2005, the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi, established a new National Military Strategy (NMS) that focused on Russian military bases and the peacekeeping troops that remained in the separatist regions. The NMS position was that Russian military bases provoked instability and remained a threat to Georgian autonomy (Galeotti 2023). Then, the following year, in 2006, Russia imposed economic sanctions on Georgia, citing poor sanitary conditions in their farming industry, which resulted in Georgian authorities arresting alleged Russian spies that were in Georgia, and the relationship continued to deteriorate (Macfarlane 2020).

Meanwhile, Russian behavior was not altogether reactionary, and they continually consolidated forces across the border from Georgia. Moreover, a further provocation for Russia came from the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008, when NATO announced its intentions to bring Georgia into the alliance and make it a member of NATO. Russian officials quickly illustrated their outrage at the possibility of Georgia becoming a member of

the alliance. Furthermore, according to reports, Putin “flew into a rage” about the possibility of that happening (Mearsheimer 2022). Germany, France, and Russia were able to block the initiation of a Membership Action Plan (MAP). Regardless of the outcome and the inability of NATO to initiate a MAP for Georgia, they stated that Georgia would one day become a member of the alliance, thus creating concern for Russia that Georgia might someday fall under the protection of the alliance. This admittance would allow NATO to stage military apparatuses near Russia’s border, and the announcement furthered Russia’s security concerns, explicitly concerning South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Khan 2008).

Before the war, isolated incidents of conflict were instigated by both sides. The incidents included artillery strikes, cross-border kidnappings, and snipper incidents. South Ossetian forces shelled Georgia villages, and a Georgian police truck hit a mine, injuring six officers. Georgian Interior Ministry snippers fired on an illegal checkpoint in South Ossetia. These incidents expanded into a further escalation that included mortar and rocket fire, killing six and injuring 20, and after a week of skirmishes, Saakashvili had enough and was ready to engage. On August 7, 2008, he approved Operation “Clear Field” (Galeotti 2023, 21).

That night at 11:35 PM, Saakashvili called Major General Gogava, the Chief of the General Staff of the Georgian Armed Forces, and approved an assault. (Galeotti 2023, 23). Just after midnight on August 8, Georgia attacked Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, to restore order to the region (Tsygankov 2022, 272).

Georgian forces began to assault Tskhinvali with mortar artillery and MLRSs. The accuracy was poor, and the effort was much dirtier than Georgian officials anticipated, and some artillery shells struck a Russian peacekeeping base. Georgian officials claimed they attempted to avoid this, but regardless, it was all the provocation that Russia needed to enter the conflict, and Moscow immediately called it an act of aggression (Galeotti 2023, 24).

In anticipation of such aggression, Russia was ready and, at 1.00 AM, activated Colonel General Sergei Makarov, who served as the Commander of the North Caucasus Military District. (SKVO). Russia responded with overwhelming military force, including armored battalions, airpower, and marines (Tsygankov 2022, 272). The SVKO dispatched two battalion tactical groups, including 1500 soldiers, 14x T-72 tanks, 16 self-propelled guns, and a battery of MLRSs (Galeotti 2023, 24).

Despite how prepared the Kremlive believed it was, there was significant confusion at the start of the war. Both President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin were unavailable, and the General Staff's Main Operations Directorate (GOU), which is the department that orchestrates field operations, was undergoing an office relocation. When Georgia initiated contact in South Ossetia, Russian operational gameplans were locked in secured trunks in the back of trucks due to the move, and the transmission of sensitive military orders was left to civilian cell phones (Galeotti 2023, 25).

By the morning of August 8, Georgia had made steady ground controlling the area, but it was short-lived, and by that afternoon, Russia began to turn the tide. It began with a Russian Su-25 aircraft attacking Georgia's 42nd battalion and demonstrated that Russia could attack with impunity. It killed more than 20 Georgian soldiers, demoralizing the Georgian forces. The Russian air power caused Georgian forces to begin to flee the city, and by mid-afternoon, Georgian forces lost all of the territory they had captured throughout the night and into the early morning (Galeotti 2023, 28–29).

Although potentially under pretext, Saakashvili allowed militias to surrender and civilians to leave, which allowed his forces to regroup by issuing a humanitarian ceasefire. Meanwhile, 3,000 Russian troops were already en route to Tskhinvali. When they reached the city, they began bombarding Georgian forces, thus increasing the panic that began with the initial airstrike by the Russian Su-25s. Georgian forces, which included the entirety of the

Georgian army, sat across the border for South Ossetias overnight and began to draw up an action plan for a second assault (Galeotti 2023, 29–30).

