Coercion in an Era of Gray Zone Conflict:
Explaining Russia’s Responses to Declining Role in the Post-Soviet Region

by

Dani Belo

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Norman Paterson School of International Affairs
Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario

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Dani Belo
Abstract

Following the annexation of Crimea by Russia, it was predicted by numerous academics, policymakers, and media sources that Moscow would use its military in a similar manner in the rest of Ukraine. However, contrary to these predictions, Moscow used various hybrid tools and tactics, such as targeted media operations, material support for ethnic-based movements, as well as covert security operations. Such tools and tactics have become a defining feature of gray zone conflicts, which dominate the mode of contemporary interaction between geopolitical adversaries. The question this research addresses is why does Russia use various intensities of coercive tools and tactics across its near abroad? This thesis builds a theoretical model of foreign policy decision-making through the synthesis of system-level incentive and domestic-level opportunity causal variables. A structured-focused comparison through discourse and content analysis is used to assess the validity of the causal mechanisms in the Incentive-Opportunity Intervention (IOI) Model. This study focuses on the cases of Russia’s decisions to use various gray zone tools and tactics in 1) Abkhazia, 2) Crimea, 3) Odesa, 4) Kharkiv, and 5) the Donbas region. The testing of the hypotheses is conducted through two process-tracing tests: 1) the ‘hoop test’ and 2) the ‘smoking gun test.’ For each hypothesis, there is a sequence of necessary observations to support causal inference. The observations in each case are identified through the gathering of empirical evidence in three stages. This study finds that the variation in Russia’s application of gray zone tools and tactics is a function of 1) different system-level role decline risks relative to power across its ‘near abroad’ as well as 2) varying costs associated with support for non-state actors in different ethnic-based movement types. In terms of implications for conflict management, this study challenges the conventional approach of addressing geopolitical threats with military means. Rather, security threats in gray zone conflicts may be addressed effectively through ‘civilian’ means. To this end, a key focus of bilateral and multilateral conflict management efforts in gray zone conflict should be domestic-level institutional structures in states which become the battlegrounds of great power politics.
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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 The Value of Combining System and Domestic Dimensions to Explain Gray Zone Conflict Behavior

As one of the critical geopolitical competitors, Russia has engaged in various operations to challenge the dominance of the U.S and its allies in international relations. This phenomenon has become known in both academic and policy circles as engagement in gray zone conflict.¹

In gray zone conflict, states use a combination of strategic-, operational-, and tactical-level techniques, which make this form of conflict exceptionally resistant to resolution. Onset and termination are ambiguous because many of the tools and tactics used in gray zone conflicts are dependent upon a highly globalized and interconnected international economic and political world order, as well as considerable permeability of international borders. As a consequence, people, technology, information, and military hardware, which are essential for gray zone conflict participants, can move easily across the world. In this conflict format, states rely primarily on covert operations which never pass the threshold of open warfare to achieve operational or strategic aims. Moreover, the long-term point of victory by participants and stakeholders remains largely ambiguous. Finally, there is a desire by one or more parties to gradually, but fundamentally, revise the regional or global system of alliances as well as norms of international conduct. This is often to a degree not even seen during the Cold War era.²

It was predicted by academic research, policymakers, and media sources that Russia would use overt military operations readily across its ‘near abroad.’³ This mistaken belief crystalized following the annexation of Crimea in 2015, after which influential figures claimed that Russia would engage in similar military operations against the rest of Ukraine.
and elsewhere across the post-Soviet region. For example, Canada’s Foreign Minister John Baird compared Russia’s actions in Crimea to those of Nazi Germany in 1938; the implication of this analogy is that Moscow would invade the rest of Ukraine as Germany did Czechoslovakia.\(^4\) On another occasion, focusing on the Russian diaspora factor, historian Max Boot looked at Moscow’s actions in Ukraine as analogous to the 1941 German occupation of the Baltic region, where many considered the Nazis as liberators.\(^5\) However, these predictions of a large-scale Russian invasion failed to materialize. In turn, the anticipation of an imminent Russian invasion corresponded to the deployment of costly and uniform conventional, military-oriented, deterrence measures by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).\(^6\)

This mismatch between the above theories and evidence of Russia’s foreign policy is attributable to the isolation of system- and domestic-level causal variables, which create a permissive environment for Moscow’s cross-border interventions. This delineation between the two groups of variables results in misspecification\(^7\) and in turn, a false anticipation of uniformity in Russia’s actions across its ‘near abroad.’

The great power struggle argument has been frequently offered to explain Russia’s coercive engagement against smaller post-Soviet states. The argument has largely been distilled to countering NATO influence. This is a system-level argument, in which the enlargement of NATO results in the U.S and its allies’ militaries moving closer to Russia’s borders and shifting the perceived balance of power away from Moscow. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO has generally taken two approaches to expanding its influence across the post-Soviet region and Northern Europe: 1) incorporation of new members and 2) in cases where membership is problematic, engage in military collaboration. The first
approach entailed the addition of the independent post-Soviet republics, former members of the Warsaw Pact, and other non-NATO members into the Organization. The Second method relied on the Partnership for Peace, launched in 1994. The initiative incorporated many of the former Soviet republics of Central Asia and European non-NATO states. As noted by President Clinton, the Partnership is a track to membership in the Organization. However, the idea of NATO enlargement, whether through memberships or partnerships, was met with resistance from Moscow.

From Russia’s perspective, the expansion of NATO influence contributed to a shift in the regional balance of power and established a spiral of insecurity and distrust. Yevgeny Primakov, Russia’s Foreign Minister (1996-1998), stated that Moscow deemed the movement of "NATO infrastructure" close to Russian borders as unacceptable. Subsequent Foreign Ministers, such as Igor Ivanov and Sergey Lavrov, echoed this message stating that the Organization’s expansion is a manifestation of the desire by the U.S and its allies to contain Russia. Since the 1990s, Moscow feared this expansion would displace Russia’s military-political linkages and power across the post-Soviet region. However, starting in the early 2000s, Russia also indicated that it would actively prevent the advance of NATO closer to its borders. This balance of power, system-level consideration, has been one of the two core arguments used to assess Moscow’s foreign policy choices.

A second argument used to explain Moscow’s cross-border interventions in the post-Soviet region is the affective or ideological motivation associated with empire-building, akin to Imperial Russia. Some political and academic figures have framed it as building the “New Third Rome.” Believers in, or proponents of, this argument frequently
referred Vladimir Putin’s statement that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the twentieth century. Pointing to prophecies made by nationalist writers like Alexandr Dugin (1997), the logic follows that Russia is attempting to, or should, consolidate all Russian speakers living across the former Soviet region under a single leadership. However, the magnitude of such a consolidation of the Russian diaspora depends on the definition of the group.

The term Russian diaspora has been defined as cultural practices, linguistic affiliation, religious association, and (or) identity based on symbolic markers which tie people with the Russian Federation. In the 1990s, the term encapsulated people who identified themselves as ethnic Russians. Since then, however, both in academic and policy circles, the term has been transformed to account for a larger group of people. For example, Bloch (2012) and Harmon-Donovan (2015) define members of the ‘diaspora’ as any people from the post-Soviet region, whether they are ethnically Russian or not, with some perceived ties to Russia. This broader definition of ‘diaspora’ was adopted in Moscow’s foreign policy to protect Russian ‘compatriots’ in the post-Soviet space and beyond. In turn, under the banner of a symbolic right to protect its diaspora, Russia intervened in ethnic-based movements across its near abroad.

Heraclides (1990) finds that one of the indicators of affective reasons for third-party interventions in ethnic-based movements is the disproportionate economic, material, and geopolitical losses compared to any affective gains. This disparity in losses and gains often makes the states’ actions seem irrational. In other words, because ideological outcomes or gains may be difficult to measure, and are clear only to the intervener, high monetary and material investment in their pursuit may appear disproportionately large and thus,
irrational to other actors. Even though either of the above system- or domestic-level explanations appear plausible, if taken individually, they fall short of comprehensively explaining Moscow’s decision-making.

Reliance on any one of the above system- or domestic-level explanations for Russia’s use of gray zone tools and tactics across international borders results in an anticipated uniformity in Moscow’s cross-border actions. The system-level argument is useful to account for variation in Russia’s use of coercion across NATO and non-member states, such as Estonia and Ukraine respectively. In the former case, NATO membership may restrain Russia’s actions in fear of retaliation by the alliance. In the latter, case Moscow may act more severely to prevent accession into the Organization and thus, avoid a further shift in the regional balance of power toward the alliance.

The NATO expansion argument however is insufficient to explain variation in the use of different gray zone tools and tactics across states which are not part of the alliance. If the NATO enlargement prevention argument is followed, Russia should have an incentive to deploy a similar intensity of force across Ukraine as it did in Georgia. Both states are not members of the Organization, and the prevention of their accession into the alliance is similarly important for Moscow to counter the perceived encirclement of Russia. In practice, however, Moscow deployed different tools and tactics across the two cases.

Similar to the NATO expansion factor, the diaspora protection or consolidation argument also predicts a uniformity in Moscow’s strategy. Those considered by Russia as ‘compatriots’ worth protecting constitute a large, and often similar, percentage of the local population across many locations in the post-Soviet region. In practice, Russia’s strategy
was far from uniform when comparing the Georgia (2008) and Ukraine (2014) conflicts, for example. Therein, Russia deployed different tools and tactics in both gray zone engagements.

Based on this mismatch between the expected uniformity in Russia’s foreign policy choice, established by the above theories, and the variation in coercive gray zone tools and tactics observed in practice, the main question addressed in this research is why does Russia use various intensities of coercive tools and tactics across its near abroad? This research does not suggest that either of the above arguments, the system- or domestic-level considerations, should be dismissed; they individually offer useful variables which appear instrumental to Russia’s decision-making. Rather, they are individually insufficient to account for the nuances and complexities in Moscow’s foreign policy choice to apply different tools and tactics in gray zone conflict. Thus, both strategic- and domestic-level variables must be considered when explaining Russia’s use of different tools and tactics in gray zone conflict.

The main objective of this research is to identify and understand the factors which affect Moscow’s decisions to engage in gray zone conflicts using cyber warfare tools, non-state actors, manipulation of ethnic friction, propaganda, and small-scale covert military campaigns across its ‘near abroad.’ Moreover, such insight into Russia’s actions can provide a more nuanced understanding of the evolution in contemporary international conflict formats.

For the policy community, this study contributes to the ongoing foreign policy discussion on effective deterrence measures among NATO members and allied countries such as the U.S, Canada, Latvia, Estonia, and Ukraine. Furthermore, this research has
implications for European regional policy in areas such as minority rights protection, the role of the NATO alliance, and other international security-oriented organizations. By comprehensively understanding foreign policy decision-making in gray zone conflict, it becomes possible to identify the key challenges to effective conflict management within this dispute format. Knowledge of system- and domestic-level motivation(s) of great powers, such as Russia, to engage in various types of coercion increases the likelihood that deep-rooted causes of dispute can be remedied through diplomacy before escalation to violence. Moreover, this study shows that Russia’s perceived protector role in relation to its ‘near abroad’ is unlikely to disappear, as the region has become an inseparable part of its own national identity. Instead, a focus on domestic-level conflict management which targets local permissive conditions for intervention, such as minority rights issues, can become an effective deterrence strategy against gray zone tools and tactics.

