EXCERPTED FROM

Explaining Foreign Policy: International Diplomacy and the Russo-Georgian War

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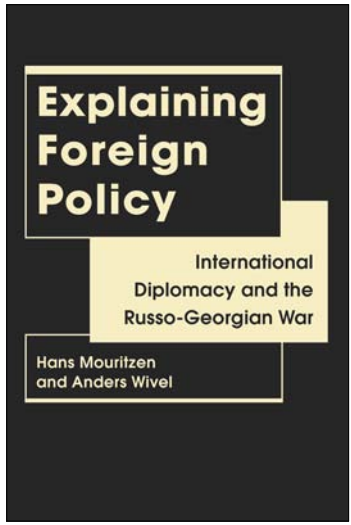

ISBN: 978-1-58826-835-8 hc

LYNNE RIENNER PUBLISHERS
1800 30th Street, Ste. 314
Boulder, CO 80301
USA
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fax 303.444.0824

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Explaining Foreign Policy

On 8 August 2008, the Russian army and air force attacked Georgia through South Ossetia, following Georgia's puzzling nighttime bombardment of South Ossetia's de facto capital, Tskhinvali. This attack, in turn, was a response to days of unrest within South Ossetia between Ossetian and pro-Georgian paramilitary forces. The full-scale Russian response shocked the Georgian government, and in five days Georgia had sustained a remarkable defeat, leaving Russian troops about 35 kilometers (22 miles) away from the Georgian capital of Tbilisi (see Figure 1.1).[1] Unsurprisingly a media war followed, with the contending parties reporting vastly differing versions of events to the international community. In the hectic world diplomacy that took place during the war and the weeks that followed, widely different reactions and interpretations of events were presented.

For some states and commentators, Russia's assertiveness represented a "return of history,"[2] with the events of 8 August 2008 ("08/08/08") being no less significant than the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989. From this point of view, the Russian attack on Georgia resembled Nazi Germany's successive partitions of Czechoslovakia in 1938 and 1939 or the Soviet Union's Cold War interventions in Eastern Europe. It was taken as evidence of the advent of a new Cold War.[3] For others, especially as the Georgian state and government survived and world attention turned to the Wall Street financial meltdown in the United States, the conflict came to be seen essentially as a tempest in a teacup.[4]

We do not see the conflict as any return of history, since we do not believe history to have ended in the first place. And a new Cold War was hardly in the cards, even at the height of the drama. But the long-term

Figure 1.1 Map of Georgia (including Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Ajaria)

effects of the war should not be underestimated. Russia's military intervention in South Ossetia and Georgia was its first major intervention on foreign territory since the collapse of the Soviet Union.[5] It was the most direct Russian challenge to the New World Order introduced by President George H. W. Bush in 1991, continued under President Bill Clinton, and accentuated after 2001 by President George W. Bush. The war signaled not only a challenge to this American world order, but also a contest to US foreign policy in general and its conduct in post-Soviet space in particular. Georgia had been labeled a "beacon of liberty" by President George W. Bush and hailed for its economic and political reforms, which were allegedly inspired by Western-style market economy and democracy. The country was a top-ten receiver of US economic aid, the beneficiary of a comprehensive US military training program, and—despite widespread European skepticism—a potential member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a result of US pressure within the alliance.

This was exactly the bone of contention for Russia, underlined by Vladimir Putin's explicit claims that the United States had deliberately provoked the conflict. According to President Dmitrij Medvedev, the shelling of Tskhinvali had the same impact in Russia that the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 had in the United States.[6] In his Munich speech in 2007,[7] prior to the Russo-Georgian conflict, Putin had spelled

out Russia's dissatisfaction with the hegemony of the United States and the country's hyperpower status since the end of the Cold War, including its neglect of United Nations (UN) resolutions and international law. Promise after promise to Russia had allegedly been broken through NATO's steady advance toward the former superpower's borders. Time and again, solemn Russian protests, for instance in connection with the NATO membership of the Baltic states, had been neglected by the West (though without the predicted "grave consequences," thereby causing a Russian loss of credibility). But with plans to welcome Ukraine and Georgia into NATO under way, the Georgian-Ossetian conflict presented an excellent occasion for Russia to put its foot down. As it turned out, the February–March 2009 "reset" in US-Russia relations following the war actually meant a de facto US acquiescence to the revised status quo in the southern Caucasus,[8] suggesting that the post–Cold War hegemony of the United States had ended. Together with the Wall Street financial meltdown of October 2008, China's ongoing rise to great power status, and the gradual emergence of other powers, a multipolar world, enabling separate spheres of interest, had been created. In combination with the Kosovo war of 1999 and the US intervention in Iraq of 2003, the Russia-Georgia war signaled decreased respect for international law and international organizations, and the increased adoption of *Realpolitik*.