Facing imminent failure, Saakashvili had not reached a point where he was ready to yield to Russia, and on August 9, he had his commanders regroup their forces and begin movement toward the city. In return, the Russians showered them with fire, and after the exchange, Georgian forces withdrew (Galeotti 2023, 32).

By 2.00 PM on August 10, Russia had cleared South Ossetia of Georgian forces. By the end of the third day, more than 10,000 Russian soldiers entered the war (Galeotti 2023, 37). Georgian officials thought Russia would not be satisfied by simply resecuring South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Moreover, Saakashvili began to fear that Moscow might use this assault by Georgia as grounds to occupy and seize the entire state (Galeotti 2023, 37).

While Russia was mounting assaults through the region and seizing critical Georgian military outposts, Saakashvili formally announced the end of the operation by Georgian forces. Still, Russia had pushed through South Ossetia and was now 15 kilometers into official Georgian territory. It had reached the village of Variani, which held a critical government supply base for Georgia; as a result, Georgia fought to retain control but took on losses, and it fell to Russia (Galeotti 2023, 38).

On August 11, all appearances signaled that Russia was preparing an advance on Tbilisi and had expanded its forces to 14,000, and South Ossetia was in complete control of its territory once again. Russia had complete control of Georgia, and Georgia could do nothing to impede Russian efforts (Galeotti 2023, 40).

Meanwhile, Georgian efforts in Abkhazia were essentially feckless, and the Russian forces they sent to support the region secured the area quickly. Although there was little conflict in the area, a vast amount of combat occurred in South Ossetia (Galeotti 2023, 43).

Finally, on August 12, as Georgian forces in Tbilisi were digging in with its 2000 troops waiting for Russia to try and sack the city, Medvedev announced that Russia had achieved its objective and restored peacekeeping, Russia punished the aggressor, Russian airstrikes had ceased, and the war was over (Galeotti 2023, 41).

Eventually, France mediated the negotiations for a ceasefire on behalf of the European Union, and French and German ideologies blamed the conflict on Georgian aggression; on the other hand, the United States took a pro-Georgian position (Michta 2009). Ultimately, Russia found language in the weakly written ceasefire memorandum, allowing it to retain troop and peacekeeping efforts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia (Macfarlane 2020).

Coding Russian Motivations During the 2008 Georgian Conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia: The first criterion of my coding schema is to assess the presence or absence of verbal provocations that might have preceded Russian military troop deployments. While coding my first criterion, I determined that Georgia was far more aggressive. Saakashvili was vocal about his ambitions to retake South Ossetia and Abkhazia, publicly stating his goal to regain control over territories now under Russian protection. He significantly increased annual funding for Georgia's military over several years, preparing for potential conflict with Russia. Moreover, the NATO statement from the Bucharest Summit also heightened security concerns for Russia. (Galeotti 2023, 6–7). As a result, I assessed a score of (-8).

The second criterion of my coding schema is to assess the presence or absence of military provocation due to troop movements or coercion with exterior powers or alliances that either preceded or did not precede Russian military troop deployments. While coding my second criterion, I determined that Russia deployed troops after military provocation, and as a result, I assessed this case a (-8), indicating that Georgia had a more offensive role in the conflict. Saakashvili made efforts to prepare to go to war with Russia and began training his

troops with NATO and US forces. He increased Georgia's military budget by 4300% and made public statements about his goal to retake former territories that were now under Russian protection. Russian security concerns mounted as Saakashvili's efforts to align with Western allies, specifically the United States, increased through troop deployment and joint training operations (Galeotti 2023, 6–7).

Moreover, NATO's statements of its intent to admit Georgia into the alliance furthered concerns for Russia. Lastly, Georgia was the first to deploy military personnel into South Ossetia, thus breaking the ceasefire agreement established in 1991. A key factor of provocation for Russia was when Georgian artillery shells inadvertently struck a Russian peacekeeping base (Galeotti 2023, 6–7). On the contrary, Russia showed some military activity by consolidating forces on the Georgian border in preparation for a conflict with Georgia (Mearsheimer 2022).

The third criterion of my coding schema is to assess whether the Russian troop deployment occurred before the attempt or conclusion of or without any attempt to find a diplomatic resolution. While coding my third criterion, I assessed this case a (0) because, before the conflict, neither Russia nor Georgia made any effort or indicated that an agreement was possible (Galeotti 2023; Mearsheimer 2022).

