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RUSSIAN INTERFERENCE IN ABKHAZIA AND SOUTH OSSETIA: AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The year 1991 was not only the year of the Soviet Union's dissolution, but also the year in which secessionist movements arose in several post-Soviet states. Two of these movements, in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, led to full-scale war and remain unresolved to this day. As these territories have been unable to secede completely from their parent state, Georgia, and establish themselves as independent states, they have sought support from the Russian Federation, especially since the year 2000, when Vladimir Putin first became President. Most scholars have concluded that Russia is strengthening its relationships with these territories out of a desire to annex them and that South Ossetia is further along the path to annexation than Abkhazia. Theorizing that Russia is increasing Abkhazia and South Ossetia's reliance on the Putin government as a prelude to annexation, I examine the ethnic makeups of these territories and their underdeveloped political institutions in order to explain how Russia's involvements differ between the two territories.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The Soviet Union's diversity was one of its defining features. Home to over one hundred ethnic groups of varying population sizes, this diversity soon showed itself to be a liability for the government. Some minority groups complained of discrimination, claiming that the government neglected their needs and suppressed their culture. These experiences led to widespread discontent among members of minority groups. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 instantly resulted in the creation of fifteen newly-independent states from the fifteen Soviet republics, each with its own titular ethnic majority and a plethora of minority groups. However, the grievances of smaller ethnic groups after 1991 largely went unaddressed, as they had been during Soviet times. Secessionist movements arose in several post-Soviet states in 1991, in some cases eventually leading to full-scale war. Over two and a half decades later, two of these conflicts remain unresolved, threatening the stability of the Caucasus region.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia are two small regions that are internationally regarded as belonging to Georgia. Since 1991, they have attempted to secede from Georgia and establish themselves as independent states. As Georgia is unwilling to allow these territories to secede, both Abkhazia and South Ossetia have looked to the Russian Federation for support, especially since Vladimir Putin first became the Russian President in 2000. Observers have noted that South Ossetia's relationship with the Russian Federation appears much closer than Abkhazia's, despite the numerous similarities between the two territories. My thesis investigates the relationships between the Russian Federation and these territories, guided by the following

question: why has the Russian Federation become involved in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and why has the form of their involvement- political, military, and economic- differed in each region?

In recent years, Russia's growing involvement in conflicts all over the world has come to be of concern to the international community. Russia's involvement in the Syrian Civil War complicates an already-complex conflict and indicates that President Putin seeks to use the instability in the Middle East to his own expand Russia's sphere of influence and regain its former superpower status. Distant states, such as the United States and Germany, have uncovered evidence of Russian interference in their national elections. Russia's neighbors fear for their own security, having witnessed Russia's swift annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, its cultivation of "frozen conflict zones" in Moldova, and its large-scale military exercises in the Baltics. The cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are yet another example of how Russia has used its involvement in world affairs to flex its muscles. Georgia is Russia's main rival in the Caucasus region and Georgian stability is significantly affected by the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia; were either of these territories to become independent states or to become part of Russia, Georgia would be greatly weakened. Knowledge of Russia's relationships with Abkhazia and South Ossetia is crucial to our understanding of its geopolitical goals and may assist us in predicting what Russia's next moves might be.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia have received little scholarly attention, given the difficulty of finding accurate, unbiased sources of information about them. Despite this, these territories occupy an important place in the field of frozen conflict research. This thesis builds upon the scholarly consensus that South Ossetia is much farther on the road to annexation by Russia than Abkhazia is. However, I depart from the existing literature in that I attempt to not only describe

and analyze the different types of Russian involvement, but also to explain how it is shaped by ethnic relations in these target territories and by the condition of these territories' internal political institutions. To accomplish these goals, I conduct a qualitative analysis of Russian involvement in South Ossetia and Abkhazia using a case study method. Data about ethnic relations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia were obtained from two data sets compiled by the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich). Data about political rights and civil liberties were obtained from Freedom House's *Freedom in the World* project. Bilateral agreements between Russia and each territory proved to be rich sources of information about Russian involvement.

My comparative analysis illustrates, as many scholars have previously asserted, that South Ossetia has indeed traveled farther down the road to annexation than Abkhazia: in fact, South Ossetia, by now, has been largely absorbed into Russia. South Ossetia finds itself reliant on Russia for economic support, security provision, and the completion of day-to-day administrative activities. The fact that Russia has stealthily annexed South Ossetia, without an official declaration of its intent to do so, and has made gestures to do the same with Abkhazia, has serious implications for countries that neighbor Russia and were previously part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and other regions in which Russia has entrenched itself play vital roles in international politics and merit further study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Summary

An examination of scholarly literature related to Abkhazia and South Ossetia yields evidence of few major disagreements in the field. In the vast majority of works, the authors largely agree that Russia is strengthening its relationships with these territories not out of humanitarian concern, or of support for their claims to independence, but out of a desire to eventually annex them. However, the literature does expose a divergence of opinion regarding the extent to which inhabitants welcome Russian interference in their affairs. There also exists a question as to the legal justifications of secession and of Russia's involvement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Nearly all studies on this topic were conducted in a qualitative manner; what quantitative data were available were either estimates or outdated by several years. While my thesis is largely qualitative in nature, additional quantitative studies would have been useful to its development. Many studies were either written before major world events that will likely affect Russian interference in Abkhazia or South Ossetia, or they do not assign due importance to these events. In addition, there are very few recent studies that explicitly interpret Russia's involvement in post-Soviet de facto states as efforts to increase their reliance on Russia. Most studies I have read instead view Russian involvement in territories like Abkhazia and South Ossetia as a vehicle to weaken and distract Georgia, one of Russia's geopolitical foes. While Russian involvement does

succeed in doing this, I believe that the Russian government is pursuing an additional goal: to annex Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

De facto states, secession, and survival

Given that there are so few de facto states and frozen conflicts worldwide, I found it both possible and necessary to learn about those besides Abkhazia and South Ossetia in order to put my research into context. Rein Müllerson's comparative study of Kosovo, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia examines how states deal with secessionist movements (2009, 2). He theorizes that while all secessionist conflicts are similar by nature, three characteristics definitively mark them apart from one another: the character of the parent states; the type of parent state (pre-modern, modern, and post-modern); and the ease, costs, and benefits of secession (Müllerson 2009, 5-6). He writes that the situations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are more influenced by recent events and by the actions of great powers than they are by these territories' *historical* relationships with Georgia, Russia, and the West (Müllerson 2009, 10, 13). Significantly, Müllerson argues that a secessionist movement should only be recognized as legitimate if the minority group in question is so discriminated against that they cannot participate economically, politically, socially, and culturally (2009, 19). Though I include a section on the histories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, that section includes updated information on "recent events" and the "great powers" in order to satisfy what I believe is a need to discuss both the recent and the distant past (Müllerson 2009, 10, 13).

In a qualitative study, Sanchez examines Transnistria, a frozen conflict zone that is considered by the international community to be part of Moldova (2009, 153). Transnistria is

infamous for its government corruption, poverty, weapons trafficking, and human trafficking (Sanchez 2009, 154-170). Transnistria's role as a site for violent transnational crime, its physical location, and its reliance on cheap Russian natural gas cause concern for NATO and the EU (Sanchez 2009, 154-170). Sanchez explains that these factors are barriers to reintegration with Moldova (2009, 170). Sanchez and Müllerson agree that the opinions of the residents of frozen conflict zones are far less important than the desires of the great powers (Sanchez 2009, 172-173; Müllerson 2009, 16, 24). Unlike Müllerson, however, Sanchez does not examine whether secession is justifiable from a legal standpoint. While neither Abkhazia nor South Ossetia suffer from the same issues that Transnistria does, it is important to consider how their governments may foster or prevent activity that are viewed negatively by more powerful entities.

Though only a few de facto states exist, researchers have shown that it is possible to conduct rigorous studies to determine how likely it is that such states would become independent. In his 2017 study, Florea hypothesizes that a de facto state's peaceful reintegration with the parent state becomes less likely the greater its external military support, fragmentation, extent of state-building, and the number of veto players in the parent state government (2017, 337). The analysis of the data supports all hypotheses except that regarding veto players: Florea's findings show that the higher the number of veto players, the higher the likelihood of peaceful reintegration (2017, 347-348). His findings parallel those of Pokalova's study, which seeks to explain why resolution in frozen conflicts has historically taken so long to achieve. Pokalova theorizes that as a de facto state "consolidates," or engages in more state-building activities, its inhabitants increasingly desire complete independence (2015, 68). To illustrate this, she focuses on the frozen conflict zone of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan (2015, 72-73). She draws a correlation between Nagorno-

Karabakh's internal state-building activity and its unwillingness to reintegrate with Azerbaijan (Pokalova 2015, 69). Pokalova and Florea both assign importance to a de facto state's state-building processes, but only the latter considers other variables that influence the likelihood of reintegration (Florea 2017, 337). Some Russian activity in Abkhazia and South Ossetia may be referred to as state-building activity. Pokalova and Florea's studies prompted a shift in how I thought about Russia's political involvement in these territories, though I theorize that supporting such state-building activity is merely a tool to increase reliance on and gratefulness towards Russia, with the ultimate aim of annexing these territories

The type of government in a de facto state can have a significant impact on its survival. No post-Soviet de facto state is "likely to disappear" anytime soon, as they have all developed relatively stable governments based, at least in theory, on democratic principles (von Steinsdorff 2012, 202). Internal stability and a democratic government make it much more likely that a de facto state will be recognized by the international community (von Steinsdorff 2012, 203). Such potential recognition is vital to a de facto state: von Steinsdorff goes so far as to write "it is impossible to understand the internal political logic [of de facto states] without taking into consideration their permanent search for international attention, if not acceptance" (2012, 202). International acceptance can decrease the risk of armed conflict, provide access to global trade, and increase the likelihood of invitations to international organizations (von Steinsdorff 2012, 205). Russian political involvement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia may be masked as state-building activity. However, if this involvement in truth makes these de facto states less self-sufficient and democratic, the international community may be less likely to recognize them as independent states. But why would a state like Russia decide to officially accept the existence of

and involve itself in the affairs of a de facto state, especially one whose government is more democratic than its own?

Ethnicity and the “Us versus Them” Mentality

Frozen conflicts, particularly those that have led to the creation of a de facto state, are strongly influenced by ethnic grievances. However, scholars disagree as to whether the concept of ethnicity is natural and deeply ingrained in humanity, or if it is a tool used for personal or political gain, or if it “is socially constructed and internalized by individuals” (Herta 2017, 109). In any case, many post-Soviet de facto states consider themselves to be homelands for small, historically marginalized ethnic groups. The importance of ethnicity in these areas stems from the Soviet ethno-federalist system and from the alliance between Russian nationalists and nationalists of smaller groups (Herta 2017, 112). In the late Soviet period and immediately after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, smaller ethnic groups were concerned that the majority ethnic group in their union republic, and later fully-fledged independent state, would discriminate against them (Herta 2017, 113). In the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the new Georgian government was not prepared to handle complaints of ethnic discrimination. The situation eventually escalated to violent conflict that led to the creation of these two de facto states.

Participants in frozen conflicts often possess an “us versus them” mentality, particularly when ethnic tensions are high, that is exacerbated by the actions of patron states. In his 2013 work, Artman charts the waxing and waning of Russian power and President Putin’s desire to bolster his country’s presence on the world stage. He points to Russia’s granting of passports to inhabitants of Abkhazia and South Ossetians as a way of “consolidating its grip on the de facto

states” (2013, 689). He notes that the Abkhaz and South Ossetians were “eager” to obtain such passports, given the benefits attached to them (Artman 2013, 690). The passports tied their holders to Russia and, more importantly in some ways, made their holders feel like they were part “of a polity that was *not Georgia*” (Artman 2013, 693). This passportization is a potential example of exploitation of ethnic tensions in the pursuit of annexation and therefore relates directly to my theory.

The case of Russia’s invasion and occupation of Crimea is a clear example of how the concerns of a particular ethnic group may be used as justification for one country’s interference in the affairs of another. Crimea had been ruled by various states and empires throughout its history, but was part of the Russian Empire from 1783 onwards (Bebler 2015, 37). During the 19th and 20th centuries, the ethnically-diverse region was almost completely Russified (Bebler 2015, 37). From 1922 to 1954, Crimea was not part of the Ukraine Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR), but rather of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (SFSR) (Bebler 2015, 38). In 1954, the Soviet government transferred Crimea to the Ukraine SSR in action that was “illegal even in Soviet terms” because the transfer was not carried out according to established legal procedures (Bebler 2015, 38). After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the citizens of Crimea were not consulted as to whether they wanted to remain part of Ukraine or to be returned to Russia (Bebler 2015, 38). The Crimeans attempted to establish themselves as an independent state in the 1990s, but these efforts were subdued by the Ukrainian government (Bebler 2015, 39). Since then, the actions of the Russian government have largely supported my hypothesis, as the Russian government granted military, financial, and political support to Crimean separatists (Bebler 2015, 39-40). In addition, Russia openly discussed the possibility of annexing the region for many years and distributed Russian passports to Crimeans, just as it has done to the Abkhaz

and South Ossetians (Bebler 2015, 39-40). In 2014, during a power vacuum caused by the flight of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, the Speaker of the Russian State Duma was given a draft legislation; this legislation “justified the incorporation of parts of Ukraine into the Russian Federation on the grounds of alleged Ukrainian discrimination of national minorities,” referring to Russian speakers (Bebler 2015, 40). Within a month, Russian forces successfully occupied Crimea in an operation that was “obviously well-prepared, rehearsed in advance and professionally executed” (Bebler 2015, 41). Of course, the situation in Crimea is not a direct analog to those in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Despite the fact that many residents of Crimea were and are not ethnic Russians, Bebler states that Russia seems reluctant to annex Abkhazia and South Ossetia because their citizens are not ethnically or culturally Russian (2015, 37). However, would it not be easy for Russia to annex Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the grounds that their citizens, a majority of whom hold Russian passports, are under threat from the Georgian government? Could Russia not also cite the fact that the people of South Ossetia are ethnically indistinguishable from the inhabitants of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, a federal subject of Russia?