The world diplomacy attached to the Russo-Georgian war presents us with a number of intriguing explanatory objects for the present volume:

- *Georgia's puzzling attack on Tskhinvali:* How could any sensible Georgian decisionmaker initiate the forceful shelling of Tskhinvali in the face of a large-scale Russian military exercise north of the border, given the obvious risk of provoking precisely the large-scale Russian attack that Georgia could not resist?
- *Russia's well-prepared and swift retaliation:* Whereas the Russian reaction hardly amounts to a puzzle, it is debatable which of the potential gains drove Russia into war, and which were merely fringe benefits. Moreover, why did Russia not continue its military operation to achieve further gains, such as the rest of Georgia, including Tbilisi, and topple the anti-Russian regime residing there?
- *The United States letting down its most loyal friend:* Is this allegation true? How to account for the restrained response of the United States to Russia's intervention in Georgia?
- *Europe divided:* Given the long-standing efforts of the European Union (EU) to become a foreign policy actor, even a major one on

the world stage, how can the divided nature of European national responses to the war be explained?

- *The seemingly successful EU mediation:* Given the divided nature of European responses, how did this mediation, at the hands of the French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, come about?
- *Russia's near abroad and China "united in caution":* The remarkably uniform and lukewarm reactions in this part of the world were a stark contrast to reactions in Europe. Why? How could these eleven states, without strong superstructures like the EU or NATO, manage such a unified approach?

Foreign Policy Explanations: Competitive or Complementary?

Whereas the international diplomacy of the Russo-Georgian war presents the explanatory objects listed above, the general theme of this volume is foreign policy explanation. When we explain something, we normally base our explanations on ("consume") one or more explicit theories or looser theoretical perspectives. Even if we should feel that one particular theory is generally better than its competitors, this theory will often prove inadequate for satisfactorily explaining the particular case at hand. The perennial methodological issue we wish to address in this book is whether a combination of two or more perspectives is possible, and if so, how.[9] While eclecticism is of course to be avoided in the establishment phase of any theory, should it also be avoided in the consumption phase? If and how explanations with different roots can be combined is a recurrent theme in political and social science. The topic arises in most theoretically oriented research seminars in everyday academic life.

The study of foreign policy is currently experiencing a comeback, and the number of university courses is increasing. Indications of this trend include the launch of the new journal *Foreign Policy Analysis* by the International Studies Association in 2005, the publication of a new major textbook on foreign policy,[10] and the inclusion of a chapter on foreign policy in the most recent edition of a major international relations (IR) textbook.[11]

Within the empirical study of foreign policy, only a few paradigmatic volumes attempt to explain the same situation from several alternative analytical angles or theories—precisely what we wish to do in the present volume. The most famous of these is Graham T. Allison's *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (1972),[12] which describes

the same empirical event in three different ways, thus inviting a different explanation for each (the "unitary actor," the "organizational process," and the "bureaucratic politics" models of foreign policy). In other words, the use of different conceptual lenses allegedly leads to different explanations. Not least due to this pedagogical set-up, the study still plays a significant role in university education and has received continuing scholarly attention.

Allison's epistemology is not clearly stated, but can justifiably be interpreted as representing "perspectivism."[13] This position ascribes a value of its own to heterogeneity and the partiality of our interpretations of the world as we experience it. Paradigms,[14] pre-paradigms, and perspectives are seen as complementary and mutually exclusive. Rather than contributing to full-fledged syntheses, perspectives should be kept separate, including for purposes of explanation. Perspectives of the "same" event can be compared in the sense of being put next to each other and examined one after the other, but they should in no way be integrated. This is Allison's view of his three foreign policy models, at least in his early phase (see Chapter 2).

By contrast, we think that, for explanatory purposes, perspectives should be made compatible by the conscious effort of the analyst (for such an effort, see Glenn 2009 pertaining to versions of realism and strategic culture studies). "Compatible" means that they should be mutually competitive, thereby possibly being contradictory, and ultimately supplement each other in a specific explanation. Even if forces are contradictory, they may both be at work in a given situation and thus "push" our actor in question in opposite directions—the resultant action being thus a compromise. Therefore perspectives should be allowed to supplement each other for explanatory purposes.

We support this view for both practical and epistemological reasons. The latter are argued in Chapter 2, where we derive our position from the critical rationalism of Karl Popper (as distinct from the idealism/relativism of the perspectivist approach). At the practical level, we wish to combat the existing tendency toward compartmentalization of research communities along "incompatible" theoretical lines. This easily leads to scholarly navel-gazing and a reduced interest in the real world; it is fruitful neither for mutual criticism, nor for social well-being in research communities. Any explanatory effort should have a self-confident, rather than self-sufficient, platform at its base, and should be humble enough to regard this platform as nothing more than a strategic starting point for research in face of the complexities of the real world. The inclusion of explanatory factors born in the "wrong"

context should be based, of course, on the premises of the platform. And preferably, such factors should be included in a non–ad hoc way, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Explaining Much by Little

Among two equally powerful theories, we prefer the more simple or parsimonious one (again following critical rationalism). We prefer theories and explanations that explain "much by little" to those that explain "little by little" (like Waltzian realism) or "much by much" (historians or analysts who wish to present the "full narrative"). This preference also diverges from Allison's practice. He obviously overlooks the fact that the unitary actor model is much simpler than his other two models. Even if he should be right that it explains less than do the other two, this must be judged in relation to its overall parsimony.