The fourth criterion of my coding schema is to assess indicators that illustrate whether Russia's objectives were temporary or permanent and to determine if Russia seized control of the military institution where it deployed its troops or whether its troops withdrew. While coding my fourth criterion, I assessed this case a (-8) because Russia already had troops in place as peacekeepers and controlled the entire area before the conflict began. Moreover, after just five days, Russia was primed to seize all of Georgia, insomuch that Saakashvili began reaching out to the global community looking for support. However, Russia pulled back and maintained its position before the conflict (Galeotti 2023, 40).

The fifth criterion of my coding schema is to assess indicators that illustrate whether Russia's objectives were temporary or permanent and to determine if Russia seized control of the political institution where it deployed its troops. While coding my fifth criterion, I assessed this case a (-10). Russia did not seize any control of the Georgian government once it met its objective. It withdrew forces and returned to the status quo (Galeotti 2023, 40).

The coding schema assessed an overall score of (-34), depicting Russia as having a significant defensive stance. However, while acknowledging some offensive elements, the study posits that security concerns on its border primarily drove Russia's behavior.

Case 4: Coding Analysis of the 2008 Georgian Conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia		
Precipitating Event:	Analysis: Yes/No	Score: In the analysis, a yes response indicates an expansionist (offensive) act and receives a positive score. In the analysis, a no response indicates an insecure (defensive) act and receives a negative score.
Did Russia deploy troops without verbal provocation?	No	-8
Did Russia deploy troops without any actual provocation, including military or weaponry advancements, military exercises directed at Russia, or political coercion between other powers?	No	-8
Did Russia deploy troops before the conclusion of or attempt to conduct diplomatic resolutions?	Yes	0
Did Russia assume complete control of the military institutions after reaching its objectives?	No	-8
Did Russia assume complete control of the political institutions after reaching its objectives?	No	-10
Final Score:		-34

The 2014 Annexation of Crimea: Throughout Eastern Europe, few events have garnered as much criticism as Russia's decision to deploy troops into Crimea. This case study

focuses on the factors that motivated Russia to move its troops into the region. By delving into Russian motivations and the intricacies that inspired them, I aim to highlight the core reasons that compelled Russia to take such an aggressive move.

To better understand why this event happened, this case study examines various factors that led to Russia's decision, including historical context, international provocations, security concerns, and Russian geopolitical interests related to the Black Sea and Crimea. Crimea's significance as a geopolitical stronghold for Russia was pivotal in influencing Russia's decision to initiate the conflict.

The relationship between Ukraine, Russia, and Crimea is extensive. Crimea was originally part of the USSR until it collapsed in 1991. At that time, Ukraine absorbed Crimea, and even though Crimea was now part of Ukraine, Russia still maintained its most extensive naval base in the Crimean city of Sevastopol, making Crimea's strategic position critical for Russia. Not only does it maintain its most extensive naval base in Crimea, but that base sits on the Black Sea, thus providing Russia with a critical protection point for Russia to thwart adversarial attacks. If Crimea were to fall under the control of an adversarial military power or alliance, it would pose a clear threat to Russian sovereignty, leading to a significant shift in relative power dynamics for Russia (Menkiszak 2016).

Looking beyond Crimea's importance to Russia, the geopolitical factors that initiated the annexation of Crimea began in 1996. President Bill Clinton's administration aimed to begin admitting Eastern European states from the Soviet territory into NATO (Mitchell 1996). In 1997, fifty foreign policy experts, including academics, diplomats, retired military, and foreign policy experts, penned an open letter dated June 26, 1997, to President Clinton expressing their concerns about any NATO expansion into Eastern Europe (Arms Control Association n.d.). The letter in part read:

> "(…) In Russia, NATO expansion, which continues to be opposed across the entire political spectrum, will strengthen the nondemocratic opposition, undercut those who favor reform and cooperation with the West, bring the Russians to question the entire post-Cold War settlement" and "Because of these serious objections, and in the absence of any reason for rapid decision, we strongly urge that the NATO expansion process be suspended while alternative actions are pursued (…)"(Arms Control Association n.d.).

In 1999, despite the internal concerns from within the administration, The US government coerced NATO to admit the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary into the alliance. At the time, William Burns, currently the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, was stationed in Moscow as the U.S. Embassy's political officer. He criticized the US government's direction toward including old Soviet states in NATO expansion as "needlessly provocative" (Suny 2022).

Subsequently, in 2004, George Bush's administration expanded Russian provocation when NATO admitted three states that were part of the former Soviet Union: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. NATO also admitted the Eastern European states of Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Slovenia (Gidadhubli 2004; Suny 2022).