Reliance on Russia

The work of Ambrosio and Lange provided an important inspiration for this thesis. In their 2016 work, they theorize that through the use of bilateral agreements with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia has built up “considerable influence” in these territories (2016, 674). They examine the texts of 78 bilateral agreements between these two de facto states and Russia between 2008 and 2015 (Ambrosio & Lange 2017, 674). They find that both de facto states rely on Russia for their security and for economic support (Ambrosio & Lange 2017, 688). However,

Abkhazia and South Ossetia cannot be considered to be *equally* reliant on Russia: while the texts of many of these agreements were identical, the agreements that were not identical to one another granted Abkhazia more autonomy than South Ossetia (Ambrosio & Lange 2017, 682, 688). Ambrosio and Lange concluded that “deeper integration” between these de facto states and Russia is to be expected in the coming years, and that South Ossetia especially is “on a path to accession” (2017, 688-689). However, neither can be considered an “appendage” of Russia (2017, 688-689). This last conclusion conflicts with the findings of O’Loughlin, Toal, and Kolosov (2017). These researchers were interested in studying whether inhabitants of states that had experienced Russian interference felt that their area was part of the Russian world, a term associated with the Russian diaspora, with the Russian Orthodox Church, and with those regions that were part of the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union (2017, 746). In December 2014, they interviewed 4,833 residents of Transnistria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Crimea, and six oblasts (administrative regions) of Ukraine (O’Loughlin et al. 2017, 757). They find that a majority of respondents in Abkhazia and South Ossetia believed that their region was indeed part of the Russian world (O’Loughlin et al. 2017, 759-764). The researchers found that attitudes towards Russia and trust in Russian President Vladimir Putin showed significantly positive relationships with respondents’ answers to the question about their region being in the Russian world (O’Loughlin et al. 2017, 767-768). Their data conflict with Ambrosio and Lange’s assertion that Abkhazians are more reluctant than South Ossetians to accept Russian interference in their affairs, as their data do not show a significant difference in attitudes between these two populations.

Sorenson approaches South Ossetia and Russia’s relationship using a method similar to that of Ambrosio and Lange by specifically examining the Treaty on Alliance and Integration

(2016, 224-225). Russia claims that it carries out its involvements in South Ossetia with the intention of promoting the latter's ability to exercise "self-determination." Sorenson theorizes that Russia has been allowed to use South Ossetia to further its own goals in the region because the term "self-determination" is ill-defined and poorly enforced under international law (2016, 225). Sorenson argues that this has allowed Russia to essentially annex South Ossetia under the guise of humanitarian intervention (2016, 240). Sorenson, like Ambrosio and Lange, finds that bilateral agreements have laid the basis for ever-increasing Russian interference in these areas (Ambrosio & Lange 2017, 689; Sorenson 2016, 240). He also agrees with Müllerson that international law regarding interference in the affairs of other states is unclear, and that not all secessionist movements deserve to be deemed legitimate.

German agrees that Russia's involvement in these territories is not based solely on a humanitarian concern for their populations (2016, 157-158). Using a framework developed by Kolstø and Blakkisrud in their 2008 work on de facto states, German shows that without Russia, South Ossetia would be unable to function independently (2015, 158). It is clear to the international community that the South Ossetian government has left several responsibilities to Russia that it would normally carry out itself (German 2015, 159-163). However, German acknowledges that in its official communications with the South Ossetian government and with the public, the Russian government uses the language of statehood with regards to South Ossetia (2015, 159).

Relevance

The scholarly works summarized above each address at least one aspect of Russian involvement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia or of the current situation in other frozen conflict zones. However, no study that I have found includes contextual information about the histories of the chosen regions and about other frozen conflicts and analyzes the bilateral agreements between Russia and Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while also examining the current state of Russian involvement in those two territories. Müllerson (2009) even argues that the relevance of historical relationships between these areas are inconsequential to examinations of their current relationships. I disagree with this assessment, as the legacies of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union still linger today. I also have had great difficulty in finding scholarly works that explicitly interpret Russian involvement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as strategic pre-annexation activity. In contrast, I believe that this interpretation has become increasingly valid in recent years for reasons explained below. In this thesis, I justify my interpretation of Russian involvement in these territories by conducting detailed case studies that include historical information, analysis of bilateral agreements, and a synthesis of available qualitative information.

The time when I am writing this thesis, after the beginning of the war between Russia and Ukraine, presents an opportunity for me to differentiate it from the existing literature. Most studies were written prior to Russia's 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, but this event makes an examination of the situations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia much more urgent. It also lends greater credibility to the prediction that Russia will eventually annex one or both of the territories. The majority of the studies I have found were conducted or published before President Donald J. Trump took office. Prior events involving Russia and these territories, such

as the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, attracted a great deal of attention in the United States and even played a minor role in the 2008 presidential election. Though President Trump is only two years into his term, it is clear that his approach to Russia is quite different from that of his predecessors; increased Russian involvement in the Caucasus would not result in similar concern from the executive branch as the events of 2008 did. The current state of Russo-American relations, orchestrated long in advance by President Putin, presents an opportunity for Russia to become more aggressive in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. My study includes information about how the Crimean annexation has affected the situations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and about any action the United States has taken since January 2017 to address these issues.

Chapter 3

Historical Background

Introduction

The Caucasus region is one of the most complex regions of the former Russian Empire and Soviet Union. As it is home to dozens of ethnic groups, each with their own language and culture, the Caucasus has a fascinating and rich history. Despite its relatively small area, the region has long played a significant role on the world stage. It has been part of many of the world's great empires and the site of several decisive conflicts, each of which left a lasting influence on the cultures and peoples of the region. When analyzing the politics of frozen conflict zones like Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it is necessary to examine their histories individually, the history of the Caucasus region as a whole, and the region's relationship to the ruling capital.

Geography of the Caucasus



Figure 1

Map of Abkhazia and South Ossetia today (File 2017)

As with any region of the world, geography affected the history and cultures of the Caucasus. The Caucasus Mountains are divided into the Greater Caucasus, in the north of the region, and the Lesser Caucasus, in the south (Bruk, Gvozdetsky & Owen, 2017). The land north of the Greater Caucasus is referred to as Ciscaucasia, while the land to the south is referred to as Transcaucasia (Bruk, Gvozdetsky & Owen, 2017). These terms reflect Roman perceptions of the region (Forsyth 2013, 32). The two mountain chains run parallel to one another, from the northwest to the southeast (Bruk, Gvozdetsky & Owen, 2017). The approximately 170,000 square miles that make up the Caucasus are divided amongst Georgia, Russian, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and the three de facto states of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh (Bruk, Gvozdetsky & Owen, 2017).

In addition to being bordered by the Black and Caspian Seas, the Caucasus is home to many rivers and lakes and boasts over 2,000 glaciers (Bruk, Gvozdetsky & Owen, 2017). Various areas of the Caucasus have semiarid, desert-like, or subtropical climates (Forsyth 2013, 11). Though the Caucasus is largely mountainous, there are areas of steppes, plateaus, and thick forests (Bruk, Gvozdetsky & Owen, 2017). Historically, the rugged terrain made it difficult, in certain seasons, to travel through the region.

History of the Caucasus Before the Russian Empire

In ancient times, the various ethnic groups of the Caucasus were influenced by several great civilizations. From the ninth century BCE onward, the Greeks maintained colonies on the Black Sea, including some in what is now Abkhazia, which provided trade opportunities for the Caucasus peoples (Forsyth 2013, 18). From “at least the eighth century” BCE, nomadic

Caucasian tribes occasionally ventured into sedentary communities in Persia, prompting the Persians to fortify their frontier against raids (Forsyth 2013, 18). The Persians expanded their empire in the 600s BCE, but they only remained the region's great power until the time of Alexander the Great, who conquered much of the Caucasus (Forsyth 2013, 20). However, after Alexander's death and the founding of the Seleucid Empire, the Romans seized the opportunity to expand eastwards (Forsyth 2013, 20). Armenia and Caucasian Albania were conquered by the Romans around 64 BCE, but were lost a mere four years later (Forsyth 2013, 18). Marc Antony attempted to wrest control of the Caucasus from the Parthians in 36 BCE, but only succeeded in occupying Armenia (Forsyth 2013, 21).

Despite Antony's failure to regain control of the Caucasus, the Romans continued to dream of eastward expansion. Around 114 C.E., decades after an attempt by Nero to subdue the Caucasus, the Emperor Trajan finally conquered Armenia, Assyria, and Mesopotamia (Forsyth 2013, 21). During the reign of Marcus Aurelius, Armenia officially became a province of Rome and the Romans invaded the principality of Abazgia (Abkhazia) on the Black Sea (Forsyth 2013, 22). Despite the fact that Georgia was never conquered by Rome, Roman historians became important sources of information about the Georgians. From them we know that like the Armenians and the Abkhaz, the Georgians were subjects of the Persians or of Persian vassal states; however, their cultural development was still influenced by the frequent Roman military campaigns into the Caucasus (Forsyth 2013, 26).

The Caucasus was exposed to Christianity from the earliest stages of its development. Christianity originally came to the region through Syria and Asia Minor (Forsyth 2013, 27). Missionaries from Syria and Constantinople visited Abazgia and Georgia during this period (Forsyth 2013, 27). Armenian tradition states that the Armenians converted to Christianity in 301

CE; Christianity became the official state religion in 334 CE (Forsyth 2013, 27). The inhabitants of Georgia, Armenia, and surrounding areas had all largely converted to Christianity, by the end of the 4th century CE, but strictly adhered to different dogmas (Forsyth 2013, 27-28).

The historical record of the people now known in English as the Ossetians begins far after that of the Abkhaz. The Alans were a tribe which first appeared in the Caucasus in the second century BCE (Forsyth 2013, 32). They were overrun by the Huns, who migrated to the region in the fourth century CE, but they managed to survive and were eventually converted to Christianity by missionaries from Georgia or Constantinople (Forsyth 2013, 33). The Alans' freedom did not last long: the Khazars conquered their territory in the sixth century CE (Forsyth 2013, 33).

From the 5th to 7th centuries CE, the Caucasus was largely divided into areas of Persian and Byzantine influence (Forsyth 2013, 34). However, the Persian Empire faced a "disintegration" in 626 and the Christian nations soon faced a new foe: Islam (Forsyth 2013, 34). From the 630s onwards, the "Muhammadan theocratic empire" spread quickly across the Arabian Peninsula, Mesopotamia, and Persia (Forsyth 2013, 34). The advancing army spread their religion by force; Georgia and Armenia were invaded for the first time by the Arab army in 642, but it took until 650 to fully subdue Armenia (Forsyth 2013, 34-38). The prince of Georgia, having seen the brutal success of the Arabs, concluded a treaty "on the caliph's standard terms," which allowed the Caucasus region some measure of autonomy (Forsyth 2013, 38). The Arabs began to refer to all of South Caucasia as *Arminiya* (Forsyth 2013, 38). Loyalties of the small Caucasian principalities and kingdoms frequently switched between Byzantium, the spiritual center of the Christian denomination they followed, and the Arab conquerors and, despite the Muslim expansion, fighting between these two powers continued (Forsyth 2013, 40). However,

in the late ninth century, the once-mighty caliphate disintegrated into smaller emirates (Forsyth 2013, 45). The Armenians and Georgians took the opportunity to declare independence and to form kingdoms (the Georgians formed two kingdoms) (Forsyth 2013, 46). In the late 10th century, however the Georgians conquered large areas of Armenia, and the two Georgian kingdoms united around the year 1008 (Forsyth 2013, 47). Armenia was further weakened by aggression from the Seljuq emirate, but the Georgians and Armenians fought them back, allowing Armenia to “exist as vassals of the Georgian kings” (Forsyth 2013, 48). Other Georgian principalities were freed from Seljuq rule by King Davit II the Builder’s armies in the early twelfth century (Forsyth 2013, 113).

Though they had freed themselves successively from Persian, Roman, and Arab domination, the peoples of the Caucasus were threatened by a new power in the early 13th century: the Mongols, led by Genghis Khan, fresh from their conquests of Siberia and northern China (Forsyth 2013, 125). The Georgian kingdom was weakened after years of battling the Khwarezmians and unable to adequately face the Mongols on the field of battle (Forsyth 2013, 131-132). Rather than risk the lives and livelihoods of her people, Georgia’s Queen Rusudan submitted to Mongol authority around 1231 (Forsyth 2013, 131-2). In 1259, however, a group of Georgians rebelled against Mongol rule, inspiring the next several Georgian vassals to gradually reassert their authority and take direct control over the lands that had formerly belonged to the Kingdom of Georgia (Forsyth 2013, 132-135). In the fourteenth century, King George V finally expelled the Mongols from Georgia, but after his illustrious reign, his country disintegrated: weakened by repeated invasions from the Mongols, led by Tamerlane, and by invasions by the Turks, Georgia split up into several smaller kingdoms and principalities, including the Kingdom of Imereti (Forsyth 2013, 149). The recorded history of the Alans is far less detailed during this

period: they migrated throughout the Caucasus and were occasionally pushed out of territory they had settled on by other nomadic tribes or by the Georgians (Forsyth 2013, 171).

In 1453, an event occurred that would shape the course of history: the fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks. While this was a momentous occasion with profound implications, it had a special meaning for the Georgians, who shared their Eastern Christian faith traditions with Constantinople: Georgia was considered a center of Christendom in the Caucasus, but was now politically and spiritually cut off from Europe (Suny & Djibladze, 2019). Now that the Georgians had lost an important ally, both the Persians and the Ottomans saw an opportunity to conquer this proud, influential people (Suny & Djibladze, 2019). Over the next century, the Georgians were “raided and pillaged by the Ottomans twice, and by the Persians more than a dozen times” but there were several very brief periods of independence (Forsyth 2013, 188). While some Georgian rulers converted to Islam to protect themselves, most Georgians remained faithful Christians and viewed their struggle as a religious one (Forsyth 2013, 188). During this period, the Persians deported and abducted large numbers of Georgian Christians as a tool of submission, while large numbers of Alans migrated to Georgia (Forsyth 2013, 193). Slowly but surely, however, various Georgian rulers were able to shake off the yokes of the Persians and the Ottomans, who had both, at various times, aided the Georgians in beating back the other power (Suny & Djibladze, 2019). Two of the Georgian kingdoms, Kartli and Kakheti, were reunited in the 1760s under King Erekle II, creating a stronger Georgian state (Suny & Djibladze, 2019). King Solomon I of Imereti defeated the Ottomans, expelling them from his own territories, in 1779 (Suny & Djibladze, 2019).