1.2 Toward a Theory of Gray Zone Conflict Engagement

The theory-building and model-construction exercises undertaken in this study meet the objectives of ‘accumulation,’ and ‘synthesis.’ As noted by Carment and Rowlands (2007) and Maoz (1990), the accomplishment of these objectives facilitates an effective and meaningful conflict analysis research program. The objective of ‘accumulation’ contributes to new scientific knowledge in the subfield of conflict analysis by building on previous research and discarding arguments for which empirical support is lacking. The second objective of ‘synthesis’ can be defined as the use of multiple levels of analysis. This amalgamation of variables from different levels of analysis enables the creation of novel scientifically rigorous causal explanations for complex decision-making in gray zone conflict.
This research achieves the objective of ‘accumulation’ by building on two existing research programs. First, this study contributes to scientific knowledge in the subfield of conflict analysis by operationalizing Doran’s power cycle theory (1971; 2000; 2015) to explain state’s behavior in gray zone conflict. Second, it re-conceptualizes Siverson and Starr (1990), Most and Starr (1989), and Ward and Kirby’s (1987) original research on opportunity and willingness for cross-border intervention to fit the contemporary gray zone conflict environment.

Concurrently, ‘synthesis’ is achieved through the combination of system- and domestic-level factors, which are both necessary to explain Russia’s decisions to use different tools and tactics in gray zone conflict. As noted in the foregoing discussion, a focus on a single level of analysis has generally corresponded to an inaccurate foreshadowing of Russia’s foreign policy behavior.

Moul (1971) and Carment and Rowlands (2007) highlight that international relations researchers have often delineated micro- and macro-level explanatory variables to assess issues such as causes of war and foreign policy decision-making. Rationalist explanations for state behavior have focused on one level of analysis as they assumed that actors are able to make decisions based on “well-ordered preferences.” For example, Singer (1961) notes that scholars may “choose between the flowers or the garden, the rocks or the quarry, the trees or the forest, the houses or the neighborhood” as well as other variables of the same level of analysis to suit their hypothesis-testing procedures. Traditionally, the levels of analysis in focus have been the nation-state and the international system level.
Moreover, in his conclusion regarding the system level of analysis, Singer (1961) states that relative to the nation-state level, research reliant on macro-level variables is less effective at demonstrating causal inference.33 He claims this is a consequence of the system-level being less complex and nuanced than the national level.34 However, this study shows his general observation to be inaccurate. System-level variables within the power cycle theory, such as perceived role and power, are effective at demonstrating causal inference if they are accurately defined and operationalized into measurable metrics. The conversion of these abstract variables into measurable values allows this research to compare their impact on foreign policy decision-making across cases with great nuance.

Howitt (1987) explains that even in the field of economics, in which micro- and macroeconomics have been treated as distinct subfields, accounting for phenomena at different levels of analysis, such separation has caused considerable discontent.35 This dissatisfaction emerged when macroeconomics and Keynesianism suffered a significant setback to their credibility in the 1970s. Then, mainstream theories failed to explain complex global phenomena such as rising inflation and unemployment levels.36 In response, by the 1990s, the integration of micro- and microeconomic variables has become common.37 This amalgamation of variables from across levels of analysis filled the empirical blind spots created by this levels of analysis ‘purism.’ Moreover, the integration of variables enabled the construction of more complete and accurate causal explanations for complex foreign policy phenomena such as international trade deficit management.38

To comprehensively understand the complex decision-making of states in conflict, an effective synthesis of variables across levels of analysis must be considered. As demonstrated by Maoz (1990) in his research on conflict behavior, using game theory,
decision-making by conflict participants are complicated processes, which are affected by micro- and macro-level considerations. Moreover, in cases where a change in decision-making is to be understood over time, this aggregation of factors from more than one level of analysis is often imperative.\textsuperscript{39} Furthermore, these theoretical models which synthesize levels of analysis can be tested as rigorously as their counterparts which rely on a single level of analysis variables.\textsuperscript{40}

Ray (2001) notes that democratic peace research has spearheaded the trend of integrating variables across levels of analysis in the field of international relations.\textsuperscript{41} For example, early scholarship in this area, such as Babst (1964), Rummel (1975), Doyle (1983), Maoz and Abdolali (1989), analyzed the relationship between regime type on the national and the system level of analysis.\textsuperscript{42} Just as in the case of democratic peace research, a comprehensive assessment of foreign policy in gray zone conflict inherently requires a multi-level analysis, because the goals of participants in this conflict format are often both strategic and operational.\textsuperscript{43} However, as noted by Maoz (2001), such movement across levels of analysis can be undertaken if the causal linkages are logically consistent, by demonstrating how the different causal variables indeed affect the dependent variable in question.\textsuperscript{44}

1.3 A Multi-Level Approach to Explain Russia’s Gray Zone Conflict Behavior

Contemporary research on Russia’s foreign policy in relation to its ‘near abroad’ has generally relied on two major explanations for its actions: 1) great power politics and system-level balance of power shifts, and 2) domestic-level factors, such as the role of non-state actors and pre-existing characteristics of the societies, which become the targets of
the coercive tools and tactics. As a consequence of this levels of analysis ‘purism,’ expectations of Russia’s foreign policy behavior have often failed to materialize.\(^45\)

This study shows that variables related to these two categories of factors should be combined to understand and foreshadow Russia’s foreign policy behavior in gray zone conflict. In combining these two levels of analysis, this research constructs a theory of policy decision-making, the Incentive-Opportunity Intervention (IOI) Model, which explains the variation in Russia’s application of different tools and tactics in gray zone conflict.\(^46\)

To this end, this research draws on relevant knowledge from various bodies of literature that contribute to the research program’s ‘accumulation’ and ‘synthesis’ objectives. The following five literature bodies must be examined to comprehensively and accurately understand Russia’s foreign policy choices in gray zone conflict. First, an examination of the core power cycle theories enables the identification of the most suitable framework to explain Russia’s system-level incentive to use different tools and tactics in gray zone conflict. Second, role theory allows this study to identify and operationalize the system-level components, which can then be numerically measured. In turn, this allows a comparison of the values and impact of the system-level variables on decision-making. Third, foreign policy crisis literature provides insight on how political destabilization triggers foreign policy action on the basis of both system- and domestic-level factors. Fourth, the literature on secessionism and irredentism facilities an understanding on how domestic-level factors, such as the role of non-state actors, create different permissive conditions for states’ use of various gray zone tools and tactics. Finally, the emerging body
of literature on gray zone conflicts identifies the different tools and tactics which can be selected by states in this dispute format.

Pertinent research, combining macro- and micro-level variables, to explain such foreign policy decision-making has been conducted in the conflict analysis subfield. For example, Ward and Kirby (1987), Most and Starr (1989), Siverson and Starr (1990), Starr (2002 and 2017), and Özpek (2018), identify that opportunity and willingness contribute to the diffusion of conflict and intervention in pre-existing conflicts across international borders.47 Opportunity means the possibilities which are available to any entity within any environment, representing the total set of environmental constraints and options. This means that some activity must be physically, technologically, or intellectually possible. These are associated with macro (environmental and structural) level factors. Willingness represents the selection of behavior options at the micro level, based on relevant cost-benefit calculations.

Even though the concepts of opportunity and willingness provide a useful starting point to assess foreign policy choice, such as the use of coercion, they omit an important component – the incentive for action. Opportunity may be present due to specific permissive conditions, but cost-benefit calculations are not confined to the micro-level. System-level calculations, such as the cost of inaction during a power transition, not just possibility, serve as the basis for subsequent micro-level calculations.

The willingness and opportunity concepts, although directly applicable to the phenomenon of intervention in ethnic-based conflicts, are valid more broadly to account for both macro-level geopolitical incentives as well as micro-level calculation associated with intervention in organized movements.48 Davis and Moore (1997) conclude that
transnational ethnic alliances serve as conduits to conflict behavior.\textsuperscript{49} This research suggests that Davis and Moore are correct in their identification that ‘high politics’ is inseparable from domestic considerations such as ethnic affinity, but they have a sequential relationship with domestic conditions being the vehicle to achieve goals in ‘high politics.’ A corresponding implication is that affective reasons or considerations may be necessary, but not sufficient, for state actions across international borders. Members of an ethnic group may be concerned with the political environment and welfare of their ethnic kin across interstate borders, but actions will be taken only to the extent that the ‘mother country’ has higher stakes in the process. As this study highlights, in Russia’s case, the protection of ‘compatriots’ is driven by a higher goal by Moscow to preserve its greater perceived protector role across the ‘near abroad.’

Using Doran’s (1971 and 2015) power cycle theory, this research restructures Siverson and Starr’s (1990) original \textit{opportunity} and \textit{willingness} framework to better reflect foreign policy decision-making in the contemporary international gray zone conflict environment.\textsuperscript{50} System-level considerations, the macro-level cost-benefit calculation, is the first step on the basis of which all other lower-level calculations can be made. Opportunity and willingness, as mutually reinforcing concepts, must be amalgamated. For example, it is necessary to consider both the possibility of intervention, such as the presence or absence of specific types of ethnic-based movements or change in minority rights, as well as the costs and benefits of intervention in various movements. The domestic-level causal variable of \textit{opportunity} for the application of coercive gray zone tools and tactics used in this study accounts for both the \textit{opportunity} and \textit{willingness} variables, as described by Siverson and Starr (1990).\textsuperscript{51}
Through the combination of these system-level considerations, or incentives, as well as on-the-ground costs of the application, or the opportunity, for coercion, this research develops a model of foreign policy decision-making titled the Incentive-Opportunity Intervention (IOI) Model.

As addressed in the concluding chapter, this research recognizes the strengths and limitations of the Model in terms of generalizability. A key question this study raises is whether the IOI Model, as well as the theoretical concepts and methodology used to formulate the causal connections therein, can be applied to cases other than Russia. Looking ahead, it is possible to apply the IOI Model to understand foreign policy choice within gray zone conflicts by other great power, such as China. At the system level, misalignment between role and power is a phenomenon that affects the foreign policy choices of other great powers. On the other hand, even though this study focuses on ethnic-based movements in the post-Soviet region as part of the domestic-level cost-benefit calculation, this represents a broader trend in contemporary global conflicts. As shown by Carment and Belo (2020), the impact of non-state actors on global inter- and intra-state conflicts has been increasing since the end of the Cold War. In cases where ethnic-based groups are not part of the gray zone conflict landscape, future research involving the IOI Model will need to capture the cost-benefit calculation imposed by non-state actors’ behavior in a new way.

1.4 Research Outline

This research unfolds in several chapters. The paramount goal of the study is to create and test a foreign policy decision-making model, which can effectively explain gray
zone conflict behavior of states and in turn, offer effective gray zone security threat mitigation and conflict prevention strategies.

Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical foundation of this research. First, it reviews the relevant literature on power cycles and hegemonic transition, as well as role theory, to identify and operationalize the most suitable system-level framework to explain gray zone conflict behavior. Second, the chapter reviews the literature on secessionism and irredentism, in which non-state actors provide different permissive conditions for state interveners to use various gray zone tools and tactics. Third, the chapter reviews the literature on international crises, which serve as the trigger for state’s actions and the mobilization of ethnic-based movements in gray zone conflicts. Fourth, based on the body of literature on gray zone conflict, the chapter identifies the different tools and tactics which are available to states engaged in this dispute format. Fifth, the chapter engages in a theory-building exercise, which establishes the causal linkages between the independent and dependent variables as well as articulates causal hypotheses within the IOI Model. The last part of the chapter, outlines the research design, case study selection process, and hypothesis-testing methodology.