Even more than that, on April 2, 2008, the Bush administration and NATO went even further with a statement that followed that year's NATO summit in Bucharest when NATO made a Summit Declaration regarding Ukraine and announced its intent to admit Ukraine into the alliance. George Bush's administration strongly advocated for a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for the two nations, but Germany, France, and other NATO members successfully resisted the political pressure to commence a MAP, resulting in the alliance voting against it (Reuters 2008a). That statement read:

> "NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO. Both nations have made valuable contributions to Alliance operations. We welcome the democratic reforms in Ukraine and Georgia and look forward to free and fair parliamentary elections in Georgia in May. MAP is the next step for Ukraine and Georgia on their direct way to membership"(NATO n.d.).

Russia did not react well. A Russian Foreign Ministry Official stated that allowing Ukraine into NATO would be a "huge strategic mistake" (Reuters 2008). Moreover, Vladimir Putin clearly stated that NATO expansion encroaching on Russian borders in any capacity was a "direct threat" to Russia's Sovereignty (Dawar 2008). Putin went even further, stating that if NATO is adamant about admitting Ukraine into NATO, then Crimea and Eastern Ukraine will not be part of that admission (Mearsheimer 2022). Putin was not the only person in Russia concerned; some in the US also found these goals troubling.

The statement was so concerning for Burns that it inspired him to write Condoleezza Rice, the then-U.S. Secretary of State. He was adamant in his letter that the elites in Russia would view this act as a provocation and a direct challenge to Russian sovereignty. He continued that Russian elites felt that admitting Ukraine into NATO would be crossing the brightest of all red lines, and the concerns continued to grow for Russia (Mearsheimer 2022).

Even further, on February 7, 2010, in what the world saw as a free and democratic election, Ukraine elected Viktor Yanukovych to the Presidency (Bouchet and Lutsevych 2013). Yanukovych's presidency began with a political divide; instead of appointing a cabinet that included politicians from the opposing Orange political party, he only included hard-liners aligned with his political direction (Bell 2014). Moreover, Yanukovych had close ties with Russia and, in November 2013, was supposed to sign the European Association Agreement (EAA), which was an economic deal with the EU that would have integrated

Ukraine into the European system. Instead, he accepted a fifteen billion dollar counteroffer from Putin (Bell 2014; Mearsheimer 2014). Many Ukrainian citizens were displeased with Yanukovych and took to the streets.

The protests erupted in Kyiv in November 2013 and lasted nearly three months. The protests expanded at the onset with the involvement and encouragement of the United States. The U.S. officials were displeased with Yanukovych's decision not to sign the EAA and utilized the protests in Kyiv to try to push Yanukovych out. Iryna Solonenbko, a Ukrainian scholar, pointed out that U.S. agencies like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) shared the same complex as the US Embassy in Ukraine. These two agencies had been the backbone of funding for Ukrainian civil unrest (Marcetic n.d.). Two months before the protests erupted, the President of NED wrote, "The opportunities are considerable, and there are important ways Washington could help." This statement intended to give direction to fund such groups as New Citizen. Journalist Mark Ames uncovered and reported that New Citizen received hundreds of thousands of dollars from US democracy promotion initiatives. Moreover, the Financial Times also reported that the funding "played a big role in getting the protest to overthrow Yanukovych up and running" (Marcetic n.d.).

By February 2014, hundreds had died, and Western emissaries traveled to Kyiv in an attempt to resolve the unrest; on February 14, government officials and protesters agreed to allow Yanukovych to complete his term and remain in power until the elections. Subsequently, the deal unraveled the following day, and political pressures forced Yanukovych to flee Ukraine in exile for Russia (Mearsheimer 2014).

The U.S. government supported the coup, and Victoria Nuland, the US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, and Senator John McCain both participated in demonstrations that supported the uprising in Ukraine. The US Ambassador to

Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt, called the toppling of Yanukovych “a day for the history books.” Moreover, a leaked telephone call recording caught Nuland advocating for regime change, and it was clear that her objective was to select Arseniy Yatsenyuk as the new government’s Prime Minister. That goal reached its objective, and he was elected (Mearsheimer 2014). Had the United States abstained, it could have helped alleviate Putin’s fear of NATO, but it did not; instead, it exacerbated it.