Georgian independence was short-lived. Erekle II’s reign was troubled by foreign raids and economic instability (Suny & Djibladze, 2019). Desperate to protect his kingdom, in 1783,

he signed the Treaty of Georgiyevsk with Russia, exchanging Russian suzerainty over Georgia for its independence (Suny & Djibladze, 2019). However, Russia did nothing to protect its new protectorate when it was invaded by Shah Agha Muhammad in 1795 (Forsyth 2013, 270). Erekle II died in 1797 and his successor too passed away in 1800 (Forsyth 2013, 270). Suddenly, using Georgia's vulnerability to foreign invasion and the poor management of its rulers as excuses, the Russian Tsar Alexander I declared the outright annexation of Georgia, its absorption into the Russian Empire (Forsyth 2013, 270-1). Only eastern Georgia was annexed immediately, as the west, as well as Abkhazia, was still occupied by the Ottomans (Forsyth 2013, 271, 290). By 1810, however, after wars between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, the rest of Georgia, including Abkhazia and the lands inhabited by the Alans, was occupied by Russia (Forsyth 2013, 271).

The Caucasus as Part of the Russian Empire

Once control over the Caucasus had been established, Russian imperial authorities did not hesitate to exercise their influence over all aspects of life. One of the Russian government's priorities was to Christianize the Caucasus according to Russian religious standards. The Georgian Orthodox Church was "subordinated to the Russian Church" in 1817 and its Georgian liturgy was replaced by the Church Slavonic liturgy (Forsyth 2013, 271). Members of the Georgian royal families were deported to Russia and were pressed to take up positions in the government and military (Forsyth 2013, 271). Georgian landowners were allowed to keep their land and, in exchange for "maintain[ing] order locally," could take positions in the military or government or be given noble titles (Forsyth 2013, 271). Some Muslim Georgians were newly

designated as “Turks” and many fled to Turkey in order to avoid discrimination in Georgia (Forsyth 2013, 271). Russification was strongest in major cities like Tbilisi, where “Russian colonial institutions” were built and city planning was carried out on a Russian model (Forsyth 2013, 298-291). Abkhazia was allowed to remain a protectorate of Russia until 1864, at which point Russia deposed the Abkhaz ruling family (Editors 2018). Two years later, Russia attempted to turn all Abkhaz freemen into serfs to complete Abkhazia’s integration into Russia, but this resulted in a massive uprising that led to thousands of Abkhaz fleeing to Turkey (Editors 2018).

Despite the Caucasus’ long relationship with Christianity, a significant number of its inhabitants were pagan, particularly the Ossetians, formerly known as the Alans. Russians first visited “Ossetia” (which was then part of Georgia) in the seventeenth century, but only became interested in Ossetian affairs in the 1760s (Forsyth 2013, 273). Russian military and natural resource expeditions in the late 1700s convinced the imperial government to annex Ossetia along with the rest of Georgia (Forsyth 2013, 273-4). In contrast to many other areas annexed by Russia, much of Ossetia “willingly swore loyalty to Russia” (Forsyth 2013, 274). However, there were conflicts between Ossetian chiefs and the Russians over “loss of toll revenue” and the maintenance of serfdom (Forsyth 2013, 274-275). Overall, relations between the Ossetians and Russian authorities were “friendly” and the Russians largely succeeding in improving Ossetian living standards (Forsyth 2013, 275-276). Russian relations with the Abkhaz were quite different, as many Abkhaz had remained Muslim after the Ottoman period ended and felt a kinship with countries like Turkey (Forsyth 2013, 290).

The Russian Revolution

Until the Russo-Japanese War, which lasted from 1904 to 1905 and ended in disaster for Russia, the tsarist government exercised complete control over internal matters and allowed little criticism or progress throughout the empire (Forsyth 2013, 321). After Russia's military failures, and after tsarist forces killed over one hundred peaceful demonstrators outside St. Petersburg's Winter Palace, those who were dissatisfied with the existing system felt justified in voicing their concerns (Forsyth 2013, 321). Several political parties, most of them espousing liberal views, sprang up throughout the empire (including in the very politically-active Caucasus) in 1905, and they succeeded in convincing Tsar Nicholas II to commit himself to "a manifesto stating that constitutional rule would be instituted" (Forsyth 2013, 322, 340). However, Nicholas II soon reneged on that promise and dismissed the newly-elected liberal Duma (parliament) (Forsyth 2013, 322-323). He also dismissed the second Duma, which was followed by two rightist Dumas that satisfied the tsar's standards for a deferential legislative body (Forsyth 2013, 323).

By 1917, Nicholas II had long since established himself as a conservative, reactionary ruler, easily influenced by his wife, Tsarina Alexandra, and by his advisors. He was "the main obstacle to progress" in a country that sought to meet the standards set by its European neighbors (Forsyth 2013, 329). Upon Russia's entrance into World War I in the summer of 1914, the tsar assumed greater power despite his ineptness; his actions, as well as the strength of the Central Powers' armies, gradually wore away public support for the war and for the tsarist government (Forsyth 2013, 329). Some of the Caucasus had been invaded by the Turks during the war but some Muslim groups, including the Ossetian Muslims, remained loyal to Russia (Forsyth 2013, 339, 343). The February Revolution of 1917 resulted in Nicholas' abdication and the end of Romanov rule (Forsyth 2013, 331-333). The various assemblies, people's councils, soviets, and

political parties across the empire debated the stances they would take on the revolution, the future of the country, and whether or not their region should secede; however, the Provisional Government reiterated “the first assertion in the 1906 constitution: ‘The Russian state is one and indivisible’” (Forsyth 2013, 331). However, in Georgia, “anti-Russian patriotism” was strong and the Ossetians created their own National Council in order to address the self-determination question (Forsyth 2013, 345; Saparov 2015, 68).

The Bolshevik communists had long held substantial political influence in Russia. Upon the return of their leader, Vladimir Lenin, from exile in Europe, the Bolsheviks enacted their plan to dominate post-revolutionary politics in Russia and to create the communist state of which they had dreamed (Forsyth 2013, 334). In the October Revolution of 1917, the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government and seized city after city, attempting to quell any counter-revolutionary activity they encountered (Forsyth 2013, 334). However, they did not immediately succeed, and the Russian Civil War dragged on until 1922 (Forsyth 2013, 334-336). The war also included violent reconquests of areas of the former Russian Empire which had attempted to secede after the revolutions, such as Georgia, which was controlled by a Menshevik government (Forsyth 2013, 347). In July 1918, as the Bolshevik army approached, the Abkhaz, who had formed their own SSR, signed a treaty with Georgia, making Abkhazia “part of Georgia *temporarily*,” though they resented Georgian control (Forsyth 2013, 380; Saparov 2015, 53-55). This treaty, as well as the constitution of the Georgian SSR, made it clear that Abkhazia was subordinate to Russia (Saparov 2015, 55). Unfortunately for the Georgians and the Abkhaz, their union was not sufficient to fight the Russian Bolshevik threat: by November, the entire Northern Caucasus, including all of Georgia and Abkhazia, had been captured by the Bolsheviks (Forsyth 2013, 385). The Bolsheviks backed several anti-Georgian rebellions in Ossetia between 1918 and

1920, with little permanent success (Saparov 2015, 69-70). While the White Army, aided by the Cossacks, expelled the Bolsheviks from the region in May 1919, the Red Army regained control after a short campaign in early 1921 (Forsyth 2013, 417-418, 424). Throughout 1921, the Ossetians tried to negotiate, first with the Georgian authorities, and then with the authorities who administered the whole of Caucasus, for a measure of autonomy for their region (Saparov 2015, 79-80). They drafted a constitution, using language similar to that contained in the treaty that united Abkhazia and Georgia (Saparov 2015, 80). Ultimately, the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast was created within Georgia (Saparov 2015, 86).

The Soviet Period

Despite its attempts to differentiate itself as much as possible from Imperial Russia, the Soviet Union treated the Caucasus region in quite a similar way as the old imperial government had. This was made possible by the region's insulating geography (Forsyth 2013, 442). Religious groups were persecuted as a rule, particularly the Muslim population and Orthodox populations in urban areas (Forsyth 2013, 441). Resistance efforts persisted until the late 1920s; those suspected of having political allegiances to foreign, but culturally familiar, countries, such as Turkey, or of resenting Soviet control, were monitored (Forsyth 2013, 441-442). The Soviets instituted the "nativization" policy by which official posts would at first be occupied by "non-indigenous, mainly Russian" people, while indigenous peoples were trained to eventually take on skilled positions (Forsyth 2013, 441).

The Ossetian and Abkhaz experience of the early Soviet period slightly differed from that of many other small ethnic groups in the region, though both groups still experienced

nativization and were resistant to collectivization (Forsyth 2013, 480-481). The eastern Caucasus was more sparsely populated and the Muslim population was smaller, so the Soviet government did not feel the need to heavily police the region (Forsyth 2013, 474, 478). Soviet authorities promoted literacy, both by carrying out literacy campaigns and by promoting publications in minority languages, as part of their nativization campaigns (Forsyth 2013, 477). The North Ossetian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was created within Russia in 1936, bringing the number of national regions for the Ossetians to two (Forsyth 2013, 487). Unlike in most other autonomous regions, South Ossetia's government enjoyed an unusual degree of autonomy and responsibility (Saparov 2015, 143). The Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) provided schools for the Abkhaz and Ossetians (Forsyth 2013, 499). The Soviets exploited the Caucasus' natural resources, particularly coal and metals, and its potential for hydropower production (Forsyth 2013, 502). In their brief period of independence, the Abkhaz prioritized cultural development and the founding of cultural and educational institutions, which continued to flourish in the early Soviet period (Saparov 2015, 150).

The Caucasus region suffered immensely during the Stalinist terror of the early 1930s. Joseph Stalin's right-hand man, Lavrenti Beria, the head of the Transcaucasian Joint State Political Directorate (secret police), participated eagerly in Stalin's political purges and in the destruction of what was left of the middle class (Forsyth 2013, 506-510). No ethnic group was too small or powerless to escape the secret police's oppression (Forsyth 2013, 518). Abkhazia's political status shifted: the region was "downgrad[ed]" from a Soviet Socialist Republic to an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Saparov 2015, 151). Even though the Soviets had imposed Cyrillic orthography on most other minority groups, the Abkhaz were forced to adopt a Georgian-based orthography; use of the Abkhaz language declined sharply (Saparov 2015, 151).

The literary and research journals that had flourished in South Ossetia during the 1920s came under intense scrutiny and began to publish only pieces on “politically neutral subjects” (Saparov 2015, 143). Even though the Soviet government recognized that the inhabitants of North and South Ossetia shared the same heritage, they were ordered to use two different alphabets so that the North Ossetians could “assimilate into Russian culture” and the South Ossetians could “assimilate into Georgian culture” (Saparov 2015, 144). Several Abkhaz cultural and educational institutions were closed or had their activities curtailed (Saparov 2015, 151). The Soviet government resettled large numbers of Georgians in Abkhaz territory in order to “change the population balance (Saparov 2015, 152).

From our modern point of view, it is difficult to imagine the shock that the ordinary Soviet citizen must have felt on 22 June 1941, when Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union, its former ally. Despite the fact that the invasion was a surprise, Soviet society immediately mobilized and prepared for the conflict, which became a personal one for many. In the summer of 1942, German forces invaded the North Caucasus, and despite resistance from inhabitants, they were able to move swiftly throughout the region (Forsyth 2013, 527). Inhabitants of these areas “underwent the same tribulations as in other regions,” such as mass executions, hostage-taking, and deportation to Germany to be used as slave labor; the small Jewish population faced deportation to concentration camps and brutal executions (Forsyth 2013, 527). In attempts to win the loyalty of those whom they oppressed with violence, the Germans reopened places of worship and encouraged decollectivization (Forsyth 2013, 529). Within six months, the Soviet army entered and reconquered the Northern Caucasus (Forsyth 2013, 533). In typical Soviet style, the government “arbitrarily branded” five small ethnic groups from the Caucasus as “traitor nations” and exiled them (Forsyth 2013, 534). The Caucasus region largely escaped

further consequences of World War II, besides the large numbers of Caucasus natives who died fighting for the Soviet Union.

Life for Soviet Caucasians improved drastically following World War II, particularly after the death of Stalin and the execution of Beria. Soviet officials granted Georgia, and the small ethnic territories within it, greater autonomy (Forsyth 2013, 560-561). Several changes that had been made during the Stalin years were reversed, allowing the Abkhaz and Ossetians to participate more openly in regional politics and leading to “the revival of cultural institutions” No ethnic group was too small or powerless to escape the secret police’s oppression (Saparov 2015, 144, 153). Thanks to the growth of subtropical plants, like grapes and lemons, and to massive infrastructure projects, Georgia’s economy thrived such that standards of living and the quality of education surpassed those in many other SSRs (Forsyth 2013, 564). Some of this improvement, however, was due to the “second economy” which allowed for the secretive private buying and selling of coveted consumer items (Forsyth 2013, 567-568).