Chapters 3 to 7 focus on the case studies of Abkhazia, Crimea, Odesa, Kharkiv, and the Donbas, respectively, which are used to assess the validity of the Model in application to Russia’s use of different gray zone tools and tactics across its ‘near abroad.’ The Abkhazia, Crimea, and Kharkiv cases test the applicability of the Model in explaining high, medium, and low intensities of coercion, respectively. The Odesa case is used as a control case to assess the validity of the causal linkages in a scenario where Russia did not apply coercion. Finally, the Donbas case was selected based on purposeful sampling due to
the value of the dependent variable relative to the other case studies. The relative positionality of the Donbas case enables the assessment of the validity of the IOI Model as a whole. Russia’s coercive gray zone tools and tactics in the Donbas region were more intense than in Odesa and Kharkiv following crisis onset but were less intense relative to Crimea and Abkhazia. As a consequence, the Donbas case allows an evaluation of whether system-level *incentive* or domestic-level *opportunity* variables had a greater impact on Russia’s decision to use specific gray zone tools and tactics in this region.


See “Deterrence and Defence.” NATO. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_133127.htm  

Misspecification occurs when a foreign policy model does not account for all the variables, which it should. Models which are ‘misspecified’ tend to be biased toward certain variables or estimators. Such models fail to accurately account for phenomena in international relations and have low predictive capacity. See Curtis S. Signorino and Kuzey Yilmazm "Strategic Misspecification in Regression Models." American Journal of Political Science 47, no. 3 (2003): 551-566. 


18 Ibid.


20 The broad definition of Russian ‘compatriot’ appeared in Russian Federal Law of May 24, 1999 No. 99-FZ, “On the state policy of the Russian Federation in relation to compatriots abroad.” Article 1. According to the law “compatriots include persons and their descendants, who live outside the territory of the Russian Federation and relevant as a rule to the peoples historically living on its territory, as well as the ones made their free choice in favor of spiritual, cultural and legal connection with the Russian people whose relatives in a direct upline previously resided in the territory of the Russian Federation. These include: 1) persons of the nationality of the Soviet Union living in the states that were part of it gained the citizenship of these states or became stateless persons and 2) natives (immigrants) from the Russian state, the Russian republic, the RSFSR, the USSR and the Russian Federation had the appropriate nationality and became citizens of a foreign state or stateless persons See President of Russia website, http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/13875.


23 See Heraclides, 375.

24 For encirclement argument from Russia’s perspective, see Charles A. Kupchan, "NATO's Final Frontier: Why Russia Should Join the Atlantic Alliance." *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 3 (2010): 12.

25 The concept of a great power has been defined by the Treaty of Chaumont (1814), signed by the Russian Empire, United Kingdom, Austrian Empire, and Prussia. A great power is specified through the following three components: 1) power, which reflects the nation’s vast capability to achieve significant political outcomes in its favour; 2) a spatial dimension, which involves the exertion of power across large territories; and 3) a status dimension, which indicates a formal or informal acknowledgement of the great power title by other nations. Russia fits the definition of a ‘great power.’ See Vesna Danilovic, "Major Powers and Global Contenders." In *When the Stakes Are High: Deterrence and Conflict among Major Powers*, 26-46. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002.


27 Ibid., 133-134. This research does not endeavour to meet the objective of ‘integration,’ an attempt to draw on findings from different methodologies. As noted by Carment and Rowlands (2007), the key challenge with effective ‘integration’ in a scientific research program in the field of conflict analysis is the absence of sufficient consensus regarding how to identify a better methodological approach to measure complex phenomena such as cross-border interventions. As noted in Chapter 2, this research identifies the methodological approach which is suitable to explain Russia’s choices to use different gray zone tools and tactics; a comparison of research methodologies to find the most effective one is not a goal for this research program.


Ibid., 89.

Ibid., 89-90.


Ibid.


Ibid.

See Maoz, 1990.

Ibid., 123.


As per Carment and Belo (2018), gray zone conflict participants have goals which cover the strategic, operational and tactical ‘levels of war.’ This means motivations to reach those goals, from across levels of analysis, inherently need to be understood. This is also different from hybrid warfare, where the goals of participants are primarily tactical. See David Carment, and Dani Belo, (2018). “War’s Future: The Risks and Rewards of Grey-Zone Conflict and Hybrid Warfare,” Canadian Global Affairs Institute, [online] Available from: https://www.cgai.ca/wars_future_the_risks_and_rewards_of_grey_zone_conflict_and_hybrid_warfare.


See arguments by John Baird and Max Boot examples above, which focus on a single level of analysis to explain Russia’s foreign policy choices.

It should be recognised that even in my efforts to improve our understanding of Russia’s foreign policy behaviour in gray zone conflict with a high level of objectivity, subjectivity is still present in the case selection criteria and hypothesis-testing methodology. For example, the case selection criteria discussed in section 1.4 below and Chapter 2 assume that the selected cases are representative of various levels of coercion used by Russia. However, there may be other relevant cases in Russia’s near abroad, where a similar intensity of coercion was used by Russia. These cases may offer other nuances regarding Russia’s decision-making in gray zone conflict and can be studied in future research. Regarding hypothesis-testing methodology, the coding of the elements of perceived role and power, which are based on the power cycle theory, allow me to assess
system-level *incentive* for the application of coercive gray zone. The elements of role and power, such as role specificity and degrees of clarity, acceptance and formality, are based on Sarbin and Allen’s (1968) social psychology research, discussed in Chapter 2. However, a high degree of subjectivity persists in how these role and power elements are operationalized into coded values, which are subsequently used to determine the role-power gap and thus, *incentive* for the use of coercive gray zone tools and tactics.  


48 David R. Davis and Will H. Moore, "Ethnicity Matters: Transnational Ethnic Alliances and Foreign Policy Behavior." *International Studies Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (1997): 171-184. Davis and Moore (1997) confirm their two hypotheses that 1) “The level of conflictual relations between two states will be higher if both state contain group members from the same ethnic group, and one of the co-ethnics is politically and/or economically privileged in its society, but its brethren in the other state are not. and 2) “High levels of ethnic mobilization within a disadvantaged ethnic group will be associated with high levels of dyadic conflict.”


51 See Doran, 2000.


53 The cases were selected based on five criteria: 1) Russia’s ‘near abroad,’ 2) crisis-induced foreign policy decision-making by Russia, 3) timeframe between the years 2000 to 2019, based on the introduction of a new Foreign Policy Concept by Moscow in June 2000, 4) politically-relevant dyads, and 5) the cases are ‘typical’ and represent the spectrum of variation in the intensity of coercive gray zone tools and tactics. The case selection criteria, as well as the reason for the exclusion of Russia’s gray zone activities in the Baltic region as case studies, are discussed in detail in Chapter 2, section 2.8.1.

54 See Philip M. Podsakoff et al., "Sources of Method Bias in Social Science Research and Recommendations on How to Control It." *Annual Review of Psychology* 63 (2012): 539-569.

Chapter 2 Incentive-Opportunity Intervention (IOI) Model: Combining System Incentives and Domestic Costs of Gray Zone Coercion

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that system-level considerations, such as relative power shifts, and domestic-level permissive conditions for intervention, are individually insufficient to fully explain the variation in tools and tactics used by Russia in gray zone conflict. As noted in Chapter 1, this has been confirmed by the failure of the policy and academic communities to accurately explain, or foresee, Russia’s gray zone operations in Georgia and Ukraine. This study does not suggest that system- or domestic-level variables should be entirely dismissed. Rather, they can be effectively combined to create a more comprehensive and accurate model of foreign policy decision-making to explain why Russia relies on different low- and high-intensity tools and tactics in its conflict engagements.

The chapter is divided into several parts. First, it compares relevant system-level power transition theories and identifies the one most suitable to explain foreign policy decision-making of great powers in gray zone conflicts. Among the core theories, Doran’s power cycle theory (1971; 2000; 2003) appears to be the most suitable to explain great powers’ behavior in gray zone conflict. This applicability of the theory is a function of its focus on power hierarchy shifts prior to conflict onset and nation-states as the units of analysis and unlike the comparable theories, Doran’s framework is a theory of foreign policy choice.\(^1\)

To make the power cycle theory applicable as an explanation for the system-level incentive of states to engage in gray zone conflict, the second part of the chapter identifies, defines, and operationalizes the key components of the theory: perceived role and power.
By drawing on Sarbin and Allen (1968), Jonnson and Westerlund (1982), and Goode’s (1960) social psychology frameworks, it is possible to unpack the main theoretical components of great powers’ perceived role.² In turn, these theoretical elements are combined with the power cycle theory to yield the disparity between perceived role and power, which incentivizes great powers to engage in gray zone conflict. However, as highlighted in Chapter 1, system-level factors are only one part of states’ considerations when deciding how to engage in gray zone conflict.

In the third section, this chapter examines the domestic-level factors which contribute to Russia’s cost calculation when engaging in gray zone conflict across the post-Soviet region. When considering Moscow’s foreign policy choices in relation to its ‘near abroad,’ non-state actors, in this case, involved in ethnic-based movements, provide the permissive domestic conditions for the application of its gray zone tools and tactics. Secessionist and irredentist movements impose different costs on potential interveners in these ethnic-based mobilizations. However, considerations associated with either system-level or domestic level factors are insufficient to trigger the use of gray zone tools and tactics. A politically disruptive event must occur to make this cost-benefit calculation relevant.

The chapter also examines how international crises serve as a ‘trigger,’ which introduces competing actors onto a political arena with rivaling role narratives. First, the onset of crisis triggers the use of various gray zone tools and tactics as a response to a perceived dilution and potential decline of a state’s perceived role (IV1). Second, it aggravates local ethnic-based movements, in which non-state actors, in turn, create various permissive conditions for the use of gray zone tools and tactics (IV2). To understand the
options of tools and tactics available to states in gray zone conflict, the dependent variable (DV), this chapter reviews the emerging literature body on gray zone conflict.

Finally, combining the power cycle theory, role theory, as well as literature on ethnic-based movements and gray zone conflict, the chapter constructs a theoretical model to explain Russia’s choice of different coercive tools and tactics across the post-Soviet region. In the last section, the chapter outlines the research design, case selection process, as well as the theory and hypothesis-testing methodology. However, before constructing the Incentive-Opportunity Intervention (IOI) Model, it is important to identify and select the system-level theory which is most suitable to explain states’ system-level incentive for gray zone conflict engagement.

2.2 Hegemonic Competition and Power Transition Theory

The purpose of the following section is to compare the most prominent system-level power transition theories and identify the one most suitable to explain great powers’ choice to engage in gray zone conflict as a preventive measure against anticipated perceived role decline.