Subsequently, the time had come, and Putin ordered Russian forces into Ukraine to seize Crimea on February 22. It was an easy victory that only took days, and Crimeans called for a referendum on whether to secede from Ukraine and join Russia or remain under Ukrainian control (Herszenhorn 2014). Russia makes up 60% of the ethnicities in the Crimean population, and the outcome was clear early on; exit polls showed that 93% of voters favored secession. Victory parties erupted in the Capital of Crimea (Simferopol), with thousands of Russian flags flying and the people chanting Russia. While this happened, Russian forces were active throughout Crimea (Herszenhorn 2014; Mearsheimer 2014). Russian forces lined the Ukrainian border and surrounded Ukrainian bases, pinning Ukrainian soldiers in place who refused to surrender. Many outsiders and the Ukrainian government were concerned about a military incursion into mainland Ukraine (Herszenhorn 2014).

With Russian forces in place and retaining a high level of control, it took only days to seize Crimea. After the seizure, Russia provided various levels of support for separatists in Eastern Ukraine, which included diplomatic support, advisers, and weapons. Russia retained military control of Crimea and lined the Ukrainian border with troops but did not cross into Ukraine until 2021, and Russia still controls Crimea to this day (Mearsheimer 2014).

Coding Russian Motivations During the 2014 Annexation of Crimea: The first criterion of my coding schema is to assess the presence or absence of verbal provocations that either preceded or did not precede Russian military troop deployments. While coding my first

criterion, I assessed a score of (-10). I determined that Russia received ample verbal provocations and felt there was a considerable impact on Russian behavior. It began under the Clinton administration with the first installation of Eastern European nations into NATO and subsequent moves by the Bush administration in 2008, where NATO was clear with its intent to create a MAP for Ukraine, further threatening Russian sovereignty (Dawar 2008; Mearsheimer 2022; NATO n.d.; Reuters 2008a, 2008b).

The second criterion of my coding schema is to assess the presence or absence of military provocation due to troop movements or coercion with exterior powers or alliances that either preceded or did not precede Russian military troop deployments. While coding my second criterion, I assessed this case a (-10). I considered the financial support provided by the US government, which funneled money through the NED and USAID, the two NGOs that propped up the 2013 uprising that resulted in the overthrow and exile of Yanukovych, a Russian ally. Subsequently, the US hand-picked the Prime Minister who replaced Yanukovych, thus bolstering my assessment that Russia was concerned about NATO encroachment. (Dawar 2008; Mearsheimer 2022; NATO n.d.; Reuters 2008a, 2008b).

The third criterion of my coding schema is to assess whether the Russian troop deployment occurred before the attempt or conclusion of or without any attempt to find a diplomatic resolution. While coding my third criterion, I assessed this case a (0). I considered not only Putin's objections but also the numerous Russian official's objections to the West and NATO's intent to admit Ukraine into NATO. Putin's objections went so far as to say that if the West is insistent on admitting Ukraine into NATO, it would do so without Crimea. However, it became apparent that Russia did not make significant efforts to resolve the conflict through negotiations, and ultimately, it seemed that the United States was not open to negotiation either. (Dawar 2008; Mearsheimer 2022; NATO n.d.; Reuters 2008a, 2008b).

The fourth and fifth criterion of my coding schema is to assess indicators that illustrate whether Russia's objectives were temporary or permanent and to determine if Russia seized control of the military and political institution where it deployed its troops or whether its troops withdrew. I assigned the fourth and fifth criteria a score of (10) because Russia seized Crimea, assumed complete control of its military and political institutions, and continues to maintain control over them today (Mearsheimer 2022).

This case study provides critical data on how Russia perceived Western involvement with Ukraine and the states on its border regarding access to the Black Sea. The geopolitical context sheds light on Russian objectives regarding their border, especially concerning protecting its naval base in the Black Sea and Russian access to it.

The coding schema resulted in an overall score of (0), indicating that offensive and defensive factors influenced Russia's military deployment. It is crucial to consider the military ramifications for the Russian naval fleet if Crimea were to join NATO.

Case 5: Coding Analysis of the 2014 Annexation of Crimea		
Precipitating Event:	Analysis: Yes/No	Score: In the analysis, a yes response indicates an expansionist (offensive) act and receives a positive score. In the analysis, a no response indicates an insecure (defensive) act and receives a negative score.
Did Russia deploy troops without verbal provocation?	No	-10
Did Russia deploy troops without any actual provocation, including military or weaponry advancements, military exercises directed at Russia, or political coercion between other powers?	No	-10
Did Russia deploy troops before the conclusion of or attempt to conduct diplomatic resolutions?	Yes	0
Did Russia assume complete control of the military institutions after reaching its objectives?	Yes	10

Did Russia assume complete control of the political institutions after reaching its objectives?	Yes	10
Final Score:		0

The 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine: Due to Ukraine's dense geopolitical history, particularly concerning Crimea, many factors that apply to the 2014 Annexation of Crimea are relevant to this case study, especially concerning the geopolitical ambitions of Russia, external states, and military alliances. As a result, we observe redundant data mirroring the factors analyzed in the 2014 Annexation of Crimea case study.