After the deposition of Nikita Khrushchev as leader of the Soviet Union in 1964, the Caucasus region once again experienced a period of oppression and economic stagnation. In South Ossetia, “social and economic conditions” became worse than those in Georgia, as South Ossetians were given disproportionately low salaries and were unable to match Georgians in economic output; many South Ossetians emigrated to other parts of the Soviet Union (Saparov 2015, 146). South Ossetian intellectuals and cultural observers believed these phenomena to be the results of deliberate discrimination on the part of the Georgians, who often ignored “the Ossetian presence in the territory of South Ossetia (Saparov 2015, 146-147). On the other hand, Georgian scholars adopted the viewpoint that the Ossetians, unlike the Georgians, had no claim to autonomy (Saparov 2015, 147-148). The Abkhaz fared slightly better. Their representation in

the local Communist Party, even in the highest levels of the administration, continued to increase until the late 1970s (Saparov 2015, 152). Into the 1960s, the Abkhaz were allowed to publish books that dealt with the complicated history of Abkhazia and of discrimination against the Abkhaz at the hands of the Georgians (Saparov 2015, 153). However, around 1970, the Abkhaz became increasingly aware of forced Georgianization and of discrimination against their people; there were several large, unauthorized demonstrations against the perceived undue influence of the Georgians in Abkhaz affairs (Saparov 2015, 154-155). Some Abkhaz began to demand that their territory be incorporated into Russia (Saparov 2015, 155). Alarmed, Soviet authorities encouraged the development of Abkhaz tertiary education and of Abkhaz cultural institutions and allowed an Abkhaz television to be established, among other things (Saparov 2015, 155).

Precursors to Conflict

Perestroika and *glasnost* may have brought about the introduction of liberal economic and social policy in the Soviet Union, but they unintentionally inspired conflict in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Glasnost allowed Georgian dissidents to more openly question Russification and the Ossetians' right to autonomy and Ossetian dissidents to more openly demand autonomy (Saparov 2015, 149). In 1989, the Georgian Supreme Soviet ordered all educational institutions to use Georgians as the primary language of instruction; the Ossetians responded in kind by demanding that Ossetian be used in the same way in their own territory (Saparov 2015, 149). An Ossetian request that their territory be granted the higher status of an autonomous republic was "ignored" (Saparov 2015, 149). Late 1989 saw a massive march of Georgians on the Ossetian-controlled city of Tskhinvali; violent brawls killed "several" people and prompted the Georgian Supreme Soviet to bar members of the South Ossetian National Front from participating

(Saparov 2015, 149). Feeling that they had been unduly punished by the Georgians, the South Ossetians first demanded the creation of an autonomous republic within Georgia, and then the creation of a separate union republic (Saparov 2015, 149). Georgian authorities rescinded South Ossetia's autonomous status in December 1990, at which points both sides militarized and began preparing for war (Saparov 2015, 149). The conflict, which resulted in the expulsion of 100,000 Ossetians from Georgia and in some 20,000 Georgians fleeing South Ossetia (Saparov 2015, 150). In the summer of 1992, violence was ended by a ceasefire agreement (Saparov 2015, 150).

Throughout 1987 and 1988, the Abkhaz witnessed the Georgians' poor treatment of the South Ossetians. The Georgians also continued their dissection of political activity within Abkhazia, as they felt that Georgians living there were not adequately represented (Saparov 2015, 156). Fearful of what the Georgian government would do, the Abkhaz demanded secession from Georgia in a letter sent to the All Union Party Conference in 1998 (Saparov 2015, 156). Within a year, Abkhazia swiftly "deteriorated into inter-communal violence" which the declaration of the Abkhaz Soviet Socialist Republic (Saparov 2015, 156). The Georgians and the Abkhaz were able to compromise in 1991 on an election law that granted "disproportionate power" to the Abkhaz in Abkhazia, even though the Georgians were the largest ethnic group there (Saparov 2015, 157). The following summer, the ceasefire agreement in South Ossetia prompted the Georgian government to rescind the promises it had made to the Abkhaz, who responded by reinstating their 1925 Constitution, effectively declaring their own independence (Saparov 2015, 157). In August, the Georgians invaded Abkhazia, setting off a full-scale war (Saparov 2015, 158). Thanks to semi-secret support from the Russians and the peoples of the North Caucasus, the Abkhaz were able to push out Georgian troops and expel nearly 250,000 Georgians from their territory in the summer of 1993, signaling the end of the official conflict

(Saparov 2015, 158). Russia's support of Abkhazia in this conflict was credited to Russia's concern for its citizens living there, though the Russian parliament and executive branch were divided as to whether the Abkhaz had the right to secede from Georgia (Forsyth 2013, 695-696).

The 2008 Russo-Georgian War

Between the ceasefire agreements of the early 1990s and the year 2008, Abkhazia and South Ossetia existed in a state of uncertainty. They went unrecognized as independent states and had few allies. The next event to prompt major change in these territories was the 2008 Russo-Georgian War. The cause of this conflict has been much debated, as Russia largely succeeded "obscur[ing] the facts" and blaming the war on Georgia" (Forsyth 2013, 811-812). What is not debated was that the war began with the seizure by the Russian army of a tunnel leading from North to South Ossetia in August 2008 (Forsyth 2013, 812). The Russians claimed to be coming to the aid of the South Ossetians, whose villages and the city of Tskhinvali were being attacked by the Georgians (Forsyth 2013, 812). However, it is now believed that the Russians mobilized several days in advance and were motivated in part by the blocking of a Russian-sponsored United Nations resolution that implied that Abkhazia was not part of Georgia (Forsyth 2013, 814-815). Russia invaded Georgia with an army of between 40,000 and 80,000 soldiers and 3,000 to 5,500 tanks, and also engaged in extensive "aerial bombardment in Gori - including the use of illegal fragmentation shells to cause maximum destruction and death" (Forsyth 2013, 817-818). It is also clear that by invading Georgia, the Russians hoped to force the Georgians to allow the South Ossetians to secede (Forsyth 2013, 819). A ceasefire agreement was concluded on 12 August, but the Russians refused to withdraw the troops from the region for

over a year (Forsyth 2013, 822). The war was followed by Russia's official recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states.

Chapter 4

Theory

The history of relations between the Abkhaz and South Ossetians and the Russian (or Soviet) government is a long and complicated one, marked by ethnic, religious, linguistic, and political tensions. However, instead of ignoring the plight of the Abkhaz and South Ossetians against Georgia, the Russian government has become deeply involved in their conflicts. Russia's involvement has been particularly marked since 2000, when Vladimir Putin first became President of Russia. I theorize that in order to increase Abkhazia and South Ossetia's reliance on the Putin government as a prelude to annexation, Russia has used the territories' ethnic makeup and underdeveloped political institutions as pretexts for Russian interference in political, economic, and military matters. This thesis seeks to qualitatively explain how and why Russia's involvements differ between the two territories and why they should be viewed as pre-annexation actions rather than as help from a neighbor.

The first concept examined in this thesis is the ethnic composition of Abkhazia and of South Ossetia and the consequences thereof. This concept is related to three independent variables: the size of each ethnic group in these territories; each ethnic group's access to political power; and the relationship between civilians in an ethnic group and the secessionist group that claims to act in their name. It is necessary to analyze this information because the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are partially driven by ethnic identity and complaints of discrimination by the Georgian government towards and neglect of minority groups. The frozen conflicts in these areas are not the only ones that are influenced by ethnic relations: for example, Müllerson (2009) and O'Loughlin et al. (2017) have each examined how frozen conflicts are often truly ethnic conflicts. My historical background section includes concise summaries of

these ethnic groups' histories and their relations, at various times, with the Russian imperial, Russian federal, Georgian, and Soviet governments. I expect to find that Russia's involvement in South Ossetia is due to the fact that the South Ossetian ethnic groups are closely related to those in neighboring areas of Russia; Abkhazia's relative reluctance in accepting Russian assistance may be due to the fact that its inhabitants do not have such close ties with people living in Russia. There is disagreement in the literature as to which of these two territories is more open to Russian assistance, so this hypothesis is certainly worthy of investigation (O'Loughlin et al. 2017; Ambrosio & Lange 2017). I also expect to note a relationship between an ethnic group's political power and its willingness to accept assistance from Russia, as a less politically powerful group may seek a more powerful ally.

The second concept, and its associated independent variable, is the strength of government institutions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Though each area has a government acting in its name and in its interests, neither government can be considered "developed" or fully sovereign. I hypothesize that Russia has strategically identified areas of weakness in the governments of these territories and offered appropriate assistance in order to increase their reliance on Russian largesse. This may continue to the point that these territories are unable to provide for themselves, leaving them no choice but to accept annexation by Russia. This is influenced by German (2015), who states that South Ossetia would not be able to function without Russia because of its reliance on Russian support.

The concept of Russia's involvement in these regions is the dependent variable in this analysis. I consider three dimensions of involvement: political; military; and economic. Each type of involvement may take many forms. The term "political involvement" refers to the manner in which the Russian government has influenced the election process, election outcomes,

and the formation of government institutions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It also refers to Russia's "passportization" process, whereby it grants inhabitants of these territories Russian citizenship, as described by Artman (2013). The political involvement allows Russia to influence elections in these territories, thereby creating more Russia-friendly governments in neighboring regions. It also allows Russia to influence the exact forms these governments take, which may make it easier in the future for Russia to take advantage of these territories. The literature shows that the greater the degree of state-building activity, the longer a frozen conflict tends to last (Pokalova 2015, 68). Granting Russian citizenship and other benefits to inhabitants of these territories may give Russia a strong reason to occupy them. Russia would be able to say that it is acting to protect its citizens. The term "military involvement" refers to the Russian government's provision of border security and customs personnel for Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as to its intervention in the 2008 war. The military involvement presents several opportunities for Russia. First, it provides the Russian military with new training opportunities. Second, by helping the Abkhaz and South Ossetians secure their borders, Russia makes it less likely that Georgia would start a conflict or attempt to retake the territories. Third, this conflict showcases the Russian military's capabilities and dedication to these separatist causes; this intimidates countries like Ukraine and the Baltic states, which fear invasion by or interference from Russia. Russia's military involvement only worsens the conflict: as Florea notes, the greater the military support from an external actor, the smaller the likelihood that a de facto state will be successfully reintegrated into its parent state (2017, 347-348). As the Abkhaz and South Ossetian governments are primarily funded with money from the Russian government, it is clear that Russia has also become economically involved in these territories. This type of involvement, which, according to Ambrosio and Lange, is codified in bilateral agreements, presents new

investment opportunities for Russians (2017). It also helps the territories improve their economies at the expense of Georgia's. Though each type of involvement is carried out differently and presents its own opportunities for Russia, it is difficult to analyze them separately from one another: issues that on their face only involve the economy or the military often involve political considerations. Therefore, the three types of Russian involvement will often be jointly examined in this thesis.

As with any theoretical framework, the one used in this thesis has limitations. There are several possible reasons as to why the Russian government has chosen to become so deeply involved in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While his prior behavior makes it unlikely, one cannot rule out the possibility that President Putin truly believes that these territories have a right to statehood and is willing to assist them without any expectations of repayment. One could also theorize that rather than aiming to annex the territories, President Putin aims to weaken Georgia, one of Russia's geopolitical foes; helping the Abkhaz and South Ossetian governments to become independent would deal a massive blow to Georgia, which would lose a great deal of territory and approximately 300,000 citizens if these areas became independent. The Caucasus region is a tumultuous one and many former Soviet countries have been grappling with questions of identity and power since the end of the Cold War; Russia in particular clearly longs for a return of its hegemon status. Given these facts, it is possible that the Russian government has no concrete plan, that its government hopes that it can plunge the Caucasus region into chaos, which may lead to Russia gaining greater, but as-yet-undefined, influence. An additional limitation of this thesis has to do with its timing. The conflicts in these territories are classified as "frozen," but given the current geopolitical situation, it is possible that relations between Georgia, Russia,

Abkhazia, and South Ossetia could change overnight, thereby affecting this thesis' relevance and accuracy.

Chapter 5

Case Study Design

In order to investigate the differences in the Russian Federation's involvement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, I will undertake a comparative case study of the evolving state of affairs in these frozen conflict zones. This case study relies primarily on qualitative analysis. Each territory will be examined independently, with a comparison section to follow.

Depending on one's definition of the term "frozen conflict," there are as many as a dozen of them worldwide. The choice to examine only Abkhazia and South Ossetia was not made arbitrarily; despite their many differences, these territories have important similarities that make them compelling cases to study. Both territories have close historical ties to the Russian Federation, having previously been part of the Russian Empire and then of the Soviet Union. In 1991, immediately after the Soviet Union collapsed, both territories began their attempts to secede from Georgia. Even the most cursory examination of these territories will reveal that Russia has been more involved there than in other post-Soviet frozen conflict zones, such as Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh. While the conflict in Ukraine has gained more international attention than any other frozen conflict, the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are older and have different root causes; these differences make a detailed examination of Abkhazia and South Ossetia a more necessary undertaking.

My unit of analysis is states, de facto (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and de jure (Russia and, to some extent, Georgia). I examine Russo-Abkhaz and Russo-South Ossetian relations from 2000, when Vladimir Putin first became President of Russia, to the end of 2017. By

necessity, I emphasize the period after 2008, when Russia recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states after the Russo-Georgian War.

Russia's involvement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia between 2000 and 2017 acts as the dependent variable in this analysis. It has three interrelated dimensions: political involvement; military involvement; and economic involvement. Each form of involvement is codified in bilateral agreements between the respective territory and Russia. These bilateral agreements are available for download in Russian on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation ("Bilateral Agreements" 2019). The website provides the title and full text of each agreement, as well as the date it was signed ("Bilateral Agreements" 2019). The dates agreements were signed will be included in this analysis, as separate, but similar, agreements for Abkhazia and South Ossetia have often been concluded simultaneously. The agreements' topics will be categorized as "political," "military," or "economic" depending on what is mentioned in the title. Those agreements that were concluded on the same day and discuss similar topics will each be compared in order to determine whether Russia has treated Abkhazia and South Ossetia differently, whether these territories have been granted differing levels of autonomy; reasons as to why will be suggested.