In accordance with our preference for parsimony, we proceed in each explanatory attempt from the principle of the "stepwise abandoning of simplifying assumptions"[15]—that is, we move, if necessary, from the abstract to the specific, down an explanatory ladder. We start from the most parsimonious level of explanation, the international system—the highest step on the ladder. If explanation fails at this level, we loosen some assumptions and proceed to the interstate level—the next step—and if we also fail here, we climb one step further down to the intrastate level. When descending, we should consider for each step the explanatory power we gain in relation to the loss of theoretical parsimony. As with any ladder-climbing, this is of course an act of balancing.

There is also a consideration of research economy behind this ladder strategy. It would be an overwhelming task to study the detailed decisionmaking procedures, bureaucratic politics, or leader personalities of the forty countries that we cover in this volume (the two contending parties in the war plus twenty-six European countries, eleven Eurasian countries including China, and the United States). We dive into these intricacies only if simpler explanations prove unsatisfactory.

Superficially, it may sound contradictory that we stress both parsimony and level combination. However, parsimony applies to the establishment of theory and the initial explanatory phase; if we fail there, we compromise and in the process allow for level combination. This is compatible with our epistemology, but requires a conscious effort in finding a suitable description of the explanatory object as well as a solid construction of the explanatory ladder.

Realism and Foreign Policy

These methodological preferences—parsimony together with an allowance to combine different levels of explanation, if necessary—are satisfied in the ambitions of neoclassical realism.[16] This is a prevailing school in contemporary foreign policy theorizing, which should be understood against the background of systemic neorealism,[17] that seeks to explain international politics from systemic anarchy and polarity: the number of great powers in the system (bipolarity, multipolarity, etc.). Recognizing the limitations of neorealism, neoclassical realists explicitly seek to explain foreign policy and specific historical events. They acknowledge the importance of anarchy and polarity, but find that these are mostly permissive causes, stipulating certain background conditions for state action only.[18] Therefore, in order to explain foreign policy, often in detail, they typically incorporate domestic (state) variables into their explanatory models.

Here, of course, they are caught in a dilemma between distinctly realist but indeterminate explanations and improved but indistinctive explanations. They can stay true to the neorealist core assumptions and end up with indeterminate explanations, or they can combine structural factors with other variables and easily end up with a collection of ad hoc arguments indistinct from other theoretical perspectives.[19] Moreover, whereas neorealists emphasize material factors such as traditional power resources (e.g., gross domestic product [GDP], military expenditure, size of army), the neoclassicists typically add how these material factors are interpreted and perceived by the human beings who make foreign policy.

Like the neoclassical realists, we tackle in this volume the dilemma between parsimony and explanatory power. In so doing we agree with Robert Keohane that "the debate between advocates of parsimony and proponents of contextual subtlety resolves itself into a question of stages, rather than an either/or choice."[20] This is different from the approach of most neoclassical realists, though, who rarely start out by applying the original neorealist model, but prefer instead to develop more complex models to be applied from the outset of the analysis.

The Spatial Blindness of Modern Realism

We wish also to point out one critical weakness that neoclassical realists have inherited from Waltzian neorealism: a spatial blindness. As geopolitics was rejected in favor of realism in the postwar era, its spatial

emphasis went with it, consciously or not, for many international relations researchers. Moreover, younger scholars brought up under the Waltzian regime—whether they became realists or something else—internalized its discourse: "if not system, then unit (state), and if not unit, then system." In other words: no salient environment, no neighbors, no buffer zones—in theory at least. Undoubtedly this tendency was exacerbated by an understandable US focus, both during systemic bipolarity and later during US unipolarity. Naturally, realists and others were impressed by the vast supremacy of the United States in terms of capability and thus easily became US-centric, forgetting that the United States is a "faraway" sea power in relation to Eurasia and becoming blind to Eurasian states' more proximate power concerns. This had a certain parallel among some journalists and observers who blamed or praised Washington for the outcome of every major conflict in the world. Even at the height of US unipolarity, this was unfair.

According to a neoclassic axiom, "the impact of [the state's relative material power capabilities] on foreign policy is indirect and complex because systemic pressures must be translated through intervening variables at the unit level."[21] In other words, as the neoclassical realists took the reasonable step of adding factors to the systemic perspective, they elegantly jumped over the spatial factor and landed in states' domestic societies and decisionmaking procedures: state bureaucracies, the perceptions of policymakers, interest groups, elite cohesion, and the like. We wish to remedy this omission by inserting an interstate level of explanation between the systemic and the intrastate levels. It remains to be seen how much explanatory power it possesses regarding the diplomacy of the Russo-Georgian war.