Recent literature on Russia’s confrontation with the U.S and its allies in the Baltic and Ukraine suggests that great power politics is the primary cause driving the hostilities. Power transition theory provides the conceptual tools for the creation of a model to account for the difference in power architectures across cases, on the basis of which variation in incentive for coercion can be explained. Moreover, this research seeks to build a comprehensive model for Russia’s decisions to apply coercion in its near abroad, thus it is important to identify a theoretical framework that explains foreign policy choices across cases – not only systemic power shifts, as in the case of the NATO enlargement argument.
Power transition literature in application to Russia relies on offensive realism as its main logic, which proposes that the anarchic international system incentivizes large states to engage in aggressive foreign policy to maximize power and influence, thereby increasing their perceived security.\(^4\) However, among the three power theories examined in this section, Doran (1971; 2000; 2003) provides the most nuanced, applicable, and compelling theoretical framework to understand Russia’s foreign policy.\(^5\) Moreover, Doran’s power cycle theory can be used to examine variation in relative power architectures across cases, on the basis of which the different foreign policy strategies and tactics are applied by Russia.

Power transition and hegemonic competition theory provide a number of useful analytical concepts to understand variation in intervention such as measurement and exercise of national power and the relationship between changes in relative power and onset of conflict. Organski (1968), Doran (1971; 2003), and Modelski (1987) highlight that interstate politics are largely guided by the continuously evolving relative power distribution which shapes the international system.\(^6\) Moreover, they note that interstate conflicts, and times of peace, are directly related to the phenomenon of power transition, in which a dominant power loses its relative hegemonic position as a result of another rising challenger state. Even though this relationship is a common denominator among the theories, they offer various positions regarding 1) their applicability to foreign policy choice versus system-level power transition, 2) the sequence of international systemic power transition relative to the onset of the conflict, 3) the range of variables which influence the power transition phenomenon, and 4) the metrics for the measurement of power.
In his system-level theory, Organski (1968) explains that the relative power position of states is determined by their varied ability to influence the policy decision-making of other states. His theory offers insight into systemic trends, and general ways in which power can be exercised. However, it fails to provide a nuanced explanation regarding foreign policy choice and variation in conflict engagement. Organski’s power measurement is an outcome-based metric – or a state’s ability to influence the policy direction of an adversary. This is a useful metric for the measurement of power relative to net resources, as states may possess vast quantities of material wealth, but can fail in the application of their assets to gain power. His model however also acknowledges the importance of variables associated with national resources such as geography, economic productivity, population, and national morale, which enable control over the policy choices of other states. Finally, Organski does not specify whether the policy influence is over the competing great power or the ability to influence third-party states’ policy allegiances.

According to his model, power can be exercised through four general tactics: 1) persuasion, 2) rewards, 3) threat of punishment, and 4) force. Organski corresponds these to the intensity of efforts to exercise national power, which influences a state’s relative power in the system. He notes that a foreign policy decision to use the various tactics is based on the degree of policy disagreement between the target states in dispute as well as the nature of the pre-existing relations. Organski finds that friendlier states tend to use lower intensity tactics while states with a history of hostilities are more likely to deploy high-intensity tactics. The onset of conflict is based on great power competition in which war is a vehicle for a challenging power to become the new hegemon, while peace is a consequence of hegemonic stability. However, Organski does not provide a comprehensive
explanation with regard to the types of sub-tactics that constitute each category and the decision to deploy them.

Modelski’s (1987) long cycle theory offers several variables to explain the onset of interstate conflicts, leaving his analysis largely confined to systemic trends, as opposed to foreign policy choice. As in the case of the other models, he highlights that nation-states are the most influential units in the global system. The ‘long cycle’ is a period of 60 to 100 years, in which a single power dominates global politics, but a challenging power generally emerges towards the end of the cycle. Unlike Organski’s model, the measurement of power in the ‘long cycle’ is largely based on national resources metrics such as the relative extent and domination of global trade, maritime strength (in tonnage), and relative economic performance variables such as the size of the economy and relative growth. However, one of the drawbacks of such a measurement is the assumption that resources will necessarily yield an effective exercise of power – a key component in power transition. As noted by Organski (1968), a country may possess substantial economic and political resources, but an isolationist foreign policy. This does not mean such a nation is powerful. Moreover, according to Modelski, the onset of international conflict occurs between the hegemonic power and its immediate challenger; if the challenger is able to defeat the hegemon in the major dispute, a new international power hierarchy is established. However, such a sequence of conflict and power transition has been challenged both theoretically and empirically.

Doran’s (1971; 2003) power cycle theory offers a different causal mechanism with regard to the onset of conflict relative to the change in power hierarchy. A key difference relative to the previous two models is that conflict is a consequence of a preceding power
hierarchy shift, which often causes erosion in the world order. After this transition, the traditional hegemon’s policy expectations can no longer be fulfilled. In this model, power is measured based on economic resources such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) but also accounts for military size, population, and softer metrics such as the capacity for technological innovation.

A state's foreign policy expectations are tied to change on its power cycle, but power and role are often mismatched because actors and the system do not easily adjust to changes in relative power. Role is foreign policy behavior that the system has allowed the state to achieve. Moreover, foreign policy role marks the behavior and position of the state manifested in its external relations and like power, it is relative. It involves a recognized niche in which a country can use its power to obtain additional ends, in particular enhanced security. However, role is affected by the course of power in the long term. It is determined primarily by what a government itself does and exists only if the targets accept its exercise of that role. Based on Doran’s (2000) empirical analysis, role has been associated with the accepted level of presence of another state within the security, social, and economic domains of a given territory.

On the incline of the power curve, the increase in power tends to exceed the acquisition of role. The system is often unwilling to yield role to the ascending or challenging state, often as a result of path dependence in elites’ behavior. On the downside of the curve, there is a tendency for role to exceed power, leading to an overreach of expectations regarding foreign policy abilities. For example, allies and dependent middle powers do not want the once-ascendant state to step aside, especially local elites accustomed to benefits from the traditional power. The power-role gap is often placed at the forefront of diplomacy, altering
security circumstances, thereby escalating interstate tensions between the previous and emerging powers. Doran notes that substantial mismatches between role expectations and relative power have caused high-intensity conflicts among great powers. These wars have often been attributed to a desire by the hegemon to use a window of opportunity before the power gap relative to the challenger becomes too great, following the inflection point on their power cycle.

Levy (2011) highlights that a rapid power shift shortens the time that the declining hegemon has to increase its own relative power or seek a favorable deal with its main competitor. The greater the adversary’s future advantage, the larger the potential margin of victory in future conflicts. This means greater concessions the declining power would have to make to avoid future confrontations. For the declining state, this creates a high incentive for rapid preventative actions, thus increasing the likelihood of higher intensity operations such as military engagement.

Preventive war has often been linked to prospect theory, which proposes that a high probability of losses incentivizes risk-taking behavior. States are risk-averse with regard to gains but are willing to accept risk when facing losses. Such a behavioral phenomenon has also been associated with the endowment effect, which suggests that people are more likely to save an object they own than acquire that same object when not already in their possession. In application to Doran’s (1971) power cycle, the greater the anticipated loss of role as a result of relative power decline, and the greater the future gap between the two variables, the greater the likelihood of risk-taking behavior such as engagement in military operations.
Out of the three theories examined above, Doran’s (1971; 2000; 2003) power cycle appears to be the most suitable to explain a state’s system-level incentive to use gray zone tools and tactics to preserve its role within the international system. However, to make it a usable and measurable system-level concept to explain foreign policy choice, its key components ‘role’ and ‘power’ must be operationalized.

The table below compares the theories discussed in the foregoing section, with the power cycle selected as the most applicable system-level theory to explain foreign policy choice in gray zone conflicts.

**Table 2.1. Comparison of Core Power Transition Theories**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Long Cycle (Organski)</th>
<th>Power Transition (Modelski)</th>
<th>Power Cycle (Doran)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timing of Conflict</strong></td>
<td>Conflict is a vehicle for change in the power hierarchy.</td>
<td>Conflict is a vehicle for change in the power hierarchy.</td>
<td>Power hierarchy shifts prior to the conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Measurement of Power</strong></td>
<td>Outcome-based</td>
<td>Resources-based</td>
<td>Resources-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Units Analyzed</strong></td>
<td>Nation-states</td>
<td>Nation-states</td>
<td>Nation-states and leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level/Type of Analysis</strong></td>
<td>System-level transition and (limited) foreign policy choices.</td>
<td>System-level transition.</td>
<td>Theory of foreign policy choice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: the gray boxes indicate the selected system-level theory, the power cycle theory, which is the most suitable to explain system-level considerations in a state’s foreign policy in gray zone conflicts; one exception is the measurement of power, for which an outcomes-based measurement (as opposed to resources-based) is most accurate in determining national power.

**2.3 Role of States**

The purpose of the following section is to operationalize the concept of states’ perceived role, which is a key component of the incentive structure to use gray zone tools and tactics across international borders. The identification of the separate components of a state’s role is necessary to enable its measurement, and thus make the power cycle theory usable to explain, generalize, and compare foreign policy choices.

The role of states is determined primarily by what a government itself does and if the target governments and societies accept its exercise of that role. This principle, drawn
from social psychology theory, is based on an analogy of a theatre performance, in which a symbiotic relationship exists between an actor on stage and an audience; an actor articulates a specific role on stage while the audience views and accepts or rejects the actor’s enacted role.

According to Doran (2000), role is facilitated by the effective exercise of power and like power, it is perceived as relative by members of the international system. This causal relationship becomes especially important in cases where the audience must be influenced to accept and secure that role. Goode (1960) notes that, as a result of having multiple role demands which exceed available resources, a person enters a cognitive state called role strain, or the felt difficulty of fulfilling role obligations. This observation also pertains to states during the onset of international crises.  

Jonnson and Westerlund (1982) analyze superpower role conceptions and find that great powers have generally adopted five major roles: 1) promoter of universal values, 2) regional protector, 3) liberation supporter, 4) developer, 5) and promoter of own values. In theory, these appear to be distinct. In practice, however, these roles are not perfectly delineated. For example, states may undertake regional development, disseminate values, or support liberation movements to safeguard their perceived role as security providers. The adoption of such roles has traditionally been studied on the basis of speeches of national leaders. However, even with role selection, it becomes important to assess the extent of role within a given system. Sarbin and Allen (1968) identify five categories on the basis of which the extent of role expectation can be assessed, capturing both the perception of the role enactor as well as the level of acceptance by an audience:
1. *Their degree of role specificity*. This component of perceived role depends on the articulation of the role enactor. The degree of role specificity can be operationalized as the degree of focus on a single narrative. Moreover, the more individual narratives an actor maintains, the greater the role demand and thus, the level of strain on the role enactor. This directly corresponds to the observations made by Goode (1960). Conversely, the greater the focus on a single dominant narrative, the lower the demand risking exhaustion of resources, and the greater the ability to fulfill role obligations.

2. *The degree of role scope*. As in the case of specificity, this component of perceived role is also dependent on the articulation of the role enactor. The degree of role scope is operationalized in this research as the level of geographic focus of the perceived role enactor.

3. *The degree of role clarity*. The clarity of role expectations can be defined as the difference between operating under a condition of perfect knowledge about role expectations. This component of perceived role is also dependent on the articulation of the role enactor. Perfect knowledge about role expectations can be achieved through an articulation of specific role components, which clarify how the perceived role will be operationalized in practice.