My first independent variable relates to inter-ethnic relations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. It is a composite variable with three components. The first component is the ethnic makeup of these territories' populations. The data are found in the Ethnic Power Relations Core Dataset, compiled by academics at the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich) (Vogt et al. 2018). This dataset contains data from 1946 to 2013 on over 819 ethnic groups in states that, in 1990, had at least 500,000 inhabitants (Vogt et al. 2015, 1331). The size of an ethnic group is measured relative to the size of the

overall population (Vogt et al. 2018). The second component of this variable is each group's access to political power. It is determined by whether it has a monopoly on power or is instead the dominant power; whether it shares power and is a senior or junior partner; and, if it is excluded from power, whether it is powerless, discriminated against, or excludes itself (Vogt et al. 2018, 1331). These data are also available in the Ethnic Power Relations Core Dataset and have been compiled for the years 1991 to 2001 and from 2003 to 2017. It is important to note that in this dataset, the name "Russia" is used to refer both to the Soviet Union and to the Russian Federation, depending on the time period in question (Vogt et al. 2018). The third component of this variable is the relationship between the civilians in a certain ethnic group and the secessionist group that claims to act in their name. The ACD2EPR Dataset contains data on the civilian populations' support for the rebel groups (Wucherpfennig, Metternich, Cederman, Gleditsch 2012, 79-115). Like the Ethnic Power Relations Dataset, the ACD2EPR Dataset was compiled by academics at ETHZ (Wucherpfennig et al. 2012, 79-115). The dataset includes three variables: whether a rebel group claims to represent a certain ethnic group; whether the rebel group recruits exclusively from that ethnic group; and whether a majority of the ethnic group supports the rebel group (Wucherpfennig et al. 2012, 97). These variables are coded by a 0, 1, or 2 (Wucherpfennig et al. 2012, 97). I will include data for Abkhazia from 1992 to 1993 and for South Ossetia from 1992 to 2008, as these are the only years for which data for these respective territories are available.

My second independent variable is defined as the state of political institutions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This variable is measured using data from Freedom House's *Freedom in the World* project. *Freedom in the World* measures political rights on a scale from 1 to 40 using three factors, which are themselves measured using a series of questions. These three

factors are the electoral process, political pluralism and participation, and the functioning of government (“Abkhazia” 2018; “South Ossetia” 2018). For South Ossetia, there is an additional discretionary question: “is the government or occupying power deliberately changing the ethnic composition of a country or territory so as to destroy a culture or tip the political balance in favor of another group?” (“South Ossetia” 2018). However, this question has been removed from my analysis in order to ensure that the two territories are identically evaluated. Civil liberties are measured on a scale from 1 to 60, and the same four factors are used for Abkhazia and South Ossetia: freedom of expression and belief; associational and organizational rights; rule of law; and personal autonomy and individual rights (“Abkhazia” 2018; “South Ossetia” 2018). The scores for civil liberties and political rights are combined to create an aggregate score ranging from 1 to 100; this is used to create the Freedom Rating, which ranges from 1 to 7 (1 being most free and 7 being the least free) (“Abkhazia” 2018; “South Ossetia” 2018). This rating determines whether the state or territory being examined is free, partly free, or not free (“Methodology” 2018).

The table on the next page provides concise definitions of the variables in this analysis. It may be referred to throughout the case study.

Variable Type	Variable Name	Variable Description
Independent	Inter-ethnic relations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Size of an ethnic group relative to the overall population 2. Ethnic group's access to political power <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Monopoly power or dominant power? b. Does it share power? Is it the junior or senior partner? c. Is the group powerless, does it exclude itself from power, and does it face discrimination?
Independent	State of political institutions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Political rights <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Electoral process b. Political pluralism and participation c. Functioning of government 2. Civil liberties <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Freedom of expression and belief b. Associational and organizational rights c. Rule of law d. Personal autonomy and individual rights
Dependent	Russian involvement	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Political 2. Military 3. Economic

Table 1: Variables

Reliability and Validity

As in any analysis, it is important that the reliability and validity of the measures used are discussed in detail. It is particularly vital in a qualitative study, as though the findings largely amount to interpretation, one must ensure that this interpretation is based on information that, even over time, is consistently measured in an accurate fashion. Finding accurate data, quantitative or qualitative, about such territories as Abkhazia and South Ossetia, is challenging for numerous reasons; these territories are still developing economically and politically, and so do not have the ability to collect data that established states may have; they are not recognized as

independent countries, and so are not members of international organizations that collect data on their members; and they are under the influence of Russia, a state infamous for its ability to conceal incriminating or controversial information. These facts cast a shadow of doubt over the findings of this analysis, but this shadow is unavoidable.

The Ethnic Power Relations Core Dataset and the ACD2EPR Dataset are unique in that they include information, though it is limited in timespan, about Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the state of inter-ethnic relations in these areas. These datasets appear to be reliable because of the method of data collection and coding. For each dataset, the data were initially compiled by country and regional experts, with the help of research assistants; the project coordinators then worked with the experts to ensure inter-coder reliability and that the coding was consistent across regions (Vogt et al. 2015, 1330). If coders disagreed as to how to code a particular case, additional country and regional experts were consulted (Vogt et al. 2015, 1330). The codebook for each dataset is publicly available and provide helpful insight as to collection and coding procedures. Quantifying ethnicity and ethnic relations is a difficult task, but these datasets provide strict criteria for including or excluding states and ethnic groups, as well as clear definitions of the various types of power relations.

Fortunately, rating the development of political institutions across countries seems to be a far more popular topic of study. Freedom House's annual *Freedom in the World* report is frequently cited as an important source of information about political rights and civil liberties worldwide. Freedom House takes care to ensure that its measures are reliable. To determine its country and territory scores, analysts "from the academic, think tank, and human rights communities," as well as advisers at Freedom House, use a variety of sources, "including news articles, academic analyses, reports from nongovernmental organizations, individual professional

contacts, and on-the-ground research” (“Methodology 2019” 2019). Though Freedom House does occasionally change its methodology, these changes are introduced “incrementally” so that the ratings are comparable from year to year (“Methodology 2019” 2019). *Freedom in the World* asks and answers a comprehensive list of questions about each country or territory and defines terms clearly; these facts have resulted in *Freedom in the World’s* measures garnering a reputation for being valid.

For the reasons stated above, much of the information that exists about Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Russian involvement in these areas is unreliable, biased, or inaccurate. Analyzing bilateral agreements between Russia and these territories seems straightforward at first, as these agreements are publicly available and must be informative and concise in their explanations of political, military, and economic involvement. However, there is a risk that the information contained in these agreements is incomplete, as the Russian government may be unwilling to admit the extent of its involvement in these territories. Despite this drawback, the bilateral agreements contain the most complete, detailed, and easily accessible information available about Russian involvement in these territories.

Limitations

As with any research design, the one utilized in this thesis has limitations. There are several possible reasons as to why the Russian government has chosen to become so deeply involved in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While his prior behavior makes it unlikely, one cannot rule out the possibility that President Putin truly believes that these territories have a right to statehood and is willing to assist them without any expectations of repayment. One could also theorize that rather than aiming to annex the territories, President Putin aims to weaken Georgia,

one of Russia's geopolitical foes; helping the Abkhaz and South Ossetian governments to become independent would deal a massive blow to Georgia, which would lose a great deal of territory and approximately 300,000 citizens if these areas became independent. The Caucasus region is a tumultuous one and many former Soviet countries have been grappling with questions of identity and power since the end of the Cold War; Russia in particular clearly longs for a return of its hegemon status. Given these facts, it is possible that the Russian government has no concrete plan, that its government hopes that it can plunge the Caucasus region into chaos, which may lead to Russia gaining greater, but as-yet-undefined, influence. An additional limitation of this thesis has to do with its timing. The conflicts in these territories are classified as "frozen", but given the current geopolitical situation, it is possible that relations between Georgia, Russia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia could change overnight, thereby affecting this thesis' relevance and accuracy.

Chapter 6

Case Study: Abkhazia

Geography, Demographics, and Government

Abkhazia, with an area of 3,336 square miles, lies on the eastern shore of the Black Sea, bordering Russia to the north and Georgia to the east and south-east (“Abkhazia” 2018). Its location allows for “near-subtropical conditions” in the lowland areas near the coast (“Abkhazia” 2018). However, 64% of the territory is covered in mountain slopes with a “more severe” climate (“Republic of Abkhazia - country profile” 2019; “Abkhazia” 2018). The territory is also home to several lake, rivers, and forests (“Republic of Abkhazia - country profile” 2019).

The Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Republic of Abkhazia provides demographic information about the territory. According to the Chamber, the territory has a population of approximately 240,000 people (“Republic of Abkhazia - country profile” 2019). The population is concentrated in coastal areas (“Abkhazia” 2018). The territory is divided into seven regions, each centered around a large city; the capital is Sukhumi (“Republic of Abkhazia - country profile” 2019).

Like many of the countries in the Caucasus, Abkhazia is ethnically diverse. 50.71% of the population identifies as ethnically Abkhaz, 17.93% as Georgian, 17.39% as ethnically Armenian, and 9.17% as Russian (“Republic of Abkhazia - country profile” 2019). While the territory’s official languages are Georgian and Abkhazian, Russian is often used for state and other business; all ethnic groups have the constitutional right to use their native language (“Republic of Abkhazia - country profile” 2019; “General Review” 2019). As noted in the

historical background section, Abkhazia has long been a majority-Christian area. Today, “about 70%” of its inhabitants are Orthodox Christians and 4% are Catholic; Muslims make up 16% of the population, Jews 2%, and neopagans 5% (“Republic of Abkhazia - country profile” 2019). Despite the ongoing conflict, the Abkhaz government has prioritized economic revitalization. Tourism, power generation, and timber production are cited as important sectors of the Abkhaz economy (“Republic of Abkhazia - country profile” 2019; (“Abkhazia” 2018). Agriculture, especially fruit and tobacco farming, is vital to the economy despite the fact that Abkhazia has a relatively small amount of arable land (“Abkhazia” 2018). The Chamber of Commerce and Industry claims that the population’s “level of education” is 98.6%, but it is unclear what this means; however, one should note that a secondary education of eleven years is “compulsory” in Abkhazia (“Republic of Abkhazia - country profile” 2019).

The Abkhaz government defines itself as a “presidential republic” in which the president serves as head of state with a five-year term; the thirty-five members of the National Assembly also serve five-year terms (“Republic of Abkhazia - country profile” 2019). Abkhazia has established for itself a judicial system as well (“Our Government 2019). The territory’s constitution was adopted in 1994 and approved in 1999 (“Our Government 2019). Abkhazia may have all the trappings of statehood, but has only ever been recognized as an independent state by only six states: Nauru; Nicaragua; the Russian Federation; Syria; Tuvalu; Vanuatu; and Venezuela (“Republic of Abkhazia - country profile” 2019).

Ethnic Relations in Abkhazia

The Ethnic Power Relations Core Dataset is one of the few datasets in the world that includes information on politically relevant ethnic groups in all countries. In Russia and Georgia, as in many other Eurasian countries, there are several small ethnic groups, many of which have lived in the area for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. The dataset does not include information on ethnic groups' political power in de facto states like Abkhazia and South Ossetia; however, it is important to examine the political situations of the Abkhaz and South Ossetians in Russia and Georgia, as they contextualize the frozen conflicts.

As it has been for much of its history, Russia is home to nearly two hundred ethnic groups of varying sizes, languages, and cultures. However, not all of these groups can be classified as politically relevant because of their small size and lack of political influence. Within Russia and the Soviet Union, the Abkhaz have not fared well in terms of their access to political power. From 1946 to 1991, their share of the population was a meager .0003 percent (Vogt et al. 2018). Like the Ossetes, the Abkhaz had no political influence on the national level, but were granted regional autonomy within Abkhazia (Vogt et al. 2018). However, after 1991, the Abkhaz disappear from the Russian lists in the dataset: Abkhazia could no longer be considered part of Russia or the Soviet Union, as, depending on the viewpoint, it was either part of Georgia or was its own independent state (Vogt et al. 2018). This also shows that in the Russian Federation, after 1991, the number of Abkhaz was so small that they could not be considered politically relevant at any level of government (Vogt et al. 2018).

Georgia exists as its own sovereign entity in the dataset from 1991 onwards, and starting in 1991, the Abkhaz are listed as an ethnic group in Georgia, rather than in Russia (Vogt et al.

2018). From 1991 to 2002, the Abkhaz share of the population is listed as 0.017 percent (Vogt et al. 2018). The Abkhaz are listed as excluding themselves from power during this period and as exercising regional control in a particular place: this label means that they do not have power in the central government, but instead control some territory that is regarded as belonging Georgia (Vogt et al. 2018). As the data show, the Abkhaz share of the population increased to 0.03 percent in the period between 2003 and 2017; this is likely due to the thousands of Georgians who fled Abkhazia during and after the 2008 war, as well as to the thousands of Abkhaz who emigrated to Abkhazia during the same period (Vogt et al. 2018). The Abkhaz continue to voluntarily exclude themselves from national politics in favor of exerting political control over their own territory (Vogt et al. 2018).

There is a very clear relationship between the Abkhaz population in Abkhazia and the secessionist government of the Republic of Abkhazia. The researchers who compiled the ACD2EPR Dataset have found direct evidence for the Republic's claim to represent the needs and desires of the Abkhaz population (Wucherpfennig et al. 2018). The Republic's army recruits from the Abkhaz ethnic group, as doing so maximizes the likelihood that fighters personally support the army's goals (Wucherpfennig et al. 2018). The secessionist rebel group and the government of the Republic of Abkhazia enjoy the support of a majority of the Abkhaz population (Wucherpfennig et al. 2018).

Political Institutions in Abkhazia

Despite Abkhazia's ongoing efforts at statebuilding, the territory ranks poorly when it comes to the state of political rights and civil liberties. Freedom House's 2018 *Freedom in the World* report details important events that took place in Abkhazia in 2017 and analyzes their effects on several important facets of social, political, and economic life in the territory.