Structure of the Volume

In Chapter 2 we present our theoretical tools: foreign policy profiles and strategies, methodology and epistemology, and the theories selected at each level that we subsequently apply to all the empirical chapters. Chapter 3 covers Georgia, Chapter 4 Russia, Chapter 5 the United States, Chapter 6 the European states, Chapter 7 the European Union, and Chapter 8 Russia's near abroad and China. In each empirical chapter, we maintain a sharp distinction between description and explanation. Unlike Allison, we believe we can accomplish fairly neutral descriptions of a state's positioning (theory-impregnated, unavoidably, but not prejudging the subsequent explanatory competition). Turning to

the explanation of states' positioning, we apply the level ladder: starting with a systemic explanatory attempt, proceeding if necessary to an interstate explanation, and ending, if required, with the addition of one or more intrastate factors. This procedure implies that the deviant or difficult cases, which are actually the most intriguing ones, are those that receive the most coverage.

In Chapter 9 we conclude with a discussion of the hows and whys of the conflict studied in this volume and its repercussions for world politics and for each of the analyzed states. Also, the implications of our study for foreign policy explanation will be discussed. Before we embark, however, we turn briefly to the historical roots of the Russo-Georgian conflict.

Historical Roots of the 2008 Conflict

Georgia has a long and complex history with Russia. The eastern Georgian kingdom of Kartli-Kakheti signed the Treaty of Georgievsk with Russia in 1783, committing Russia to defend the small kingdom, which comprised the Christian areas of Georgia. Even though the treaty, signed at the request of the Georgians, was seen as an attempt to protect Eastern Christianity against the Persian and Ottoman Muslim empires, Russia offered no protection against the Turkish and Persian invasions of 1785 and 1795, and in 1801 Kartli-Kakheti was annexed and declared abolished by Russian tsar Alexander.[22] In 1810, Russia annexed the western Georgian kingdom of Imereti, followed gradually throughout the century by several other territories (including Abkhazia in 1864). Since the end of the sixteenth century, Russia had gradually taken control of larger and larger parts of the Caucasus, and in 1878, after the Russo-Turkish war, it finally succeeded in controlling the region, which was seen as central for Russia's stability as both a buzzer zone and a battlefield.[23]

During the twentieth century, Georgia experienced a turbulent relationship with the Soviet Union. In May 1918, following the Russian revolution of 1917, Georgia declared its independence, but in February 1921 it was attacked by the Red Army, which quickly conquered the Georgian forces and installed a communist government loyal to Moscow.[24] In 1922, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan were incorporated into the Transcaucasian Federated Soviet Socialist Republic (TcFSSR). Tblisi was the capital of Georgia as well as the entire TcFSSR from 1922 until the reemergence of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan as separate Soviet republics in 1936. In accordance with Vladimir Lenin's policy of nation-

al self-determination, all three entities were encouraged to preserve their own national culture during the TcFSSR period, with subnational minorities awarded various levels of independence. Reflecting this policy, South Ossetia was awarded the status of "autonomous district" in 1922 following attempts to declare independence from Georgia from 1918 to 1920.[25] At the same time, although the traditional center for Ossetian culture was located in North Ossetia, South Ossetians and Georgians had close cultural ties and a shared history including subjugation to the Russian empire.[26] This reflected the dual nature of the Ossetian-Georgian relationship: on the one hand, the communities shared Christian traditions and the experience of resisting Russification; on the other hand, conflicts erupted between them following the advent of Georgian nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, conflicts that still affect their relations today.[27] Abkhazia, independent since the Russian revolution of 1917, was annexed by the Russians in 1919–1920 and was awarded the status of a Soviet socialist republic in 1921, but was demoted to an "autonomous republic" within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1931, thereby creating significant Abkhaz resentment toward both Russia and Georgia.[28] Abkhaz language and culture were allowed to flourish to a certain extent, but only in the context of continued Russification, with Abkhazians exiled while other nationalities (Georgians among them) were encouraged to settle, making ethnic Abkhazians a minority in their own country.[29] Even so, direct connections between the Abkhazian and Soviet elites secured considerable economic and cultural advantages, including control of key political positions and domination of the agricultural sector during the Cold War era.[30]

Despite an often conflict-ridden relationship between Georgia and the Soviet Union, culminating in unsuccessful Georgian uprisings against Soviet rule in 1924 and 1956, Georgia was sometimes described as "the land of plenty and wonder" in the Soviet era.[31] This expression reflects Georgia's status as a popular vacation destination and Georgia's status as the wealthiest republic in the Soviet Union.[32] At the same time, "an oppositional national elite whose radicalism and uncompromising stand toward the Soviet Union proved to be exceptional even by the standards of the late Soviet empire"[33] gradually began to evolve beginning in the 1950s. Dissidents Merab Kostava and Zviad Gamsakhurdia established Georgian nationalist human rights groups beginning in 1954, and in 1956 riots erupted in Tbilisi, with Georgians demonstrating their dissatisfaction with Soviet rule. Georgian defiance increased in the late-Soviet era. In 1978 riots in Tblisi successfully pressured Moscow to establish a decree making Russian the sole official language of the