The geopolitical connections between Ukraine and Crimea go back centuries, but more importantly, an immediate connection dates back to the collapse of the USSR when Crimea came under the control of Ukraine, which is crucial for context in this case study.

The underlying security concerns for Russia concerning Ukraine began in 1999 when the USSR collapsed. At that time, Ukraine absorbed Crimea while Russia simultaneously assumed control of the USSR naval base in the Crimean city of Sevastopol, making Crimea a critical strategic position for Russia (Arms Control Today 1992; Menkiszak 2016). This naval base, the largest for Russia, is also located on the Black Sea, making unbridled access to the Black Sea critical for Russia to maintain a secure border and service its naval fleet. For an adversarial nation or military alliance to control, that easement could prove catastrophic to Russia, making that territory vital to Russian security (Menkiszak 2016).

The fear surrounding the precarious positioning of the Russian Naval base in Sevastopol was exacerbated by the actions of Bill Clinton, the President of the United States. In 1996, Clinton declared his goal of admitting states that once were part of the Soviet Union into NATO. Clinton's goal came to fruition in 1999 when NATO admitted the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary into NATO. Then, making matters worse, in 2004, NATO

admitted Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania into the alliance and did so at the direction of George Bush's administration (Gidadhubli 2004).

At the behest of the Bush administration during the 2008 NATO summit in Bucarest, the alliance attempted to form a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Ukraine to prepare the state for admittance into NATO, further provoking Vladimir Putin and Russian officials. During the hearings, Germany, France, and Russia were able to block the initiation of a MAP concerning Ukraine (Khan 2008). Following the summit, NATO officials made a public statement indicating their intent to prepare Ukraine for NATO; the statement read:

> "NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO. Both nations have made valuable contributions to Alliance operations. We welcome the democratic reforms in Ukraine and Georgia and look forward to free and fair parliamentary elections in Georgia in May. MAP is the next step for Ukraine and Georgia on their direct way to membership" (NATO n.d.).

Following the statement, a Russian Foreign Ministry Official said the move to bring Ukraine into NATO would be a "huge strategic mistake" (Reuters 2008b). Vladimir Putin elaborated on that statement, asserting that Russia views NATO expansion toward its borders as nothing short of a "direct threat" to its security (Dawar 2008). Moreover, Putin became enraged after the 2008 NATO declaration and warned that it would happen without Ukraine's Eastern section if Ukraine were to join NATO (Mearsheimer 2022).

At the time of the 2008 NATO summit, William Burns, the current Director of the CIA, was the U.S. Ambassador to Moscow. The NATO statement encouraged Burns to write a letter to the then-U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, expressing concerns about admitting Ukraine into NATO. He was precise with his words and said that Russian elites

would see such a move as aggressive and provocative and that they would see it as crossing the brightest of all red lines (Mearsheimer 2022).

Further provocation came in 2013 when the United States helped oust Viktor Yanukovych, the Ukrainian President who had gone through and won a democratic election in 2010 (Bouchet and Lutsevych 2013). Yanukovych had close ties with Russia, and Putin considered him an ally. In 2013, Yanukovych agreed to sign the European Association Agreement (EAA), which was an economic deal with the EU, but instead, Putin enticed Yanukovych to forgo that deal with a fifteen billion dollar counteroffer, and Yanukovych accepted it (Bell 2014; Mearsheimer 2014).

This decision displeased not only US officials but also many Ukrainian citizens. The United States used the displeasure in Ukraine to their advantage. As protests began in Ukraine, the US capitalized on them and funded an effort that converted the protests into a complete uprising.

Iryna Solonenbko, a Ukrainian scholar, uncovered documents that implicated U.S. agencies like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) in funding the Ukrainian uprise. Coincidentally, both organizations are in the same compound as the United States Embassy in Ukraine, and records show that these two agencies had been the backbone that funded the Ukrainian civil unrest (Marcetic n.d.).