Abkhazia's most recent presidential and legislative elections, in 2014 and 2018 respectively, were the focus of much speculation. Abkhazia's electoral system cannot be classified as free and fair because ethnic Georgians are excluded from the political process and because women and other minority groups are socially discouraged from running for office ("Abkhazia" 2018). Freedom House reports that they were not officially monitored because Abkhazia is not a sovereign state, but that unofficial reports described the presidential elections as "transparent and peaceful" ("Abkhazia" 2018). In contrast, the national legislative elections were marred by intimidation, violence against candidates, and "ballot irregularities" ("Abkhazia" 2018). While various political parties compete in Abkhazia, the excessive corruption in the territory weakens these parties ("Abkhazia" 2018). Importantly, Abkhazia's political institutions are, according to *Freedom in the World*, "almost entirely dependent on economic and political support from Moscow" to the degree that international observers are concerned that Abkhazia will be occupied or annexed by Russia ("Abkhazia" 2018). Officials in the Abkhaz government are heavily influenced by the Russian government when it comes to policy matters, commonly engage in corrupt practices, and have little accountability ("Abkhazia" 2018).

The civil liberties of people in Abkhazia are even less protected than their political rights are. Discrimination against ethnic Georgians is not only common, but legally defended

(“Abkhazia” 2018). Freedom of the press is limited in Abkhazia: though its citizens have access to social media and to Russian and Georgian television channels and print media sources, Abkhaz-language television is largely controlled by the Abkhaz government (“Abkhazia” 2018). “A number of taboos” limit freedom of speech when it comes to certain topics, such as relations with Georgia and Georgians (“Abkhazia” 2018). Abkhaz law allows for the freedom of assembly, even though law enforcement do not always respect the right to protest peacefully (“Abkhazia” 2018). Freedom of religion is also restricted. Only Muslims and members of the Abkhazian Orthodox Church are allowed to practice their faiths freely, while members of other Orthodox denominations and of unrelated religions face “discrimination and limitations” (“Abkhazia” 2018). There are few active and successful trade unions, labor organizations, and non-governmental organizations (“Abkhazia” 2018). Georgian speakers go to schools that are forced to undergo Russification and face barriers to tertiary education (“Abkhazia” 2018). In addition to frequent violations of due process, a lack of high-quality legal counsel, and “insufficient” incarceration facilities, the Abkhaz justice system is influenced by “nepotism, corruption [...] [and] clan and ethnic ties” (“Abkhazia” 2018). Not all residents of Abkhazia have the same right to travel freely and to own property (“Abkhazia” 2018). Economic opportunity is limited because of Abkhazia’s status and because of Russian pressure (“Abkhazia” 2018).

Given the state of Abkhazia’s political institutions, in Freedom House’s most recent report, the territory received a political rights score of 4 out of 7 (“Abkhazia” 2018). It received a civil liberties score of 5 out of 7 (“Abkhazia” 2018). These two scores resulted in a Freedom Rating of 4.5 out of 7, in turn leading to a Freedom Status of “Partly Free” (“Abkhazia” 2018). The chart below shows Abkhazia’s political rights and civil liberties scores over time.

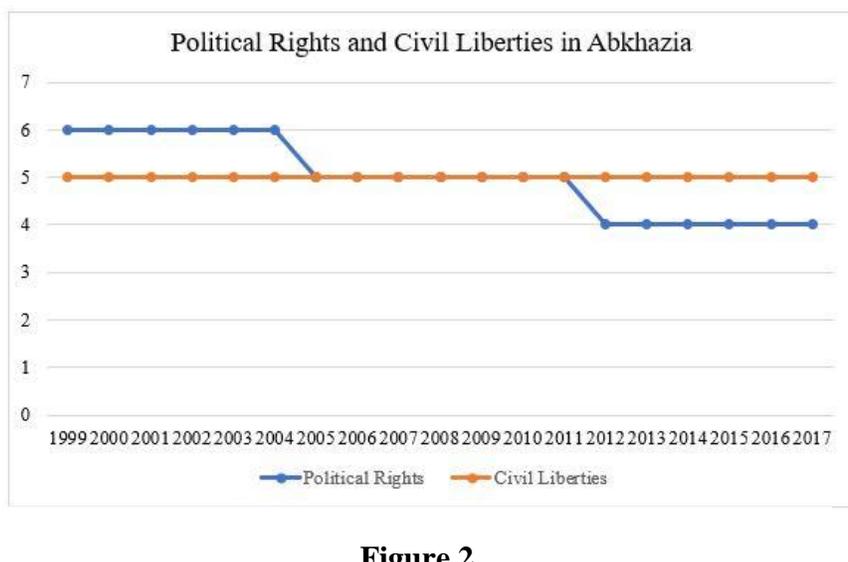


Figure 2

Bilateral Agreements Between Abkhazia and Russia

The time period under particular examination in this thesis is the period between 2008, the year of the Russo-Georgian War, and 2018. During this time, the Abkhaz government concluded fifty-seven bilateral agreements with the Russian Federation. Though these agreements address a wide range of topics, it is possible to classify them according to whether they address political, economic, or military themes. The main topic of small number of these agreements incorporated elements of all three of these themes and will hereafter be referred to as “interdisciplinary” agreements.

Figure 3 on the next page shows how many agreements between Abkhazia and Russia in each domain were signed in each year from 2008 to 2018. The years 2008 and 2014 tie for having the lowest number of agreements signed, as only one agreement was signed in each of these years. In 2010 alone, seventeen agreements were signed, nearly thirty percent of the total.

Figure 3

Table 2 below is a table of the agreements between Russia and Abkhazia sorted by general theme (economic, military, political, or interdisciplinary) and by specific topic (e.g. environmental protection, medical services for members of the armed forces). The vast majority of agreements between Russia and Abkhazia address economic and financial subjects. Within this category, the most common types of agreements are those having to do with transport, trade, and salaries for public servants. Between 2008 and 2018, the Russian and Abkhaz governments signed fourteen bilateral agreements addressing military matters. Border and migration control and law enforcement topics such as prisons, legal assistance to the accused, and crime prevention were the most common subject of military-focused bilateral agreements. Political agreements made up the smallest number of the bilateral agreements. In the period under examination, only five such agreements were signed, one each on the following topics: visas; the establishment of diplomatic missions; the protection of classified information; cultural development; and the coordination of internal affairs.

Type of Involvement	Number
Political	5
Visas	1
Diplomatic missions	1
Classified information	1
Cultural development	1
Coordination of internal affairs	1
Economic	36
Economic development	-
Transport	5
Geology/mineral exploration	-
State loans	3
Fisheries	1
Pensions	2
Telecommunications	1
Socioeconomic development	1
Trade	4
Roads and railways	3
Investments	1
Environmental protection	1
Customs	2
Salaries	5
Gazprom	-
Healthcare	2
Recognition of educational qualifications	3
Insurance	1
Transboundary waters	1
Military	14
Emergency situations	1
Search and rescue	2
Military pensions	-
Legal aid, crime, prisons	3
Medical services	1
Borders and migration	3
Military cooperation and military bases	2
Military-technical cooperation	1
Military organization and military couriers	2
Military education	-
Interdisciplinary	2

Table 2: Categorization of Bilateral Agreements Between Abkhazia and Russia

In this entire time period, only two bilateral agreements could clearly be identified as interdisciplinary. These agreements are defined as such because they concern matters relating to the economic well-being of Abkhazia, its social and political system, and its military affairs. Interdisciplinary agreements have special significance in the relationships between Abkhazia and Russia, as they may be thought of as frameworks for agreements that will follow because they address such a wide range of topics. Because of their special significance, they warrant closer examination than the other, narrower agreements.

The first such agreement was concluded on 17 September, 2008, not long after the conclusion of the Russo-Georgian War. It is titled, in English, the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance Between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Abkhazia.” It consists of thirty-one brief articles. Article 1 states that relations between Russia and Abkhazia will “guided by the principles of mutual respect for state sovereignty and territorial integrity. Article 2 through 4 acknowledge that the two parties may coordinate their efforts in several fields, including foreign policy and mutual protection. In Article 5, the mutual right to “build, use and improve” military bases and military infrastructure in the other party’s territory is confirmed; the following article states that neither party will participate in “any blocs or alliances directed against” the other. The two parties agree, in Article 7, that they will respect each other’s existing borders and cooperate in patrolling them. Article 8 and 9 concern matters of citizenship and recognition of documents. Article 10 states that both Russia and Abkhazia will guarantee every resident of their territory “civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights and freedoms” and that Russia will protect Abkhaz citizens in foreign countries where there is no representation or diplomatic missions from Abkhazia. Article 11 prescribes the creation of rules for migration of their own citizens and citizens of other territories in to and out of Russia and

Abkhazia. The next two articles concern the protection of minority groups and their cultural development. Article 14 focuses on the protection of property rights, while Article 15 promises that Russia and Abkhazia will “exchange economic information” and develop “economic, trade, scientific and technical relations.” The following two articles concern the maintenance of Abkhazia’s financial and banking systems and other economic matters. Environmental protection is the focus on Article 18. Article 19 is concerned with cultural and social development and includes a pledge that Abkhazia “will encourage the study of the Russian language.” The next three articles concern public health and technological and educational cooperation. Article 23 is slightly out of place in that it addresses cooperation on economic legislation. Articles 24 and 25 address crime prevention and the exchange of information regarding the development of the justice system. The following article states that the two parties will try to develop “contacts and cooperation” between their governments and government officials. Articles 27 through 31 address dispute settlement, ratification, the length of time the agreement will be in force (10 years).

The second of the two interdisciplinary bilateral agreements between Abkhazia and Russia is titled the Agreement Between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Abkhazia on Alliance and Strategic Partnership. This agreement was concluded on 24 November 2014 and consists of twenty-four articles. It reaffirms the general terms agreed upon in the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance, which, at the point that the Alliance and Strategic Partnership Agreement was concluded, had been in effect for six years.

Article 1 affirms that the two parties will continue their “bilateral equal and constructive relations” to enhance their alliance. Article 2 concerns the implement of this specific agreement, while Article 3 outlines the agreement’s goals (e.g. the development of a “coordinated foreign

policy” and the “promotion of socio-economic development of the Republic of Abkhazia.” This foreign policy, and the fact that Russia will work to further Abkhazia’s international relations, is further explained in the next article. Article 5 affirms that the two parties will work to form “a common space of defense and security” and a joint military force, while Articles 6, 7, and 8 outline the principle and implementation of mutual defense in event of an attack and the “modernization” of the Abkhaz army. Articles 9 through 12 concern border protection, crime prevention via a “coordination center of the Internal Affairs bodies”, and customs enforcement, including bringing Abkhazia’s customs up to the standards of the Eurasian Economic Union. In Article 13, Russia pledges to simplify the procedures by which Abkhaz citizens can acquire Russian citizenship. Articles 14 and 15 respectively concern the salaries of state employees in Abkhazia and pensions of Russian citizens residing in Abkhazia. In Articles 16 through 19, Abkhazia is obliged to ensure that Russian citizens can enjoy the benefits of Russian state-provided healthcare while living in Abkhazia, that healthcare standards in Abkhazia meet Russian standards, and that standards for those who “carry out medical and pharmaceutical activities” in Abkhazia are the same as standards for those who do so in Russia; in turn, Russia has the right to verify that these standards have been enforced. Article 20 concerns the improvement of the Abkhaz education system and requires that laws relating to this correspond to Russian standards. In Article 21, Russia promises to assist Abkhazia with its Abkhaz language development program. The final three articles concern this agreement’s ratification, length of time it will be in effect (ten years), and possible extensions and amendments.

Chapter 7

Case Study: South Ossetia

Geography, Demographics, and Government

South Ossetia consists of 1,500 square miles, bordered by Russia to the north and by Georgia on all other sides (“South Ossetia” 2018). The southern section of the Greater Caucasus lies in South Ossetia, which is covered in forest (“South Ossetia” 2018). Like Abkhazia, South Ossetia has a small amount of arable land, but is intersected by several rivers (“South Ossetia” 2018).

The South Ossetian population numbers about 53,000 people, some 30,000 of whom live in the capital city, Tskhinvali (“South Ossetia” 2018; “Tskhinvali” 2018). Ossetians make up at least two-thirds of the population, though some estimates, including that of the 2015 census, say the proportion may be as high as 89% (Svanidze 2016, 1). That census claimed a Georgian population of 7.4% and Russians are believed to constitute most of the remaining population (Svanidze 2016, 1). The majority of inhabitants identify as Christian, but like in Abkhazia, there is a neopagan and a Muslim presence in South Ossetia as well (Shnirelman 2002, 209). Hydroelectric power generation, agriculture, timber production, and sheep farming play important roles in the South Ossetian economy (“South Ossetia” 2018).

At various times, South Ossetia has been recognized by the same states as Abkhazia, with the exception of Vanuatu, which has never recognized South Ossetia (“Countries 2018).

Ethnic Relations in South Ossetia

The Ossetians (or, as they are called in the Ethnic Power Relations Core dataset, the Ossetes) are listed as being politically relevant in Russia (Vogt et al. 2018). Between 1946 and 1991, the Ossetes' size as a share of the total population is listed as .002 percent (Vogt et al. 2018). Their access to political power is classified as "powerless," meaning that they had no influence at the national political level, but were not actively and intentionally discriminated against (Vogt et al. 2018). However, the Ossetes had regional autonomy during this time period, as they actively and meaningfully participated in regional administration and exerted control over the "core competencies of the state" (Vogt et al. 2018). The Ossete share of the population increased to .004 percent in the period between 1992 and 2001, likely due to the conflict between Georgia and the South Ossetians (Vogt et al. 2018). However, this did not change their political status (Vogt et al. 2018). The Ossete population has largely remained stable since then and they continue to exercise regional autonomy in North Ossetia (Vogt et al. 2018).

The Ossetians in Georgia have, from political power standpoint, enjoyed relative stability since 1991, though the size of their population has fluctuated. From 1991 to 2002 their share of the population was 0.032 percent, and, like the Abkhaz in Georgia, excluded themselves from national power while exercising it on the regional level (Vogt et al. 2018). However, between 2003 and 2017, their share of the population decreased by approximately half, though their political situation remained the same (Vogt et al. 2018).