republic, and in November 1983 an Aeroflot plane at the Tblisi airport was hijacked by young Georgian nationalists (just as the authorities of the Georgian republic were preparing for the joint celebration of the 65th anniversary of the 1917 revolution and the 200th anniversary of the Treaty of Georgievsk, which established a Russian protectorate over Georgia).[34] On 9 April 1989, Soviet rule was severely discredited when nineteen pro-independence demonstrators were killed at a rally in Tbilisi and political initiative in the country was taken over by Georgian nationalists, who eventually ended communist rule after a nationalist coalition led by former dissident Gamsakhurdia took office on 28 October 1990, following multiparty parliamentary elections that left the communists a distant second in power.[35] The new government quickly signaled its intention to leave the Soviet Union, with Georgia declaring independence even before the collapse of the communist superpower: on 9 April 1991, exactly two years after the Soviet killings of civilians in Tbilisi and following a referendum with 90 percent of the voters endorsing independence, the Georgian parliament declared secession from the Soviet Union,[36] and on 26 May the same year Gamsakhurdia was elected president.[37]

The collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in the collapse of a Georgian state that included Abkhazia and South Ossetia (see Figure 1.1). This was the result of an action-reaction process involving Georgia, Russia, and the two breakaway republics simultaneously strengthening nationalist discourse, both before and after Georgia's declaration of independence in April 1991. Abkhazia demanded independence from Georgia in 1988, and in 1989 South Ossetia began lobbying for integration with Russian North Ossetia or, alternatively, for independence.[38] In 1990 Georgia outlawed regional parties following the rise of the South Ossetian Popular Front. As a consequence, South Ossetia declared itself a Soviet democratic republic, boycotted Georgian elections, and held its own, which were subsequently declared invalid by Gamsakhurdia, who suspended the autonomous status of South Ossetia in December 1990. By the end of 1990, Tbilisi had little authority over either South Ossetia or Abkhazia.[39] In South Ossetia violent conflict broke out in the latter part of 1991 and continued until the summer of 1992.

Mutual suspicion and insecurity came to dominate relations between Georgia and Abkhazia/South Ossetia, as political elites and populations in the two regions feared that Georgian determination to create a nation-state would undermine the political, economic, and cultural privileges they had enjoyed to an increasing degree under Soviet rule. The Gamsakhurdia regime did little to ease these worries as power became increasingly

concentrated in the hands of the president, and his political rhetoric became consistently nationalistic.[40] Gamsakhurdia had used tensions with South Ossetia as a tool for mobilizing Georgians in his rise to power.[41] Ignoring calls for increased regional autonomy, he introduced a system of monitoring local officials through republic prefects, thereby further alienating Abkhazians and South Ossetians.[42] The result was "the emergence of a triangular struggle: Georgia fighting the Soviet Union for its national liberation; Moscow fighting the Georgian drive for secession; leaders of autonomous Abkhazia and South Ossetia trying to defend their political rights against Georgian nationalism."[43]

Gamsakhurdia was ousted in a coup and fled Tbilisi in January 1992, being replaced soon afterward by former Soviet minister of foreign affairs Eduard Shevardnadze.[44] However, this did not provide Georgia with a successful solution to the conflicts over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, nor did it free Georgia from Russian domination. The Abkhazian Supreme Soviet had proclaimed Abkhazia a sovereign republic within the Soviet Union following Georgian moves toward independence. After growing tensions, Georgia sent troops to Abkhazia in 1992, but they were driven out in 1993, with almost the entire Georgian population of Abkhazia fleeing.

Georgia's first round of conflicts with South Ossetia and Abkhazia ended with the Russian-brokered peace settlements in South Ossetia in 1992 and Abkhazia in 1994, following violent conflicts between separatists and Georgian troops. Both settlements allowed Russia an active peacekeeping role, and Georgia had little choice but to accept Russian domination, as the settlements were accepted by the UN (in the case of Abkhazia) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) (in the case of South Ossetia). Georgia's position on Abkhazia and South Ossetia during the 1990s was mostly ambivalent, on the one hand refusing to recognize the independence of the two breakaway republics, and on the other hand too weak to do anything about their de facto independence.[45]