4. *The degree of acceptance* or consensus among other individuals (audience of the role). If the audience accepts the role enactment as appropriate, then they are the confirmation of the reality of the role. Acceptance of the role without major deviation across time is likely due to the fact that the audience has consistently observed the enacted role. Moreover, considering that the relationship between an
actor and audience is symbiotic, the role enactor may have agency over the level of acceptance of the perceived role by the audience.

5. Whether the role enactor position is formal or informal. This can be achieved through formal contracts. In this research, the formality and informality are operationalized as the level of commitment by the audience to the role articulated by the enactor. The higher the level of commitment to the role, the more difficult it becomes to disband the relationship between the role enactor and the audience.

As noted by Doran (1971; 2000; 2015), a state’s role is a key component of the system-level consideration for why states engage against their geopolitical adversaries. In practice, however, as I explained earlier in the chapter, it is only one of the necessary factors to comprehensively explain a state’s foreign policy choice to use different tools and tactics in gray zone conflict.

2.4 Ethnic-based Movements and Permissive Conditions for Gray Zone Conflict

The purpose of the following section is to explain the second component which affects the decision-making of states to use different tools and tactics in gray zone conflict. Domestic conditions in target states, such as the presence of a secessionist or irredentist movement, create an opportunity for the exercise of national power which is incentivized by system-level power transitions. Secessionism is an attempt by an ethnic group, claiming a homeland, to withdraw with its territory from the authority of a larger state of which it has been a part. Moreover, Thürer and Burri (2009) highlight that secession is most often a progressive phenomenon, rather than a clear-cut or one-time event. On the other hand, irredentism also involves a desire by an ethnic movement to join another state – their perceived ‘homeland.’ Even though this research treats the degree of domestic-level
opportunity for gray zone tools and tactics application as a function of different intervention costs in either secessionism or irredentism, ethnic-based separations are highly-nuanced phenomena.

For example, as noted by Heraclides (1991), secessionism should be treated as a gradation.²⁰ Using a stricto sensu definition, secession involves a formal declaration of independence by an ethnic group.²¹ However, this may not necessarily mean the group has become fully divided from the larger state prior. On the other hand, secessionism, in a broader sense, also includes incremental secession. This involves violent or peaceful political activity with the goal of independence or some autonomy within the larger state. Incremental secession does not require a formal declaration of independence.²² Pavković (2015) identifies this desire for greater autonomy, through a reduction in the central government’s authority over local affairs, as separatism.²³ Heraclides (1991) notes that in the post-Second World War era incremental secessionism has been a more prevalent phenomenon relative to secessionism in its stricto sensu form.²⁴ Even though local ethnic-based movements are a key consideration in states’ foreign policy, their importance is part of a broader trend in post-Cold War international conflicts in which non-state actors have become increasingly impactful.²⁵

Cordell and Wolff (2011) and Carment and Belo (2020) write that a major reason non-state armed groups are driven to conflict is the unequal distribution of political power relative to other groups in a given territory. Traditional interpretations of non-state armed groups are actors who mostly operate outside state control and challenge a state’s monopoly on coercion.²⁶ When mobilized, non-state actors can become a potent force for highly violent conflicts. However, this increasing role of non-state actors in post-Cold War
conflicts has also been reinforced by states, which frequently employ subnational groups to deliver on tactical goals. For example, non-state armed groups may be used in fighting or conducting cyber operations, which create challenges of attribution of actions to their state sponsors.\textsuperscript{27} In turn, these subnational groups may acquire significant monetary and material means to pursue their own goals.\textsuperscript{28} Often, ethnic-based movements, in which non-state actors play a central role, also create various permissive conditions for third-party states to use gray zone tools and tactics in pursuit of their larger strategic goals.

Heraclides (1990) identifies four \textit{instrumental reasons} for third-party intervention in ethnic-based movements: 1) international political reasons, including strategic considerations, 2) economic gains, 3) domestic motives, or internal politics, and 4) military considerations.\textsuperscript{29} However, it is difficult to entirely isolate these reasons as international politics can be a function of economics, domestic or internal politics, and military considerations. Two of these have been specifically debated with regard to Russia: international (geostrategic politics) and domestic motives (partially including economic).

Saideman (2008) examines whether domestic or international factors influence Russia’s incentive for intervention (or lack thereof) in irredentist movements across its ‘near abroad.’\textsuperscript{30} His research finds that domestic considerations within Russia outweighed international ones in the 1990s. In contrast, however applicable to secessionism, Heraclides (1990) finds a general pattern that among instrumental motives for involvement, or lack thereof, international political considerations ranked first and either accounted for, or played some part in, at least three out of four instances.\textsuperscript{31} Moreover, relative to the 1990s, the contemporary security environment around Russia’s borders has also changed.
NATO went from a relatively distant organization which Moscow did not desire to join, or perceive as an existential threat, to an expansionist alliance that has stationed troops just a few kilometers from Russia’s borders. By 2015, the majority in Russia saw the U.S and its allies as an existential threat.\textsuperscript{32} This change in circumstances from the immediate post-Soviet period altered considerations in Russia’s behavior. NATO went from an alliance that did not have a strong influence on Russia’s decisions to intervene across its ‘near abroad’ to an alliance that Russia desired to actively undermine and block. One of the ways has been to provide support for secessionist or irredentist movements, which it may have otherwise chosen to overlook. Saideman (2008) argues that Russia’s lack of coherent identity regarding what constitutes “Russianness,” prevented it from acting in support of irredentist movements even when the opportunity existed, such as in Crimea in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{33} In practice, these challenges of identity have not been resolved domestically in the 2010s, yet Russia used various gray zone tools and tactics in support of ethnic-based movements in Crimea and the Donbas in 2014.\textsuperscript{34}

Heraclides (1990) identifies several intensities of commitment through which a third-party intervener may become involved in ethnic based-movements: 1) low involvement, starting with simple transactional involvement and then including humanitarian involvement; 2) medium involvement, characterized by extended nonmilitary forms of involvement, such as providing sanctuary, a base of operations, financial assistance, or vital access to communications; and 3) high level of physical involvement, such as the deployment of troops. The three intensities of involvement are useful to identify the range of choices available to third-party interveners in ethnic-based
conflicts. However, these intensities of involvement rely on domestic-level conditions in societies that become the target of intervention.

Heraclides (1990) and Cornell (2002) find that local ethnic-based mobilization may occur as a consequence of a deteriorated relationship between minority groups and national governments. As highlighted by Gros (1996) and Jackson and Rosberg (1982), governments ‘captured’ by a certain ethnic group, to the detriment of other groups, are prone to instability. This process has been equated to an “emerging anarchy.” However, Aasland (2002) shows that it is not the status quo condition to which minority groups may be the most sensitive but rather to the deterioration of social and economic conditions. There are plenty of states and societies where ethnic minorities suffer social, political, and economic hardships, but it is the change in conditions that causes these groups to become agitated to the point of becoming organized ethnic-based movements.

Wimmer (2009), Stewart et al. (2005) note that social and political exclusion of minorities in diverse societies is one of the primary causes of internal unrest, often resulting in violent civil wars. In the short term, social exclusion may facilitate the solidification of power by the dominant group, but in the long term, such policies backfire resulting in increased agitation, mobilization, and resistance activities by minorities. However, the mobilization of ethnic groups and the threat of violence rarely convince central governments to support minorities’ efforts towards independence.

A national government may resist regional autonomy based on several considerations. First, a national government may perceive the granting of autonomy as a
risk to the territorial, and thus political integrity of the state as the movement may transform into separatism. Second, this may set a precedent for other minority groups to follow, thereby risking a greater disintegration of the larger state.

In turn, this social exclusion of minorities, reluctance to grant autonomy, and political mobilization, may create a permissive environment for third-party intervention in the ethnic-based secessionist or irredentist movements. An armed rebellion may occur when large portions of the population are excluded on the basis of their identity. A state which does not embrace the whole polis, and the elites try to eliminate rivals based on ethnic markers, would be especially ripe for exploitation by third parties in gray zone conflicts. In the absence of a “neutral” arbiter with a monopoly on the use of force, the state can become the focus of control. Third parties seeking to exercise power and gain control may exploit these goals. On the other hand, in order to legitimize their actions, emerged non-state armed groups may look for third-party states to provide political and material support. However, from the perspective of a third-party intervener, the costs of support for different types of ethnic-based movements vary.

As noted by Chazan and Horowitz (1991), support for secessionism, relative to irredentism, is a more effective and flexible tool of influence as it is substantially easier for a state to use its support selectively and reverse it when concessions are given. This is the case for both the stricto sensu and incremental forms of secessionism relative to irredentism. The comparison between secessionism and irredentism is based on overt material and political support across international borders. Irredentism is relatively costly to support in terms of international reputation and potential consequences as the endeavor requires the undermining of the territorial integrity of another state. If support for an
irredentist movement is exposed, plausible deniability is difficult to establish as the movement officially declares its desire to join the intervening state.

Relative flexibility, and therefore effectiveness, of support for the secessionist movement, is based on the relative absence of deep ties and long-term commitments, which are required for the support of an irredentist movement. Plausible deniability is easier to establish by the intervener as the local movement may only desire more autonomy from their national government. These relative costs of support for both types of ethnic-based movements are compared in table 2.2 below.\(^{44}\) However, even in cases where system- and domestic-level conditions are present, to encourage the use of gray zone tools and tactics, a triggering event must appear to compel action.

**Table 2.2 Relative Cost of Support for Irredentism and Secessionism by Interveners**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Irredentism</th>
<th>Secessionism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relative Material Cost of Support</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative Difficulty of Plausible Deniability</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relative Overall Cost of Support</strong></td>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
<td><strong>Low</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.5 **The Impact of International Crises on Perceived Role and Power**

International crises play an important role in the decision-making of states to employ various gray zone tools and tactics. They rapidly alter the political landscape, thereby undermining the pre-crisis narrative of the role enactor and erode their perceived security. Even in cases where both system- and domestic-level conditions are present and encourage cross-border use of gray zone tools and tactics, a crisis must occur to push state actors to take action against adversaries.
One of the key impacts of an international crisis is on the distribution of power in the system.\(^{45}\) In the context of power transition, international crises are an important element to consider for the following reasons: 1) it is a ‘card revealing’ event (or series of them) which defogs the real distribution of relative power in the system relative to respective roles of states; 2) onset of crisis serves as the trigger for the adjustment of relative power and role among states in the system; and 3) crises create an urgency for action to counter the adjustment of the system-level power distribution by the states with the most to lose from the transition.

International crises, however, also trigger domestic-level conditions, which create an opportunity for states to use gray zone tools and tactics. In Ukraine (2014) and Georgia (2008), the crises aggravated the local ethnic-based movements, in which non-state actors, in turn, created the permissive conditions for Russia to use gray zone tools and tactics.

Carment and James (1995) and Brecher (2016) identify two necessary conditions of an international crisis. First, it is a change in the type of, or an increase in, intensity of disruptive and hostile verbal or physical interactions between two or more states. Second, there is a heightened probability of military hostilities.\(^{46}\) Crises pose a considerable challenge to foreign policy decision-making as situational ambiguity often disrupts the previous political environment and demands corresponding policy adjustments by leaders as a reaction to changing conditions.\(^{47}\)

Therein, a crisis occurs when the intensity of threat perception between multiple states increases, leading to heightened stress and insecurity. This ‘insecurity spiral’ destabilizes their relationship and challenges the structure of the international system. Moreover, Brecher (2008) finds that international crises, or high-intensity political
earthquakes, often spilled over across larger geographic regions than their immediate jurisdiction or region. For example, such a spillover could be observed through the 2014 crisis in Ukraine, which originated in Kyiv but affected many other regions in the country.