As in Abkhazia, the rebel group seeking to establish an independent state of South Ossetia has a strong relationship with the South Ossetian people. The government of South Ossetia and its supporting rebel group have made an exclusive claim, for which there is direct

evidence, that they embody the political desires of the South Ossetians (Wucherpfennig et al. 2018). They recruit from the South Ossetian ethnic group and enjoy the support of the majority of the South Ossetian population (Wucherpfennig et al. 2018).

Political Institutions in South Ossetia

If South Ossetia were a sovereign state, it would rank among the worst for its protection of political rights and civil liberties for its residents. Freedom House's 2018 *Freedom in the World* report details 2017's most important events in South Ossetia, examining whether they had any impact on the political situation, economic opportunities, and social norms in the territory.

South Ossetia's elections cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be considered free or fair. Candidates must be approved by "Russia and pro-Russian authorities," who seem to determine who will be victorious, and the Central Election Commission's independence is doubted, preventing the elections from being considered truly competitive ("South Ossetia" 2018). While several political parties exist in South Ossetia, the government recently began disbanding those it considered inactive, but the criteria according to which these efforts were carried out were unclear ("South Ossetia" 2018). Those who are troubled by Russian involvement in South Ossetian affairs have few political avenues by which they can voice their grievances ("South Ossetia" 2018). Ethnic Georgians living in South Ossetia have seen their voting rights curtailed and women and minority groups "are not represented politically" ("South Ossetia" 2018). In addition to controlling South Ossetian elections, the Russian government heavily influences policy-making decisions in the territory, preventing the South Ossetian

government from operating transparently (“South Ossetia” 2018). Government officials are known to be corrupt (“South Ossetia” 2018).

Civil liberties in South Ossetia are at grave risk of disappearing completely. Residents may access Georgian and Russian media sources, but South Ossetian media is “almost entirely controlled by the authorities” (“South Ossetia” 2018). Freedom of speech is somewhat limited by the taboo nature of certain topics, which, if discussed, would bring one unwanted attention from the authorities (“South Ossetia” 2018). Except in the case of Jehovah’s Witnesses, who are banned from practicing their religion in South Ossetia, members of most other religions are allowed to practice freely (“South Ossetia” 2018). The freedom of assembly is limited in a practical sense due to legal retribution from government authorities (“South Ossetia” 2018). Most of the small number of non-governmental organizations in South Ossetia are under the influence of the Russian government (“South Ossetia” 2018). Trade unions are weak and susceptible to government influence (“South Ossetia” 2018). Educational instruction in the Georgian language is gradually being phased out in favor of Russian-language education (“South Ossetia” 2018). The South Ossetian justice system is incredibly weak, easily manipulated by government officials, suffers from “a lack of qualified lawyers,” and does not protect South Ossetians from the use of excessive force by law enforcement (“South Ossetia” 2018). Travel to and from any country except Russia is limited and Russian troops have been gradually moving the border between Georgia and South Ossetia (“South Ossetia” 2018). Ethnic Georgians who previously fled South Ossetia have not usually been allowed to return to their homes (“South Ossetia” 2018). Economic opportunity is limited because of South Ossetia’s status and because of the ever-changing border between Georgia and the territory (“South Ossetia” 2018).

Given the state of South Ossetia’s political institutions, in Freedom House’s most recent report, the territory received a political rights score of 7 out of 7, the worst possible score (“South Ossetia” 2018). It received a civil liberties score of 6 out of 7 (“South Ossetia” 2018). These two scores resulted in a Freedom Rating of 6 out of 7, in turn leading to a Freedom Status of “Not Free” (“South Ossetia” 2018). The figure below shows South Ossetia’s political rights and civil liberties scores over time.

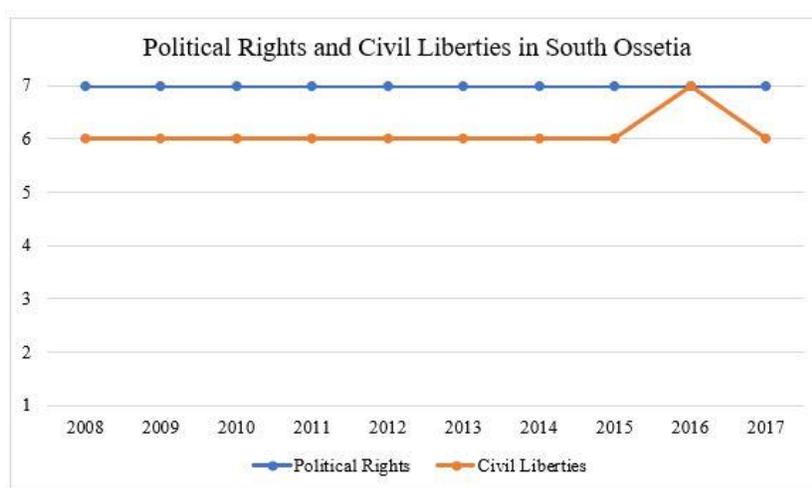


Figure 4

Bilateral Agreements Between South Ossetia and Russia

In the period between 2008 and 2018, the Russian and South Ossetian governments concluded fifty-five bilateral agreements. Like the bilateral agreements between Russia and Abkhazia, these agreements may be classified as regarding economic, military, or political matters, as well as being interdisciplinary.

Figure 2 below shows how many agreements between Russia and South Ossetia of each type were signed in each year from 2008 to 2018. The years 1994 and 2008 tie for having the

lowest number of agreements signed, as only one agreement was signed in each of these years. However, 2009 and 2010 tie for having the highest number of agreements signed, as seven agreements were signed in each of these years. The fourteen agreements signed in this two-year period account for approximately one-quarter of the total.

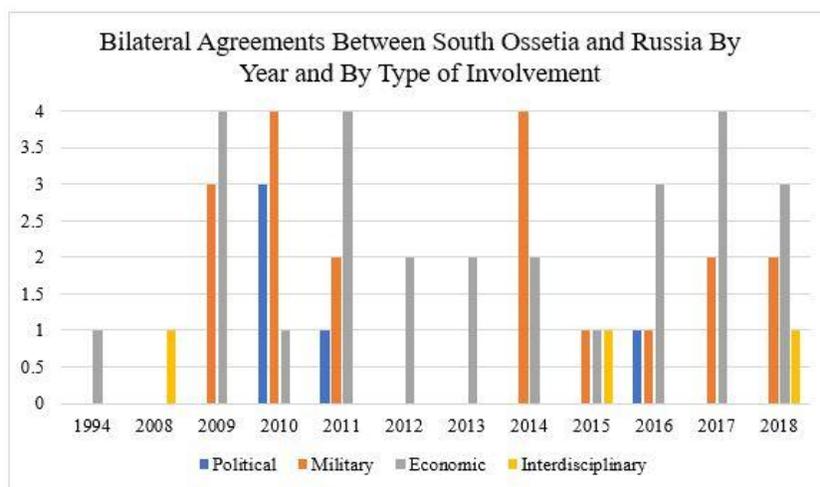


Figure 5

Table 3, on the next page, categorizes the agreements between Russia and South Ossetia according to whether they address economic, military, political, or interdisciplinary themes and according to their specific topic. As shown in the table, shows the majority of agreements between Russia and South Ossetia have economic themes. Within this category, the most common types of agreements are those concerning trade and salaries for public servants. The Russian and South Ossetian governments also signed eighteen bilateral agreements addressing military matters, with a particular focus on border and migration control and law enforcement topics. Political agreements made up the smallest number of the bilateral agreements. Only five such agreements were signed, one on each of the political topics.

Type of Involvement	Number
Political	5
Visas	1
Diplomatic missions	1
Classified information	1
Cultural development	1
Coordination of internal affairs	1
Economic	29
Economic development	2
Transport	1
Geology/mineral exploration	1
State loans	-
Fisheries	-
Pensions	2
Telecommunications	1
Socioeconomic development	3
Trade	5
Roads and railways	1
Investments	1
Environmental protection	1
Customs	3
Salaries	4
Gazprom	1
Healthcare	1
Recognition of educational qualifications	1
Insurance	1
Transboundary waters	-
Military	18
Emergency situations	2
Search and rescue	1
Military pensions	1
Legal aid, crime, prisons	3
Medical services	1
Borders and migration	4
Military cooperation and military bases	2
Military-technical cooperation	1
Military organization and military couriers	2
Military education	1
Interdisciplinary	3

Table 3: Categorization of Bilateral Agreements Between South Ossetia and Russia

The Russian and South Ossetian governments concluded three bilateral agreements that could be categorized as interdisciplinary. The first was concluded on 17 September 2008 and is titled the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance Between the Russian Federation and the Republic of South Ossetia. This agreement consists of thirty-one articles. Article 1 opens with a pledge to base Russia and South Ossetia's relations on "mutual respect for state sovereignty and territorial integrity" and Article 2 explains that these relations will involve close cooperation on foreign policy and regional conflicts. Article 3 states that Russia and South Ossetia will cooperate in the protection of one another's sovereignty. In Article 4, 5, and 6, it is explained that the two parties will cooperate militarily, that they each have the right to "build, use and improve" military bases and military infrastructure in the other party's territory, and that they will not participate in alliances directed against the other party. Article 7 states that each party will respect the other's borders. Articles 8 and 9 address issues of citizenship and mutual recognition of important documents. In Article 10, it is stated that both parties guarantee residents of their territory "civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights and freedoms" and that Russia will protect South Ossetian citizens in foreign countries where there is no representation or diplomatic missions from South Ossetia. The following article requires rules for migration of their own citizens and citizens of other territories in to and out of Russia and South Ossetia. Articles 12 and 13 concern the protection of minority groups and their cultural development. In Article 14, property rights protection plays a central role. In Articles 15 through 17, economic integration and promotion of investment are addressed, as is the fact that Russia must "maintain and operate" South Ossetia's banking and financial systems. Environmental protection is the focus of Article 18, while Articles 19, 20, and 21 respectively focus on cultural development, improvements in public health, and treaties involving healthcare. Article 22

concerns “cooperation in the field of science and technology” and cooperation in education and research. The following article addresses coordination in economic and pension legislation.

Legal issues, including the prevention of crime and terrorism and the “adoption and application of legal instruments” are central to Articles 24 and 25. Article 26 states that the parties will work to develop closer relationships between their governments and government officials. The final four articles are concerned with future disputes regarding this agreement, its ratification, and the length of time it will be in effect (10 years).

The second interdisciplinary agreement between Russia and South Ossetia was concluded on 18 March 2015. It is titled the Agreement Between the Russian Federation and the Republic of South Ossetia on Cooperation and Integration and consists of fifteen articles. This agreement builds off of the contents of the previously-concluded interdisciplinary agreement between Russia and this territory. Article 1 concerns the two parties’ coordinated foreign policy and Russia’s efforts to promote “the development of international relations” of South Ossetia. In Article 2, the parties pledge to develop a “common space of defense and security” and Russia pledges to ensure South Ossetia’s security. Article 2 confirms the “free crossing of the Russian-South Ossetian state border” but states that this may be subject to security restrictions. The two parties pledge in Article 4 to coordinate their internal affairs in order to combat crime. Article 5 concerns the integration of South Ossetian customs authorities with the Russian customs authorities, while Article 6 addresses simplifying citizenship acquisition procedures. Article 7 addresses the salaries of South Ossetian state employees, while Article 8 and 9 respectively address pensions and health insurance for Russians who live in South Ossetia. In Article 10, Russia pledges to help South Ossetia “in the development of education and science” in several different ways. Similarly, Russia promises in Article 11 to assist South Ossetia with its cultural

development programs, including its Russian and Ossetian language promotion. Some of this assistance will be in the form of investment programs, according to Article 12. Interestingly, Article 13 requires that official correspondence between state authorities of the two parties will be in Russian. The final two articles concern the agreement's ratification and the length of time it will be in effect, which is twenty-five years.

The Agreement on Cooperation and Integration was amended in a bilateral agreement that was concluded on 11 September 2018. The amending agreement is entitled the Protocol on Amending the Agreement Between the Russian Federation and the Republic of South Ossetia on Cooperation and Integration from 18 March, 2015. In contrast to the other interdisciplinary bilateral agreements examined in this thesis, this agreement consists of only two short articles. This agreement's first article 1 states that citizens of Russia and citizens of South Ossetia "are not subject to restrictions" on the length of time that they may stay in Russia or South Ossetia, as both categories of citizens are entitled to visa-free travel in these two territories. The second and final article concerns the agreement's ratification.

Chapter 8

Comparisons

Whether the agreements are read in the original Russian or in their English translations, it is clear that they corroborate the conclusions of the *Freedom in the World* project regarding the state of political rights and civil liberties in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. One may also interpret the content of the agreements to be influenced by the history of Russo-Abkhazia and Russo-South Ossetian relations, by the historical attitudes of these ethnic groups towards the influence of a great power. A comparison of the agreements also shows that South Ossetia is indeed closer politically, economically, and militarily to Russia than is Abkhazia, and that South Ossetia is at greater risk for annexation.

In the Soviet era, neither the Abkhaz nor the Ossetians possessed great political power on the national level. However, they both wielded it on the regional level. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Ossetians continued to be an ethnic group with some degree of power in Russia because they are the main ethnic group in the Republic of North-Ossetia Alania. In contrast, the number of Abkhaz living in Russia has been negligible: unlike the South Ossetians, the Abkhaz do not have a corresponding republic within Russia with which they feel any degree of kinship. Over the past two decades, the Abkhaz population in Georgia, or, rather, in the area they designate as their independent republic, increased: this leads to the Abkhaz having greater control over their republic's government. In contrast, the Ossetian share of the population in the territory they claim has decreased by approximately half since 2003. The likeliest explanation for this phenomenon is immigration from South Ossetia to Russia, specifically to the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania. Such a decrease in population share decreases South Ossetia's bargaining

power with Georgia while simultaneously strengthening the ties between the North and South Ossetians.