Moreover, two months before the protests erupted, the President of NED wrote, “The opportunities are considerable, and there are important ways Washington could help.” Journalist Mark Ames uncovered and reported that New Citizen received hundreds of thousands of dollars from US democracy promotion initiatives. Moreover, the Financial Times reported that the funding “played a big role in getting the protest to overthrow Yanukovych up and running” (Marcetic n.d.). This effort by the United States not only

sparked the 2014 annexation of Crimea but also emboldened Russian fears concerning US intentions with Ukraine.

U.S. government officials like Victoria Nuland, the US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, and Senator John McCain supported the uprising and participated in anti-Yanukovych demonstrations. Geoffrey Pyatt, the US Ambassador to Ukraine, called the removal of Yanukovych "a day for the history books." Furthermore, a telephone call recording was leaked, which caught Nuland calling for regime change to remove Yanukovych and install Arseniy Yatsenyuk as Ukraine's Prime Minister. Yatsenyuk became the Prime Minister when Yanukovych had to flee to Russia in exile following the US-sponsored uprising in Ukraine (Mearsheimer 2014).

The annexation of Crimea resulted in Russian troops lining the Ukrainian border and surrounding Ukrainian military bases, pinning Ukrainian soldiers in place who were refusing to surrender. Many outsiders and the Ukrainian government were concerned about a military incursion into mainland Ukraine (Herszenhorn 2014).

Tensions stayed mild following Yanukovych's exile, Crimea's annexation, and the election of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, but there were tensions, and due to the poor execution by the Ukrainian military during the Crimean conflict, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko ordered a complete overhaul of Ukraine's military. NATO supported this and began training Ukrainian forces, providing further provocation for Russia (Mearsheimer 2014). NATO provocation reached its climax in September 2021 when the United States and Ukraine hosted a week-long naval military exercise directed at Russia called Operation Sea Breeze, which included twenty-nine other nations (Åslund et al. 2021; Dixon 2021). As a result of this military collusion, Putin became increasingly concerned.

When Joe Biden took office, tensions between Ukraine and Russia were calm, but Biden has long been committed to bringing Ukraine into NATO while maintaining a hawkish

position toward Russia. When the Biden administration assumed control of the Oval Office, it resumed pushing the agenda, which had been stagnant since the annexation of Crimea, to admit Ukraine into NATO. This effort culminated with NATO publicly stating its intention to do so on June 14, 2021(Åslund et al. 2021).

As a result, on December 17, 2021, Russia sent letters to Washington and NATO demanding a written guarantee that Ukraine would not join NATO, that no offensive weapons would end up in Ukraine, and that NATO forces in Eastern Europe would retreat to the west. Putin also made many public statements expressing his concerns (Mearsheimer 2022). Putin attempted to initiate negotiations, but rather than negotiate, the US responded with a statement to Russia that came from the United States Secretary of State, Anthony Blinken, who said, “There is no change. There will be no change” (Mearsheimer 2022). Russia invaded Ukraine two months later.

Coding Russian Motivations During the 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine: The first criterion of my coding schema is to assess the presence or absence of verbal provocations that either preceded or did not precede Russian military troop deployments. While coding my first criterion, I determined they had received verbal provocation. It began in 2008 when NATO announced they were working with Ukraine to create a MAP to prepare Ukraine to enter the alliance, which sparked a stanch response by Putin and Russian officials. In part, they stated that allowing Ukraine into NATO would cross a red line and create a direct threat to Russian sovereignty. President Biden continued the rhetoric when he took office in 2021, and NATO sustained Biden’s position in June of that same year with a statement insofar as they planned to reboot the effort to create a MAP for Ukraine to enter NATO. To my mind, Russia’s security concerns regarding the Eastern portion of Ukraine are legitimate, and Russia clarified its concerns on numerous occasions. As a result, I coded this section a (-10).

The second criterion of my coding schema is to assess the presence or absence of military provocation due to troop movements or coercion with exterior powers or alliances that either preceded or did not precede Russian military troop deployments. While coding my second criterion, I determined that Russia also received physical provocation from the United States and NATO. It began when the US funded an uprising in Ukraine that resulted in the ousting of Viktor Yanukovych insofar as he had to flee the state in exile. Yanukovych was a Russian ally, and the US hand-selected Arseniy Yatsenyuk as Ukraine's Prime Minister after Yanukovych fled. Yatsenyuk is pro-West and willing to work with Western powers.

Moreover, further provocation came from the NATO training of Ukrainian troops after the 2014 annexation of Crimea. However, the most egregious act was a multi-state naval training exercise called Operation Sea Breeze that the US and Ukraine hosted jointly, which included thirty-two nations that performed exercises directed at Russia (Åslund et al. 2021; Dixon 2021). After considering the actions by Western powers, I have determined that Russia had ample provocation to deploy troops, and as a result, I have coded this category a (-10).