Brecher (1993; 2016) identifies four distinct phases of a crisis. During the onset phase or pre-crisis period, low-level threat transforms into heightened threat perception by one or more of the parties involved. Following crisis onset, conflict participants have a selection of gray zone tools and tactics, which may be used to prevent an anticipated decline in perceived role; these are reviewed in the next section. During the escalation phase, there is more intense disruption than in the onset phase, and perception of time pressure as well as war likelihood increase. In this escalatory phase, participants often cope with this pressure by resorting to various levels of violence or coercion against adversaries. During the de-escalation phase, there is a winding down of the crisis and a significant reduction in the severity of hostile interactions. This is correlated with a decline in threat perception and time pressure. Finally, in the impact phase, the crisis leaves certain consequences for the international system as well as participants.

2.6 Tools and Tactics in Gray zone Conflicts

The purpose of the following section is to identify the military and non-military tools and tactics available to state participants in gray zone conflicts. Over the course of several decades after the Cold War, international conflicts have evolved from relatively well-defined and overt antagonistic relations between states, and their proxies, into perpetually opaque low-intensity phenomena. Modern international relations, especially among great powers such as the U.S and Russia, do not pass the threshold of war. However, they also escape the definition of peace. This mode of interaction has frequently been associated with
a type of engagement called gray zone conflicts, in which states use different combinations of hybrid tools and tactics to promote their agendas.

The major incentive for using gray zone tools and tactics is the high cost of conventional war. First, based on the experience of the U.S, conventional military operations, even though they are highly likely to achieve results, have become increasingly expensive to the point of being cost-prohibitive. Second, conventional tools of warfare have become increasingly sophisticated and deadly over the past thirty years, making their use less likely due to the potential human costs. For example, it is unlikely that nuclear-armed parties would be willing to engage in a direct military confrontation because the potential destruction experienced by any of the parties would be unacceptable. Finally, gray zone tools and tactics, especially ones of low intensity, enable their users to create plausible deniability, or establish challenges of attribution of actions; this means users are more likely to evade international reputations costs.

International law, whether through signed treaties such as the Geneva Conventions of 1949 or customs, has generally provided sufficient guidelines to define and manage interstate conduct in conventional wars. However, within gray zone conflict, due to its low intensity and a high degree of operational covertness, the laws of war provide relatively few guidelines. The fragility of existing norms of engagement empowers revisionist states such as Russia to create and crystalize new codes of international conduct in conflicts. Drawing on Organski (1968), such revisions of international norms should not be a surprise as power transition has generally been associated with such adjustment of rules throughout history.
Gunneriusson and Bachmann (2015) find that such multi-modal hybrid threats have little in common with past examples of interstate aggression, which primarily relied on conventional hard and soft power tactics to undermine opponents. This increased complexity is exacerbated by the fact that the ultimate goals of participants are frequently, and often deliberately, unknown to prevent the deployment of deterrence measures by opponents. In this format of conflict, states may rely primarily or exclusively on tactics that do not pass the threshold of war - such as cyber warfare, economic pressure, propaganda, and the use of rebel groups for combat.

Tools and tactics of gray zone conflict can be divided into coercive and non-coercive elements. Even though this research is interested in why Russia uses different coercive tools and tactics in gray zone conflict, non-coercive means can contribute to a country’s power in a given region prior to the onset of crisis and use of coercion. This pre-crisis level of power, relative to perceived role, is an important system-level factor used to determine the coercive tools and tactics a state may use following crisis onset.

The conceptual difference between coercive and non-coercive tools and tactics lies in the former being associated with compellence under the fear of an imminent physical threat. Different tools and tactics of gray zone conflict, from information operations to targeted military deployments, correspond to different intensities of coercion as they translate into different levels of compellence and risk of imminent physical harm to targets. As a consequence, these correspond to different probabilities of achieving desired outcomes, but also carry different costs. As concluded by Carment et al. (2019) and Carment and Belo (2018), highly-coercive gray zone tools and tactics are more likely to achieve results relative to their lower-intensity counterparts. However, through low-
intensity tools and tactics, users are more likely to avoid international reputation costs as operations are difficult to expose.\textsuperscript{58} Even in cases where actions are attributed, plausible deniability is easier to maintain. These characteristics of intensities of coercion are summarized in Table 2.3 below.

On the other hand, non-coercive measures involve low-intensity tools of persuasion which only \textit{encourage} the targets’ actions. In simple terms, the difference between non-coercive and coercive measures is analogous to the difference between using a ‘carrot’ and ‘stick’ to facilitate a target’s behavior. In Russia’s case, non-coercive tools and tactics have often been referenced as Active Measures.\textsuperscript{59} These Measures have been used to sway political actors into avenues of actions favorable to the agent of influence.\textsuperscript{60} The concept has most often been associated with Russia’s actions across international borders during the Cold War and the post-Soviet period, when Moscow employs bribery and low-intensity protracted propaganda, without the framing of an imminent physical threat.\textsuperscript{61} Finally, Active Measures have been deployed most often in circumstances of low-intensity political tensions, which do not require immediate actions or resolution.\textsuperscript{62}

Whether coercive or non-coercive, one of the key gray zone tactics used by Russia is to appeal to its diaspora residing across the post-Soviet region; however, the success rate of such this is largely determined by pre-existing minority rights conditions in the host states.\textsuperscript{63} Russia has disseminated misleading information in the form of propaganda and a strong appeal to diaspora and ethnic ties across international borders to erode the societal unity and peace within an opponent’s domestic political environment.\textsuperscript{64} Molodikova (2017) notes that in May 2013, Russia’s president signed a decree ordering the government-affiliated organization Rossotrudnichestvo (Russian Cooperation) to engage
in activities of “soft power” akin to those of its counterpart USAID, thereby signaling a securitization in diaspora engagement policy.\textsuperscript{65}

Moreover, Russia has engaged in low-intensity cyber operations against its opponents.\textsuperscript{66} In most cases, such activities do not cause an immediate loss in human life and therefore have generally been classified as low intensity.\textsuperscript{67} For example, the Estonian State Procurature linked the cyber-attacks in 2007 to Kremlin-backed non-state cyber actors.\textsuperscript{68} In many cases cyber tactics have created challenges of attribution, thereby distancing sponsors of operations from targets and diluting punitive or retaliatory measures.\textsuperscript{69}

Finally, economic pressure tactics have played a major role in gray zone conflicts as they erode the opponents’ economy in hope of changing their policy direction. Even though NATO states use economic tools against Russia, such as sanctions, pressure by Russia against Ukraine has been more finely tuned. For example, Russia used its energy sector to choke Ukraine’s economy. Prior to the events in 2014, Russia and Ukraine engaged in substantial cooperation in the energy domain. Ukraine was purchasing Russian natural gas at discounted prices; pipelines between Russia and the EU have been constructed through Ukraine, which gained revenues from transit fees. In 2015, Russia ceased the export of its gas to Ukraine, claiming it would demand upfront payments for the commodity. Even though this scenario between Russia and Ukraine appeared as an energy dispute, the timing and magnitude of this energy-related crisis were convenient for Russia.\textsuperscript{70} The table below summarizes the various tools and tactics as well as their corresponding intensities of coercion.
Table 2.3. Intensity of Coercive Gray Zone Tools and Tactics Available to Russia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intensity of Coercion</th>
<th>Tools and Tactics</th>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>Results Achievement Probability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Conventional/Open Military Operation(s)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-Medium</td>
<td>Covert Military/Security Operation(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium-High</td>
<td>Material support for non-state militias</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Economic pressure(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Cyber operation(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Diaspora influence through organization(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Media and information operation(s)</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table below summarizes the key terminology used in this research.
Table 2.4 Key Terminology and Definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russia’s ‘Near Abroad’</td>
<td>Independent republics of the former Soviet Union.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power of a State</td>
<td>Outcome-based definition; ability to influence policies of another state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of a State</td>
<td>Foreign policy role marks the behavior and position of the state manifested in its external relations. Distinct from power, role nonetheless is in the long term affected by the course of power. Like power, role is relative (systemic). It is determined primarily by what a government itself does and if the other government and/or the local population accept its exercise of that role. It has been associated with the accepted level of presence of another state within the security, social, and economic domains of a given country; maintenance of role is necessary for perception of security.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secessionism</td>
<td>An attempt by an ethnic group claiming a homeland to withdraw with its territory from the authority of a larger state of which it is a part. This is different from separatism, in which a movement may desire more regional autonomy, but without a territorial withdrawal from the larger state entity. Secessionism may be defined through either its <em>stricto sensu</em> or <em>incremental</em> definition. The ‘strict’ definition involves a formal declaration of independence by a group while the latter includes political activity toward full independence or <em>autonomy</em> within a larger state, without a formal declaration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irredentism</td>
<td>Same as secessionism, but the movement also possesses the goal of politically joining the territory of another state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign policy Crisis</td>
<td>A threat to a state’s one or more basic values, along with an awareness of finite time for response to the value threat, and heightened probability of involvement in military hostilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intensity of Coercive Tools and Tactics</td>
<td>The intensity of coercive tactics considers, tools and tactics utilized, the pace of utility, and risk of immediate civilian and/or military casualties with regard to the attacker and/or targets. These are coercive tactics as they are used to influence the behavior of another state; this directly relates to the achievement of state power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Coercive Gray Zone Tools and Tactics; Active or Persuasion Measures</td>
<td>Tools and tactics below the threshold of coercion. The purpose of these operations is to maintain (or increase) state power and enable a state to promote its perceived role. In the context of this research, Active or Persuasion Measures are used to facilitate the acceptance of, and commitment to, Russia’s perceived role by local populations and state representatives across geographic locations prior to crisis onset.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.7 Theoretical Model

The purpose of the theoretical model developed in this section is to explain foreign policy decision-making by accounting for both the system- and domestic-level conditions for the use of different gray zone tools and tactics. Using the power cycle theory, this research suggests that the gap between perceived role and power establishes the degree of system-level incentive (IV1) to apply coercion; however domestic-level factors, such as the type of ethnic-based movement, creates the opportunity (IV2) for coercive actions using gray zone tools and tactics (DV). These relationships form the foundation of the Incentive-Opportunity (IOI) Model and are discussed in the following four sections.

2.7.1 System-Level Incentive for the Use of Gray Zone Tools and Tactics (IV1)

Drawing on Doran’s (1971; 2000) power cycle theory, a state’s foreign policy choice to apply various intensities of tools and tactics against its geostrategic adversaries is affected by the degree of overextension of role over power. The onset of crisis reveals this overextension, risking an adjustment in the system with a potential decline in the perceived role of a state. This role-power gap forms the system-level incentive (IV1) for the implementation of different coercive gray zone tools and tactics as states may act to prevent a potential decline in their perceived role. However, to make the power cycle theory a usable tool to measure the degree of system-level incentive, the concepts of role and power therein must be operationalized.