The Abkhaz and South Ossetian secessionist movements are quite similar in that they each enjoy the support of the populations they claim to represent. Researchers from the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule Zürich have found direct, clear evidence to support the groups' claims to represent, respectively, the Abkhaz and the South Ossetians. Both groups limit their recruitment efforts to the ethnic populations they represent. This evidence indicates that the populations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are largely in favor of secession from Georgia and that there are clear relationships between the population and the secessionist governments and armies. Secession from Georgia, however, is not synonymous with strong influence from or annexation by Russia.

As the data from Freedom House's Freedom in the World project show, several aspects of Abkhazia and South Ossetia's political institutions and the state of their civil liberties have been linked to their relationships with Russia. The political and social discrimination against ethnic Georgians and forced Russification in both territories benefits ethnic Russians who live there, as they receive schooling in Russian and have greater access to political opportunities. In Abkhazia, political institutions and economic stability depend on Russian involvement and corruption, likely involving Russian officials, is rampant. South Ossetia's election campaigns and results, as well as government policy, rely on the approval of the Russian government and of pro-Russian forces within the territory. Non-government organizations in South Ossetia are also closely linked to the Russian government. Like in Abkhazia, corruption among government officials is common. Unlike in Abkhazia, Russian troops unilaterally move South Ossetia's borders farther into Georgian territory.

The bilateral agreements between Russia and Abkhazia and Russia and South Ossetia paint a clear picture of the relationships between this great power and these two small territories. While the majority of agreements concern economic matters, the body of agreements as a whole address a wide range of political and military issues as well. The interdisciplinary agreements provide a framework upon which the other agreements are based, so while they are few in number, they have a particular importance. The interpretation put forth in this thesis, that Russia aims to eventually annex Abkhazia and South Ossetia, may be supported by plausible interpretations of Russia's bilateral agreements with these territories. While all of these agreements may serve the purposes of aiding Abkhazia and South Ossetia in their development, they also benefit Russia in seemingly small, but important ways.

Russia has prioritized economic issues over political and military issues when it comes to negotiating its relationships with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Firstly, as the data from *Freedom in the World* show, Russia exercises its influence over sixteen economic and financial domains in Abkhazia and sixteen in South Ossetia. The mere fact that these domains have at least one agreement regulating them indicates that they have some measure of importance, however small. There are several possible reasons as to why economic issues have become central to Russo-Abkhaz and Russo-South Ossetian relations; each economically-focused bilateral agreement may be thought of as an effort to bring Russia and these territories closer. First, neither of these territories are recognized by many foreign countries, making it difficult for them to develop strong economic relationships. Russia's recognition of the territories makes it far easier for them to enter into economic partnerships. Second, economic issues, even those at the national level, are deeply personal to ordinary residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as they are to residents of other territories and countries. Assisting the Abkhaz and South Ossetian governments in their

economic development, infrastructure development, and healthcare improvements would have a direct impact on the residents of these territories, making them more likely to support Russian involvement in their affairs. Third, if Russia eventually annexes either of these territories, annexing a region that is economically stable would bring greater benefits to Russia than would annexing a region that is economically unstable. Economic involvement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia not only benefits these territories financially now, but may also benefit Russia in the future if they join the Federation.

For both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, bilateral agreements regulating military matters were the second most common type of agreement signed between 2008 and 2018. Eight different military-related topics were examined in the fourteen agreements between Abkhazia and Russia. Russia and South Ossetia concluded eighteen agreements on ten military-related topics in the same period. The territories each signed agreements regarding cooperation during emergency situations and search and rescue operations, though these agreements provide few details. It is no wonder that Russia would be interested in coordinating with the territories during such situations, if they were to involve residents of Russia and the territories. While Abkhazia did not conclude an agreement regarding Russia paying the pensions of former members of the Abkhaz military, South Ossetia did conclude such an agreement. This is an example of how South Ossetia has become more financially reliant on Russia than has Abkhazia. Several of the military-related agreements concerned matters related to law enforcement, such as affordable legal assistance to people accused of crimes and crime and terrorism prevention. Preventing crime of all types increases Russia's security, given the country's proximity to these territories. Ensuring that the justice systems in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are similar to that of Russia would ease the transition if these territories were annexed by Russia and would prevent these territories from

being given the lawless label that other frozen conflict zones, like Transnistria, bear. Both territories signed agreements regarding the provision of military medical services. If Russia helps to ensure that these territories' armed forces are capable and have ample resources, Russia's claim that it supports Abkhazia and South Ossetia's independence is lent additional credibility. Borders and migration are of clear importance to these relationships. In an effort to accustom Abkhaz and South Ossetian residents to potentially becoming part of Russia, Russia has granted them the ability to move relatively freely between their home territory and Russia and to easily acquire Russian citizenship. Cooperation between the Russian military and the militaries in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as agreements regulating the organization and education of their armed forces, allow Russia to credibly claim that it supports their independence movements. It also gives Russia the opportunity to learn about the territories' armed forces: this information would be of great use if Russia had to absorb or to fight against these forces. Clearly, it is possible to establish motives for Russia's military involvement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia that go beyond the desire to help a territory's struggling for independence, and even beyond the desire to secure Russia's safety.

Both Abkhazia and South Ossetia concluded five politically-focused agreements with Russia between 2008 and 2018. It is somewhat more difficult to explain how these agreements, in comparison to the agreements about military and economic matters, benefit Russia or further its probable goals of annexation. However, it is still possible to speculate. The agreements regarding the visas (or lack thereof) required for Abkhaz and South Ossetian residents to travel to Russia may be viewed similarly to the border control agreements. The establishment and maintenance of diplomatic missions in Russia and these territories furthers the development of other forms of Russian involvement in these territories. Abkhazia and South Ossetia each

concluded an agreement with Russia regarding the protection of classified information. Such agreements enable Russia and the territories to collaborate closely on transnational law enforcement matters and assures Russia that the territories will protect its secrets. Russia's assistance to Abkhazia and South Ossetia in their cultural development allows Russia to credibly claim that it supports their claims to independence, which are partially based on their unique cultural identities. The general coordination of the internal affairs of Russia and these territories enables cooperation in all other matters and allows Russia to keep a closer eye on events and policies in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

There are subtle, but important differences between interdisciplinary bilateral agreements between South Ossetia and Russia and those between Abkhazia and Russia. Each territory concluded an agreement with Russia on 18 September 2018. These agreements are similar in many respects, such as their length and content. However, if one closely reads and compares the two, one notices disparities. Abkhazia's Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance notes that Abkhazia and Russia will exchange economic information with one another. However, South Ossetia's corresponding treaty, which has a similar title, goes one step further: it is specifically written that Russia will exercise control over banking and finance within South Ossetia, even though the country does not do so in Abkhazia. The Abkhaz treaty also states that Russia will support efforts to promote and protect the Abkhaz language, but Russia made no similar promises to the South Ossetians regarding their own language.

The second interdisciplinary agreements signed by Abkhazia and South Ossetia are also similar to one another, but not to the same degree as the first such agreements. They were not signed on the same date; instead, they were concluded approximately five months apart. South Ossetia's agreement with Russia on Cooperation and Integration states that there will be free

crossing over the Russo-South Ossetian border, despite the fact that it may be subject to security restrictions at certain times. There is no such provision in Abkhazia's agreement with Russia about Alliance and Strategic Partnership, though there are several mentions of immigration and customs procedures. That agreement does mention that Abkhazia's customs standards must be brought up to the standards of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), as if Abkhazia plans to join the organization; South Ossetia's corresponding agreement does not mention the EEU or any other such customs union. Russia affirms again in this agreement that it will support measures to protect the Abkhaz language, but again does not promise the same to the South Ossetians. South Ossetia concluded an additional interdisciplinary agreement with Russia, in 2018, which amended the territory's previous agreement with Russia. This short agreement reaffirms that residents of South Ossetia and Russia may stay for unrestricted periods of time in the other country or territory. This fact does not apply to Abkhazia and its residents.

Chapter 9

Conclusions

While Abkhazia and South Ossetia are located in close proximity to one another, the history of their relations with the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and now the Russian Federation differ greatly. Generally, the Ossetian people have been the recipients of better treatment from Russian and Soviet authorities and have been better integrated into Russian and Soviet society than the Abkhaz have. Both ethnic groups have historically been treated poorly by the Georgian authorities, having faced discrimination, political repression, and forced Georgianization. While both have looked to secession as an alternative to Georgian rule, the South Ossetians have been more amenable to assistance from Russia than have the Abkhaz.

At this point in time, South Ossetia has a much closer relationship with Russia than does Abkhazia. While Abkhazia is certainly reliant on Russian support for its economy, government policies, and maintenance of the borders and customs control, among other vital functions, South Ossetia has become so integrated with Russia that it may be considered practically a part of the country. If Abkhazia and South Ossetia were to attempt complete secession with renewed vigor, the former would have greater likelihood of succeeding than the latter: both would have to shake off the yoke of the Georgian authorities, but South Ossetia would have to cut off an incredibly close relationship with Russia.

In a pre-2014 world, it would be possible to view Russia's involvement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as help from a friendly neighbor sympathetic to independence movements. However, after the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, the Russian government's goals became clear. The Russian government under Vladimir Putin seeks not only to re-establish

Russia's role as a world power, but to expand its influence and exercise control over areas which formerly belonged to the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. The fact that Russia has not yet formally annexed Abkhazia and South Ossetia is less a testament to its self-restraint, than more a reflection of geopolitical realities and the importance of Georgia's partnership with Western powers.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as other post-Soviet frozen conflict zones like Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh, are essential topics of research for scholars in the field of international politics. In many ways, these territories were the canaries in the coal mine of Russian interference in the states and territories around its borders: Russia's involvement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia predates the invasion of Ukraine and the veiled threats of military action in the Baltic states. Further research into Russian involvement in these territories should focus on whether there are similarities between tactics used by Russia there and the tactics used in areas like Ukraine and the Baltic states. Precise quantification of Russian involvement, especially in the realm of economic interference, would be of great use to scholars, diplomats, and human rights lawyers and activists alike. If any statebuilding activities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia have actually succeeded without Russian interference, it would be wise for Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria, not to mention other unrecognized states around the world, to utilize similar tactics.

To many Americans, and indeed to many people around the world, the problems of the Abkhaz and South Ossetians may seem very far away, very insignificant. In actual fact, their issues, their experiences of oppression, their role as a pawn on Russia's chessboard, cannot and should not be ignored. The breadth and depth of Russian interference in these territories have revealed Russia's goals of their annexation and of destabilization of geopolitics in that region of

the world. It has also shown the international community which tactics Russia is ready and able to use to achieve these goals. Without extensive study of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it will be difficult for researchers and governments to predict which territory, which country, will be next.

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ACADEMIC VITA

O'NEILL KENNEDY

- Education: **The Pennsylvania State University, Schreyer Honors College, University Park, PA**
Graduation Date: May 2019
Bachelor of Arts in International Politics, International Relations option
Minors in German and Russian
Paterno Fellows Program, College of the Liberal Arts
Honors Thesis: *Russian Interference in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the Putin Era: An Analysis*
- Philipps-University Marburg, Marburg, Germany** 07/2017 – 08/2017
Completed courses in German Language, Geo-Political Change and Easternization, and Governmental and Social Challenges in the Middle East
- Center for Language Studies, Beloit College, Wisconsin** 07/2018 – 08/2018
Completed a course in Political Russian, which emphasized advanced vocabulary acquisition and the development of oral skills
- Involvement: **Pennsylvania College Democrats** 07/2018 – present
Director of Political Affairs
- Coordinate voter registration efforts across a membership of thirty-three chapters
 - Contact local, state, and federal candidates for visits to campuses and state conventions
- Penn State College Democrats** 04/2018 – present
Treasurer
- Manage a budget of approximately \$30,000
 - Plan fundraisers and merchandise sales
 - Maintain organization membership records
 - Communicated with members on a weekly basis as Secretary from April 2017 to April 2018
 - Promoted the organization to campus news outlets as Communications Chair from September 2016 to April 2017
- Schreyer for Women** 03/2018 – present
Director of Special Projects

- Organize programming that unites the organization's goals of providing service, career development, and social engagement opportunities to women students
- Plan merchandise sales and visits from speakers
- Conveyed information about club events to members via email as Administrator from March 2017 to March 2018

Judicial Board of the University Park Undergraduate Association

Associate Justice 10/2017 – present

- Adjudicate internal disputes within the student government
- Ensure adherence to the student government constitution and bylaws
- Serve as Deputy Elections Commissioner for Elections Publicity and ensure candidate compliance with the Elections Code

College of the Liberal Arts Academic Integrity Committee 10/2016 – present

- Collaborate with fellow undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty members to review instances of alleged academic misconduct

Experience: **Marc Friedenber**g for Congress

Volunteer 05/2018 – 11/2018

- Staff events as needed
- Draft weekly newsletter to 2,800 subscribers
- Act as a campaign point of contact for Penn State College Democrats

Nittany Outlets

Sales Associate 09/2017 – present

- Collaborate with fellow sales associates to provide a positive customer experience

Women's Center of Montgomery County

Volunteer 05/2017 – 07/2017

- Sorted through and organized donations at a thrift store benefitting the women's center
- Educated customers on the organization's mission and services

Redifer Dining Commons

Crew Leader 01/2017 – 09/2017

- Enforced customer service, food safety, and facility cleanliness standards
- Managed teams of four to six students and oriented employees to their work stations

Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures

Research Assistant 09/2016 – 01/2017

- Coded and organized project data using Audacity and Microsoft Excel
- Attended department research meetings and presentations

Philadelphia Office of U.S. Senator Bob Casey

Intern

05/2016 – 08/2016

- Worked with fellow interns to complete administrative and research tasks
- Drafted official correspondence and informational briefings

Skills:

Fluent in German

Proficient in Russian

Advanced knowledge of Microsoft Office Suite, MailChimp, and RStudio

Honors:

Dobro Slovo National Slavic Honor Society

04/2017

Joseph Paternost Award in Russian

04/2017

Dean's List

Fall 2015 – Fall 2016

Fall 2017 – Fall 2018