The Russian army continued to be the most powerful military force in Georgia in the first few years after independence, supplying weapons—legally and illegally—to Abkhaz and South Ossetian separatists as well as the Georgian army, controlling the border with Turkey, and maintaining headquarters of the Russian Transcaucasian Military District (ZAVKO) in Tblisi.[46] Continued Russian presence in Georgia reflected both general Russian interests in the post-Soviet sphere and particular interests in Georgia. As the Soviet Union collapsed and Russia emerged as its successor state, it faced a transformed security environment and a new set of

challenges. In particular, controlling the new Russian borders proved impossible in the short run, requiring establishment of a "forward security zone" in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), reflecting what were viewed in Moscow as the "strategic borders" of Russia, to help underpin Russian security and stability.[47] Also, continued Russian presence would prevent a security vacuum in the former Soviet sphere, which could be filled by regional rivals such as Iran or Turkey or the US unipole.[48] Following this logic, the deployment of Russian peacekeeping forces in South Ossetia and Abkhazia was a useful tool to secure Russian influence in the Caucasus and to compel Georgia to "accede to Russian security demands in the shape of forward basin rights, military cooperation and border cooperation."[49] Georgia initially resisted Russian influence (e.g., by forcing the withdrawal of Russian forces from the country even prior to independence), but the lack of interest from any other country to invest real political capital in the Abkhaz and South Ossetian conflicts, together with the general lack of Western interest in Georgia, resulted in close Georgian cooperation with Russia despite its infringements on Georgian sovereignty following from this partnership.[50] This was symbolized by the appointment of Vardiko Nadibaidze, a Russian army general and the deputy commander of ZAVKO, as Georgian minister of defense in 1994, and by the Georgian acknowledgment also that same year that Russia should be allowed to keep its bases in Georgia and have an influence over the appointment of its ministers of defense, interior, and security.[51] In December 1994 the Georgian government explicitly supported Russia's policy in Chechnya, both verbally and by allowing Russia to use Georgian airspace.

Georgia's position as a Russian quasi-protectorate gradually changed beginning in the mid-1990s with increased cooperation with the United States. No longer on the verge of collapse, Georgia began to strive toward de facto independence from Russia and a break with 200 years of Russian military dominance. The United States increasingly contributed to Georgia's economic and military recovery and supported the Baku-Tblisi-Ceyhan pipeline project, which would reduce Russian power over the region's energy resources. In 1999 Georgia left its treaty of collective security with Russia and announced its intention of freeing itself of all "foreign military presence"—that is, the Russian military bases in Georgia.[52] In 2002 Georgia and the United States agreed on a training and equipment program. US training of Georgian forces and support of the Georgian military was initially meant to reduce tensions between Russia and Georgia and to strengthen antiterror cooperation between the United States and Russia in the aftermath of 9/11 by equipping and training

Georgian forces to control the Pankisi Gorge, where Chechen separatists were hiding. Gradually, however, US-Georgian cooperation was strengthened by Georgian participation in the Iraq War (eventually growing to 2,000 troops, the third largest contribution to the Coalition of the Willing) and by US assistance in transforming Georgian defense to make it NATO-compatible, thus directly challenging Russian influence.[53]

The diminishing Russian influence over Georgian society was accentuated by the Rose Revolution of November 2003, which brought Mikhail Saakashvili to presidential power. At first, however, relations seemed to be improving. Shortly after coming to power, Saakashvili identified "much closer, warmer and friendlier relations with the Russian Federation" as a main priority of his administration.[54] He introduced a policy of crackdowns on Chechen separatists using Georgia as a safe haven and worked toward stronger economic ties between the two countries. Meanwhile Russia contributed to the appeasement of Ajaria, a potential breakaway republic, by advising Ajarian leader Aslan Abashidze to resign and leave for Moscow rather than engaging in a conflict with Georgia.[55] Ajaria was in some ways just as likely a candidate for independence as both Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Ajaria had not been annexed by Russia from the Ottoman Empire until 1878, and Ajars were Muslims, spoke a Georgian dialect with many Turkic words, and "tended to associate with the 'Turks' rather than the 'Georgians.'"[56] In the first years after the 1917 revolution, Ajars had sided with Turkey and fought both Russians and Georgians. Ajarian nationalism was reinvigorated by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the explicitly stated intention of Gamsakhurdia to abolish Ajaria's autonomy, and the region seemed well positioned for statehood: it had important political institutions in place (ministries, tax inspectorate, supreme court) and a strategically important port in Batumi.[57] An Ajarian uprising in 1991 secured the autonomy of the region but left a "mafia permeated society"[58] governed by Abashidze, until President Saakashvili in the aftermath of the Rose Revolution decided to impose central control over all of Georgia's regions, including Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Ajaria. This proved much easier in Ajaria than in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, for three reasons. First, whereas the Soviet Union had worked actively to underpin South Ossetian and, in particular, Abkhazian culture in order to create an internal counterforce to Georgian nationalism, Georgia had been permitted to pursue assimilationist policies in Ajaria.[59] Second, in addition to its geopolitical rationale, the diversified Soviet approach to Georgia's regions was underpinned by Soviet ideology promoting secularization and thereby creating a stronger cultural bond between Christian Georgians and Muslim Ajars.[60] Religion was seen as an

illegitimate indicator of ethnicity, whereas language was used to categorize ethnic groups. For this reason there were no Ajars in Soviet statistics, as they were all considered to be ethnic Georgians. Finally, the Russians stuck to the diversified policy of the Soviet Union and did little to encourage separatist forces in Ajaria.