Role theory, and the theatre analogy, is an effective way to operationalize this role-power overextension scenario. An actor’s role is overextended when the narrative articulated on stage is disproportionately greater than the role accepted by the audience. Using Sarbin and Allen’s (1968) original role theory framework, overextension would
occur when the degree of 1) specificity, 2) scope, and 3) clarity, which are part of the role articulated by the actor on stage, overreach the degree of role 4) acceptance and 5) formality, which are within the audience’s purview.

When applying Sarbin and Allen’s (1968) role theory framework to the concept of power, 4) acceptance and 5) formality ultimately represent the level of power of the actor on stage. A powerful actor is one who can effectively persuade the audience of their articulated role as well as entrench that role through a mutual agreement. Sarbin and Allen’s (1968) original role components are mapped onto the power cycle theory in Figure 2.1 below, in which role overextension is illustrated.

When the self-perception of role (components 1, 2, and 3) is greater than the ability to affect the acceptance and formal protection of that perceived role (components 4 and 5), the threat of role decline becomes credible. During the onset of the crisis, situational ambiguity becomes extensive as a result of changes in the political environment. The introduction of competing actors and their rival narratives onto a political arena following crisis onset undermines the monopoly of the previously dominant actor’s narrative(s). In turn, the new competing actors risk rendering the degree of specificity, the scope, and clarity of the pre-crisis onset dominant actor’s perceived role insignificant. These components of role, articulated by the role enactor, risk being diluted by narratives communicated by the new actor in the political arena.

However, even when competing actors and narratives enter a political environment, what remains important for the continued operationalization of the pre-crisis dominant actor’s role are the degree of acceptance of the perceived role by the prospective targets of coercion and the level of cross-border commitment to that role through formal
arrangements. Relative to role specificity, scope and clarity, acceptance, and formality, for which the ‘audience’ of the role is responsible, are difficult to undermine immediately following crisis onset. This is especially true in cases where the local acceptance and commitment to a perceived role was cultivated by external actors over a long period of time. In other words, only because an ‘actor’ on stage may change, it does not mean the audience will immediately cease accepting and committing to that role in favor of someone new.

In cases of anticipated large losses of role, higher-intensity actions, with a higher probability of success, are more likely to be undertaken following crisis onset to counter this adjustment. The cost of inaction, and subsequent loss in perceived security, would be too high to ignore and absorb. Such policy choices can be attributed to the endowment effect and prospect theory, which are discussed in more detail in the following section. This anticipated decline in role specificity, scope, and clarity following crisis onset is illustrated in Figure 2.2 below.

In line with Doran’s conceptualization, pre-conflict systemic-level conditions determine subsequent foreign policy actions. Thus it is important to establish the role-power gap prior to crisis onset. However, an inseparable part of this pre-crisis role-power gap calculation is a determination of the exact points in time prior to crisis onset when this gap should be measured.

The ability to maintain or deliver role depends on what Hart (1976) calls control over ‘consequential events.’ This means role and power are measurable at points when competitors are vying for control over certain outcomes. In terms of role theory, this means the level of acceptance and formality is directly tied to a pursuit of certain outcomes by
state actors. For example, non-coercive (persuasion) means can be used to promote role acceptance and formalization of the role by the target leadership and constituency to exert control over consequential events.

Prior to the crisis, because the risk of role decline is minimal, national power can be determined by the level of acceptance and formality in pursuit of a desired outcome based on non-coercive gray zone tools and tactics.81 For example, to determine the degree of role formality, one can ask the question of whether a country has been able to reach a long-term formal treaty to maintain its perceived role in a given region? Also, does the agreement with the target government allow for easy withdraw, or has it been diluted by treaties or agreements with competitors?

Following crisis onset and escalation, the generality, scope, and clarity of role may be eroded as a result of situational ambiguity, as a consequence of the introduction of powerful competing actors and their rival narratives. To prevent a perceived imminent decline in role following crisis onset, states may use coercive gray zone tools and tactics to increase the acceptance and formalization of this role. Ultimately, this is meant to preserve their perceived security in a given region. Next, it is necessary to establish the impact of the role-power gap size on the choice to use gray zone conflict tools and tactics intensity, in greater detail.

It is expected that in cases where the role-power gap is the largest, the system-level incentive to use high-intensity gray zone tools and tactics is the greatest; this is to prevent a significant decline in perceived role and thus, security. In cases of a large anticipated role decline, states are more likely to rely on higher-intensity tools as they are more likely to achieve results, even if they correspond with potential material and international reputation
costs. In other words, the potential payoff in terms of role preservation is anticipated to offset these costs.

On the other hand, in cases where the role-power gap is small, the expected system-level *incentive* to use high-intensity gray zone tools and tactics is correspondingly small. The potential material and international costs associated with high-intensity gray zone tools and tactics would be greater than any role preservation payoff achieved by them. Thus, a state is incentivized to lower the intensity of its coercive gray zone tools and tactics to correspond with the anticipated role preservation payoff. However, the system-level consideration for the use of coercion is only one aspect of the overall strategic calculation of states to use different gray zone tools and tactics across international borders. The figures below illustrate this system-level incentive structure, which would be different across cases.

**Figure 2.1.** Determinants of Role and Relative Power

*Sarbin and Allen’s (1968) Role Expectation Determinants:*

1. Role specificity
2. Role scope
3. Role clarity
4. Role acceptance
5. Role formality

**Relative Role of Russia**

**Relative Power of Russia**

**Time**
2.7.2 Domestic-Level Opportunity for Gray Zone Engagement (IV2)

Alongside system-level considerations, states’ decisions to employ different tools and tactics in gray zone conflicts are also based on domestic-level conditions. These conditions create varying levels of opportunity (IV2) to deploy different tools and tactics in this conflict format. These on-the-ground societal characteristics vary across states and even among regions within them.

Non-state entities, especially when organized into ethnic-based movements, create political opportunities through which powerful third parties exercise power and operationalize their perceived roles, for example as protectors. This research suggests that the type of ethnic-based movement, irredentist or secessionist, impacts the overall cost calculation of third-party’s application of coercive gray zone tools and tactics in support of that movement.
As noted by Heraclides (1990) and Chazan and Horowitz (1990), compared to secessionist movements, irredentism is relatively costly to support in terms of commitment and duration. As successful irredentism requires the addition of a territory and its people to the ‘home country,’ it becomes more difficult to assist the movement covertly. Moreover, irredentist movements most often indicate a clear desire to join the intervening state, which creates challenges of plausible deniability if the support is exposed. In turn, this creates a potentially high cost in terms of international reputation as such support is seen as a direct undermining of the territorial integrity of another state. Gray zone tools and tactics assist interveners in their support of movements covertly and in cases of exposure, enable the maintenance of plausible deniability. Thus, low-intensity gray zone tools and tactics become a worthwhile investment in cases where the potential cost of support for the local irredentist movement is higher relative to secessionism. In turn, this domestic-level consideration becomes an essential part of the overall cost-benefit calculation, in tandem with system-level factors, for the choice to use specific gray zone tools and tactics.

2.7.3 Combining Incentive (IV1) and Opportunity (IV2) to Determine Intensity of Gray Zone Engagement (DV)

This research proposes a number of hypotheses, which collectively assess the impact of system-level and domestic-level considerations in states’ choice to use gray zone tools and tactics of different intensities. The four hypotheses below test the validity of the proposed IOI Model by accounting for variation across the IVs: the role-power gap (IV1) and the type of local ethnic-based movement (IV2). For the purpose of this model, the variations in the independent variables are simplified to binary values of ‘low’ and ‘high.’
Variation in the role-power gap, or the system-level *incentive* for the use of coercion, and the type of movement across targeted regions, the domestic-level *opportunity*, affect states’ choice to use different intensities of coercion in gray zone conflict. In cases of a large power-role gap, and the local movement is secessionist, a state is likely to use high intensity of coercion. The large power-role gap creates significant system-level incentive as inaction or unresponsiveness to the potential role decline following crisis onset may be unacceptable. High intensity of coercion may carry more material and international reputation costs, but these are offset by the higher likelihood of perceived role preservation. Concurrently, involvement in secessionism carries a lower cost relative to irredentism as the endeavor is relatively more superficial. The implication is that a state can engage in high-intensity operations, the cost of which can, at least partially, be counterbalanced by the lower cost of support for secession. For example, a state may engage militarily in support of a secessionist movement, but its costs will be decreased by a shorter length of operations compared to those associated with irredentist movements, which often involved multi-stage operations across many months. Moreover, there is a relatively lower perception by the international community that the belligerent state desires to acquire the target state’s territory as the local population may only want more autonomy from their central government, not to join the third party supporter. This means overall international costs are anticipated to be lower relative to support for irredentism. The above relationship is tested through hypothesis (A): *If role exceeds power by a large margin, and the local movement is secessionist, Russia will utilize high intensity of coercion.* This relationship is also represented in box 1, in Figure 2.3 below.
On the other hand, in cases of a large role-power gap, with a local irredentist movement, a state will likely engage in high-medium intensity coercion. The system-level incentive for the use of coercion is high as the role decline is anticipated to be large. On one hand, the high-medium intensity of coercion enables some certainty that role preservation will indeed be achieved. In other words, higher gray zone intensity tools and tactics are more likely to have an impact on the target state. In comparison, low-intensity tools and tactics have an anticipated temporal lag until they become impactful, thus making their overall effect unpredictable. On the other hand, a state needs certainty that the relatively high cost and risk of involvement in an irredentist movement are lower than the benefits at the system level. By engaging in open warfare in support of such a movement, a state may incur very high international costs as its actions are perceived as seeking the territorial disintegration of the target state. Moreover, when supporting an irredentist movement with force, by implication, a state appears to commit to the acquisition of a target state’s territory and population. As previously discussed, the use of low-intensity gray zone tools and tactics may lower these costs of support for an irredentist movement. Thus, in a scenario with a high role-power gap and an irredentist movement, a state will not use the highest possible intensity of coercion, such as conventional military engagement. This relationship is tested through hypothesis (B): If role exceeds power by a large margin, and the local movement is irredentist, Russia will utilize high-medium intensity of coercion; this is represented in box 2, in Figure 2.3 below.

Third, in cases where the role and power gap is small, and the local movement is irredentist, it is expected states would be disinterested in the application of coercion. Therein, the potential material and international reputation costs associated with the high-
intensity gray zone tools and tactics would outweigh the benefits. From a system-level perspective, the implication is that Russia may be incentivized to use low-intensity gray zone tools and tactics. However, the potential cost of support for an irredentism movement is relatively high, making the overall cost of the use of coercion higher than potential system-level role preservation benefits. It thus becomes possible that gray zone activities to mitigate role decline may never pass the threshold of coercion. This relationship is tested through hypothesis (C): If role exceeds power by a small margin, and the local movement is irredentist, Russia will not utilize coercion; this is represented in box 3, in Figure 2.3 below.