The third criterion of my coding schema is to assess whether the Russian troop deployment occurred before the attempt or conclusion of or without any attempt to find a diplomatic resolution. While coding my third criterion, I determined that Russia had tried to resolve its security concerns before the decision to deploy troops. When NATO first announced its intention to create a MAP for Ukraine, Putin and Russian officials made it clear that that was a red line that NATO could not cross (Mearsheimer 2022; Reuters 2008b). Additionally, Putin dispatched letters to Washington and NATO demanding assurances that NATO would not admit Ukraine into the alliance, at which point the US, Ukraine, and NATO could have begun negotiating, but they did not. Instead, their response through Anthony Blinken was that nothing would change (Mearsheimer 2022). As a result, I coded this section a (-4) because although negotiations never actually began, to my mind, Putin was publically

clear about his security concerns, and he dispatched letters to NATO and the United States to try and initiate negotiations, from which the response was provocative.

The fourth and fifth criterion of my coding schema is to assess indicators that illustrate whether Russia's objectives were temporary or permanent and to determine if Russia seized control of Ukraine's military and political institutions or whether its troops withdrew. I assessed a score of (0) for both categories because the war is still progressing, but the indication is that Russia does not intend to seize control of the Ukrainian military or governmental institutions. It is worth noting that Putin claims that the agreement was reached in Istanbul and signed by Russian officials and Ukrainian negotiators, which would have had Russia withdraw its troops from Ukraine, and Ukraine agreed not to join NATO. According to Putin, the deal was agreed on and signed by negotiating teams from both states, but Boris Johnson, who at the time was the United Kingdom's Prime Minister, convinced Ukraine to walk away from the agreement (Pravda 2024).

In analyzing this case study, I took into account several significant factors. These include Russia's concerns regarding access to the Black Sea, the protection of its naval assets, and broader geopolitical security anxieties. These anxieties stem from ongoing pressure from the United States and NATO, particularly regarding the potential admission of Ukraine into NATO. I utilized my coding framework to study five distinct categories to assess Russian intent. This case study provides critical insight into Russia's fundamental idea concerning Ukraine and its geopolitical position when considering its admittance into NATO.

The coding schema assessed an overall score of (-24), indicating Russia's significant level of insecurity. However, I feel it essential also to acknowledge that the Russian military was the aggressor; I determined that its behavior was overwhelmingly a result of security concerns and NATO. It is worth noting that Russia has indicated on multiple occasions its

willingness to withdraw its forces from Ukraine under the condition that Ukraine does not join NATO and that NATO refrains from stationing nuclear weapons on the Russian border.

Case 6: Coding Analysis of the 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine		
Precipitating Event:	Analysis: Yes/No	Score: In the analysis, a yes response indicates an expansionist (offensive) act and receives a positive score. In the analysis, a no response indicates an insecure (defensive) act and receives a negative score.
Did Russia deploy troops without verbal provocation?	No	-10
Did Russia deploy troops without any actual provocation, including military or weaponry advancements, military exercises directed at Russia, or political coercion between other powers?	No	-10
Did Russia deploy troops before the conclusion of or attempt to conduct diplomatic resolutions?	No	-4
Did Russia assume complete control of the military institutions after reaching its objectives?	NA	0
Did Russia assume complete control of the political institutions after reaching its objectives?	NA	0
Final Score:		-24

Summary: This thesis analyzes Russian military deployments in Eastern Europe in the post-Cold War era and aims to discern the motivations behind their behavior. The study employs a process tracing methodology to qualitatively analyze six significant military engagements carried out by Russia. I have evaluated each engagement within the frameworks of defensive and offensive realism theories. I posit that defensive motivations and external security concerns predominantly explain Russian behavior. However, it is also essential to acknowledge the limited influence of offensive and expansionist goals.

Conclusion: This research suggests that it is best to explain Russian military deployments in Eastern Europe through a nuanced lens that integrates multiple theoretical perspectives. While defensive realism, when underscored by security concerns, guides Russian troop deployments, some aspects of offensive realism and expansionist aspirations also play a role. When examining Russian troop deployments, we discover the complexity of Russian military strategies and the need for policymakers and scholars to consider various factors, including geopolitical dynamics and Russia's internal political motivations. This comprehensive approach offers valuable insights in predicting and responding to future Russian military actions in the region.

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