President Saakashvili's "dual project" of modernizing Georgian society and achieving reunification proved to be incompatible with closer relations with Russia in the long run.[61] Although the Saakashvili government made an initial attempt at rapprochement with Russia in the first six months after coming to power, strong issues of contention remained: economic and political dependence on Moscow, the presence of Russian military bases, as well as the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[62] In particular, disagreement over Abkhazia and South Ossetia led to provocations from both sides, and relations between Georgia and Russia quickly deteriorated. As one analyst noted of the first few years after the Rose Revolution, "Tblisi's overarching strategy seems quite coherent in retrospect. Tblisi's understanding was that the status quo prevailing since the early 1990s needed to be altered, should the conflicts ever approach solutions."[63] In the following years, the Saakashvili administration made no secret of its intention to reincorporate Abkhazia and South Ossetia: Georgian military bases were placed in Senaki near Abkhazia and in Gori near South Ossetia (see Figure 1.1), and Georgia openly worked to destabilize the South Ossetian and Abkhazian leaderships.[64]

Russia did not immediately seek to take advantage of Kosovo's declaration of independence in February 2008, despite having warned the United States and its allies in 2006 and 2007 that this would set a precedent for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgia responded by underlining Russia's potential role in resolving the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[65] However, soon Georgia received a number of warnings from Russia: Russia voiced opposition to NATO's consideration, at the initiative of the United States, to offer membership action plans to Georgia and Ukraine, and established direct relations between Moscow and both of the breakaway republics.[66]

Even more important, Russia launched a series of military provocations to test Georgian resolve and intentions. In April 2008, Russia accused Georgia of preparing an attack on Abkhazia and responded by increasing its troops in the region; on 20 April, a Russian fighter shot down a Georgian reconnaissance drone in Abkhazia, and Georgia responded by deploying 12,000 troops in the area of Senaki; in early June, 400 Russian troops were deployed in Abkhazia to rebuild damaged railways, leading to a strong response from Georgia accusing Russia of

preparing an invasion; on 9 July, four Russian fighter aircraft flew into Georgian airspace as US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice landed in Tbilisi. During the spring and summer, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) reported "countless provocations and hostile acts claimed by both sides against the other,"[67] and on at least three occasions the two countries were on the brink of war. US, EU, and German attempts at brokering a peace plan—or at least containing the conflict to Abkhazia—proved fruitless, as did the suggestion from the Georgian leadership that Abkhazia might be partitioned, leaving one area under Russian influence and the other under Georgian influence.[68]

The conflict focus shifted to South Ossetia in July and, increasingly, during the first days of August (see Chapter 3). Strange as it may sound given the preceding background, the war that followed surprised the world community, both government leaders and commentators, including analysts of the frozen conflicts of the post-Soviet space;[69] even the Georgian and Russian governments were both allegedly shocked and surprised. This book explains how and why a war broke out under these circumstances, and why the actors directly and indirectly involved in the conflict responded the way they did.

Notes

1. *BBC News,* 15 August 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7563452.stm.

2. Robert Kagan, "Putin Makes His Move," *Washington Post,* 11 August 2008. This is an allusion to the alleged "end of history" with the termination of the Cold War (Fukuyama 1989).

3. Lucas 2009.

4. So far, analyses of the 2008 Russo-Georgian conflict have been conducted mainly by area specialists and policy analysts rather than international relations scholars. For example, Cornell and Starr 2009 provides an excellent chronological account of the roots of the conflict, the conflict itself, and its implications, but without a unifying theoretical framework. Likewise, Rich 2010 contains a number of interesting analyses of the war and its context, but without a shared theoretical framework. An entertaining and insightful account of the war, though biased in favor of Georgia, is provided in Asmus 2010. These studies tend to concentrate on the conflict itself, unpacking the line of events and, occasionally, fixing responsibility. In contrast, in the present volume, we apply foreign policy theories and do so systematically in order to explain the conflict diplomacy.

5. There had been Russian military involvements in the 1990s in Georgia (Abkhazia, South Ossetia), Moldova (Transdniestria), and Tajikistan.

6. *BBC News,* 12 September 2008, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7612507.stm.

7. Speech at the forty-third Munich Conference on Security Policy, 10 February 2007, www.securityconference.de.

8. In the words of US vice president Joseph Biden at the forty-fifth Munich Conference on Security Policy, on 7 February 2009: "It is time to press the reset button and to revisit the many areas where we can and should work together"

(www.securityconference.de). In March 2009 this was followed up by a meeting in Geneva between US secretary of state Hillary Clinton and Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov in which the two sides agreed to restart US-Russian relations (Åslund and Kuchnis 2009).

9. Mouritzen 1998, pp. 81–82, 151–153.

10. Smith, Hadfield, and Dunne 2008. See also Hill 2002; Webber and Smith 2002.

11. Jackson and Sørensen 2010. Hollis and Smith 1990 takes a different approach, discussing levels of explanation as well as teleological versus causal explanations and thereby placing the study of international relations and foreign policy in a more philosophical context. Even scholars previously working within the so-called realist tradition, for many years a stronghold of structural analyses focusing on international outcomes rather than foreign policy, are now focusing their attention on how structural pressure is transformed into concrete foreign policy.

12. See also Allison and Zelikow 1999.

13. Lukes 1982; Engelbrekt 2002.

14. Kuhn 1970.

15. Mouritzen 1998, pp. 6–7.

16. For discussions of the potential of neoclassical realism as a foreign policy theory, see Rose 1998; Schweller 2003; Wivel 2005; Rathbun 2008; Freyberg-Inan, Harrison, and James 2009; Glenn 2009; Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009.

17. Waltz 1979.

18. Walt 2002a, p. 211.

19. Vasquez 1997; Legro and Moravcsik 1999; Guzzini 2004.

20. Keohane continues, thus, that "we should seek parsimony first, then add complexity while monitoring the adverse effects that this has on the predictive power of our theory: its ability to make significant inferences on the basis of limited information" (1986b, p. 188).

21. Rose 1998, p. 146.

22. Jackson 2003, p. 115; Suny 1994, p. 59.

23. Jackson 2003, p. 116.

24. Nichol 2008; Select Committee on Communist Aggression 1955.

25. Nichol 2008, p. 1.

26. King 2001, p. 534.

27. Rich 2010, p. xiv.

28. Jackson 2003, pp. 116–117; Goltz 2009, p. 13.

29. King 2008b, p. 215; Jackson 2003, pp. 117–118.

30. Derluguian 1998, p. 270.

31. For example, Zürcher 2007, p. 115.

32. Goltz 2009, p. 14. Georgian wealth in the Soviet era was only partly reflected in official statistics. Relying mainly on agriculture, in particular the production of wine and other alcoholic beverages, large profits were made on the black market. In the 1980s, in particular, the shadow economy grew rapidly. Thus, "at the end of the decade (i.e., at the end of the Soviet Union), significantly more was produced in the shadow economy than in the official economy" (Zürcher 2007, p. 118).

33. Zürcher 2007, p. 115.

34. All the hijackers were killed at the scene by special forces or captured for subsequent execution. For a brief description of these events, see Goltz 2009, p. 15.

35. Suny 1994, p. 325.

36. Ibid., p. 326.

37. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia signaled its ambition to avoid domination by Russia by deciding not to join the Commonwealth of

Independent States until 1 March 1994 (having decided in principle on 8 October 1993). Later, on 12 August 2008, Georgia became the first country to withdraw from the Commonwealth.

38. Nichol 2008, p. 1; Nichol 2009, p. 14; Zürcher 2007, p. 121.
39. Zürcher 2007, p. 126.
40. Suny 1994, pp. 324–328.
41. Zürcher 2007, p. 124.
42. Jackson 2003, p. 113.
43. Cheterian 2009, p. 157.
44. After Zviad Gamsakhurdia's flight, Georgia was briefly governed by a so-called military council led by the commander of the National Front, Tengiz Kitovani, the commander of the Mkhedrioni, Jaba Ioseliani, and former prime minister Tengiz Sigua. Lacking both domestic and international legitimacy, they soon chose to signal their commitment to democracy and asked Eduard Shevardnadze, regarded as a prominent senior statesman both internationally and domestically, to return to Georgia to serve as head of state (Zürcher 2007, p. 129). Shevardnadze served as chairman of parliament from October 1992 and president from November 1995.
45. Cheterian 2009, p. 157.
46. Gordadze 2009, pp. 33–34.
47. Allison 1998, p. 14.
48. Jackson 2003, p. 120.
49. Lynch 2002, p. 845.
50. Aves 1998, pp. 183–184.
51. Gordadze 2009, pp. 34–38.
52. Ibid., p. 44.
53. Hamilton 2010, pp. 205–206.
54. Sophie Lambroschini, "Georgia: Moscow Watches Warily as Saakashvili Comes to Power," 5 January 2004, www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2004/01/01-05_index.htm.
55. Nilsson 2009, p. 91.
56. Zürcher 2007, p. 200. In particular, when comparing Ajaria with Abkhazia, the two entities seemed "nearly identical" (Derluguian 1998, p. 261).
57. Zürcher 2007, p. 202.
58. Derluguian 1998, p. 261.
59. Ibid., p. 262.
60. Zürcher 2007, p. 201.
61. Cheterian 2009, p. 158.
62. Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist 2009, p. 310.
63. Nilsson 2009, p. 94.
64. Cheterian 2009, pp. 158–159.
65. Popjanevski 2009, pp. 143–144.
66. Cheterian 2009, p. 164; Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist 2009, p. 312. Also, at a US-Russian summit in Sochi in April 2008, Putin used "stark and threatening language about Georgia" (Asmus 2010, p. 140).
67. International Institute for Strategic Studies 2008a.
68. Asmus 2010, pp. 152–164; Zourabichvili 2009, pp. 312–313.
69. Cornell and Starr 2009, p. 3.