Finally, in cases with a small power-role gap, and a local secessionist movement, a state is anticipated to rely on low-intensity gray zone tools and tactics. On one hand, there is some system-level incentive to use coercion to mitigate anticipated role decline. However, to prevent only a small potential decline in perceived role following crisis onset, there is no incentive to also incur the costs associated with a high intensity of coercion. Concurrently, however, support for a secessionist movement is associated with a lower cost of support relative to irredentism. As previously noted, this enables a higher intensity of coercion due to lower anticipated material and international reputation costs, if exposed. Although, such support carries some costs. In sum, this relationship between system- and domestic-level considerations is tested through hypothesis (D): If role exceeds power by a small margin, and the local movement is secessionist, Russia will utilize low intensity of coercion. The interaction of the variables, and expected outcome, is represented in box 4, in Figure 2.3 below.
Figure 2.3 below summarizes the impact of the system-level consideration, the role-power gap, and local conditions based on the movement type, on the choice of states to use different intensities of coercive tools and tactics in gray zone conflict. These relationships form the foundation of the Inventive-Opportunity Intervention (IOI) Model, which is tested based on five cases, through three stages. The foreign policy decision-making sequence to use different gray zone tools and tactics as a function of system-level overextension of role over power, crisis onset phase, and domestic-level societal conditions is illustrated in Figure 2.4 below.

**Figure 2.3.** Intensity of Use of Coercion as a function of Role-Power Gap and Type of Movement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement Type (Opportunity)</th>
<th>Role and Power Gap (Incentive)</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Large</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irredentism</td>
<td></td>
<td>(3) No Coercion</td>
<td>(2) High-Medium Intensity of Coercion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secessionism</td>
<td></td>
<td>(4) Low Intensity of Coercion</td>
<td>(1) High Intensity of Coercion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.8 Research Design, Methodology, and Case Selection

This research employs a structured-focused comparison method\(^{82}\) using the cases of 1) Abkhazia, 2) Crimea, 3) Odesa, 4) Kharkiv, and 5) the Donbas to explain the variation in Russia’s application of various intensities of coercion as a function of system- and domestic-level considerations. For cases (1) to (4), the onset of crisis follows the departure of President Viktor Yanukovych from Kyiv on 21 February 2014 during the Maidan Square demonstrations. In the case of Abkhazia, crisis onset occurs after the detonation of an explosive device, which killed Georgian police officers in Tskhinvali on 1 August 2008.\(^{83}\) Furthermore, both crises constitute what Brecher (2008) identifies as an international
political earthquake, which has a spillover effect beyond the immediate jurisdiction of origin.\textsuperscript{84}

The \textit{structured-focused comparison} method enables the generation of questions that reflect the research objective. The questions are asked of each case under study to guide and standardize data collection, thereby making a systemic comparison and accumulation of findings. Ultimately, the method yields useful knowledge of important foreign policy problems and choices by Russia following the onset of each crisis.

As noted by Collier (1993), the practice of focusing on a few cases has achieved great legitimacy in qualitative research. This decision to analyze only a few cases has generally been attributed to relatively few instances of the phenomenon under question – as in the case of this research.\textsuperscript{85} Moreover, even as a proponent of large-N analysis, Bueno De Mesquita (1985) recognizes that a focus on a small number of cases enables researchers to identify nuances in causal variables, thus allowing detailed explanations for complex policy phenomena to emerge.\textsuperscript{86}

On the other hand, Lijphart (1971) highlights a major challenge for the comparative method when a large number of variables exists relative to a small number of cases.\textsuperscript{87} As noted by Collier (2005), one of the ways to remedy this is to focus on comparable cases as well as reduce the number of variables. In this research, the ratio of variables to cases is 1:2 and the cases are comparable both temporally, in terms of fit into the same era of Russia’s foreign policy posture, as well as the anchoring of four of the five cases in the same crisis.\textsuperscript{88} The case selection criteria are discussed in greater detail below. Collier (2011) and Lijphart (1971) conclude that the comparative method enables in-depth
research, and thus, internal validity when engaging in a theory-building exercise relative to the more superficial statistical analysis of a large number of cases.89

2.8.1 Case Selection Criteria

As noted by Seawright and Gerring (2008), random sampling is not a viable approach when the overall number of case studies is small.90 Thus, a *purposeful mode of sampling* is the necessary approach.91 The selection of cases in this research is based on five criteria, which are also summarized in Table 2.5 below: 1) location in Russia’s ‘near abroad,’ 2) Russia’s actions are based on crisis-induced foreign policy decision-making, 3) timeframe of the years 2000 to 2019, 4) cases are within the ‘politically-relevant dyads’ criteria, and 5) the selected cases are *representative* of the full spectrum in Russia’s intensity of coercion.

The first case selection criterion is to examine occasions of Russia’s application of coercive gray zone tools and tactics across the independent Republics of the former Soviet Union. These nations have commonly been referenced in academic and policy circles as Russia’s ‘near abroad.’92

The second case selection criterion is to examine occasions of Russia’s deployment of gray zone tools and tactics based on crisis-induced decision-making. This means that Russia’s foreign policy choice to use coercion must take place after, and be a response to, a disruption in a local political environment. This disruption must fit the characteristics of a crisis, as outlined by Carment and James (1995) and Brecher (2016).93 As concluded by Mearsheimer (2014) and Peng (2017), Russia was deploying gray zone tools and tactics in Ukraine as a response to crisis onset in February 2014.94 Similarly, as noted by Cornell and
Starr (2009), Russia’s use of force in Abkhazia was a function of the crisis involving Moscow, Tbilisi, and NATO members, who politically supported Georgia.\(^{95}\)

Third, the timeframe selected for this research is between the years 2000 and 2019 as Russia re-oriented its foreign policy posture with the new Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation of June 2000. This document signaled the beginning of a new era in Russia’s foreign policy posture and a re-definition of the country’s perceived role in the post-Soviet region. It was a deviation from the Yeltsin-era policies, which guided Russia toward relative passivity in the international arena.\(^{96}\)

The Concept hardened Russia’s foreign policy position on a number of issues. First, it re-frames NATO as a direct geopolitical threat. Second, it highlighted the need for increased interaction as well political and economic integration with its post-Soviet neighbors. Finally, it identified a need to increase international activity in defense of geopolitical interest and the promotion of a multipolar world order. Foreign Policy Concept documents from 2008, 2013, and 2016 echo these messages.\(^{97}\) Moreover, in this timeframe, there has been a dramatic shift to more varied types of coercion by Russia relative to the 1990s, which has also corresponded with the emergence of the gray zone conflict phenomenon as the standard mode of interaction between state adversaries.

Fourth, the cases in this research were selected based on the politically relevant dyads criteria.\(^{98}\) Relevant dyads are pairs of states directly or indirectly contiguous and at least one of the entities is a designated major power based on the Correlates of War. Relevant but indirect contiguity, however, must be no farther than 400 miles of open water or direct contiguity with a ‘colony’ of a given state.\(^{99}\) The analysis of such cases is important as conflict of interest, and thus the potential for diplomatic or militarized conflict, increase
between such entities. Maoz and Russett (1993), O’neal and Russett (1997), and Lemke (1995) note that countries outside of this category simply do not have a reasonable opportunity for engagement in armed conflict, thus the need for them to be subjects of research greatly diminishes.  

Finally, the cases selected for this research are representative or typical of the theory-specified relationships among the independent variables. As noted by Seawright and Gerring (2008), cases must be useful in examining “variation on the dimensions of theoretical interest;” in this research, the selected cases represent the range of intensities of gray zone tools and tactics used by Russia after the year 2000. In Abkhazia, Russia deployed targeted military operations, which translate to high-intensity coercion. In Crimea, Moscow deployed various covert security operations, which correspond to high-medium intensity of coercion. In the Donbas, Moscow provided military and material support for non-state armed groups, which represented medium-intensity coercion. In Kharkiv, Russia deployed low-intensity coercion, based on diaspora mobilization and use of media operations. Finally in Odesa, Russia did not use coercion following the crisis onset in February 2014. These case studies correspond to the boxes in Figure 2.3 above in respective order. Moreover, the case of Odesa serves to remedy the challenges identified by King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) in their discussion of causal inferences in qualitative research.  

The case of Odesa serves as a control case meant to prevent biased or invalid study results as a consequence of ‘case selection on the dependent variable.’ King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) warn against selection on the dependent variable. For example, they note that accurate causal inferences about the outbreak of violent conflicts cannot be identified
by only examining cases where such outbreaks occurred. In fact, a given explanatory (or independent) variable may be identified as inconsequential when incorporating a case where the phenomenon in question did not occur. If a given explanatory variable indeed becomes insignificant for the ‘non-event’ case, the constructed causal theory becomes invalid. To remedy the above challenge, this research incorporates the case of Odesa, where Russia’s actions never passed the threshold of coercion.

This study also selected the case of Abkhazia due to its representativeness of Russia’s broader policy toward the Caucasian Region, where it envisioned a protector role of both local compatriots and the territory. This means the Abkhazia case may credibly represent the system-level incentive and domestic-level opportunity applicable to South Ossetia, from Moscow’s perspective. For example, Abkhazia and South Ossetia often appeared in tandem in Russian foreign policy documents. Moreover, when the President of Russia met with the representatives of the Abkhazian government to discuss relations with Georgia, these meetings were held in parallel with the leaders of South Ossetia.

Finally, the Donbas case was selected on the basis of purposeful sampling. The value of the dependent variable, the intensity of coercion, in the Donbas is greater than in Kharkiv and Odesa but lower than in Abkhazia and Crimea. Examining the values of the independent causal variables in the Donbas case allows this research to determine whether system-level incentive or domestic-level opportunity was more significant in Russia’s choice of gray zone tools and tactics in this region. The table below summarizes the case selection criteria.
2.8.2 Hypothesis-Testing Methodology

The testing of the hypotheses is conducted through two process tracing tests: 1) the *hoop test* and 2) the *smoking gun test*. For each hypothesis, there is a sequence of necessary observations to support causal inference. Even though the *hoop test* does not produce a sufficient criterion for confirming the hypothesis, it establishes all the necessary criteria individually. Each hypothesis must “jump through the hoop” to remain under consideration, but passing this test does not by itself affirm the hypothesis in its entirety.

These necessary observations are identified through the gathering of empirical evidence in the three stages of the research identified below as causal process observations (CPOs). Hoop tests do not confirm a hypothesis but are effective at eliminating them by breaking the chain of necessary conditions. For example, one of the critical ‘hoops’ is to show that

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**Table 2.5. Summary of Case Selection Criteria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case Selection Criteria</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russia’s ‘Near Abroad’</td>
<td>Target cases of Russia’s gray zone tools and tactics in the independent Republics of the former Soviet Union.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis-induced Foreign Policy Decision-Making</td>
<td>Analysis of coercive gray zone tools and tactics, which take place after crises. The definition of crisis is based on the characteristics outlined by Carment and James (1995) and Brecher (2016).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeframe 2000 to 2019</td>
<td>Starting with the new Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation of June 2000, Russia re-conceptualized its role in the post-Soviet region and relations with NATO.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politically-relevant Dyads</td>
<td>Pairs of states directly or indirectly contiguous and, at least one of the entities is a designated major power based on the Correlates of War; contiguous borders or no more than 400 miles of open water separating their territories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Representative or Typical Cases</em></td>
<td>Cases that represent the different intersections of the system-level <em>incentive</em> and domestic-level <em>opportunity</em>, as represented by the box in Figure 2.3 above. See Seawright and Gerring (2008).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
a local ethnic-based movement indeed facilitated permissive conditions for Russia to apply gray zone tools and tactics.

On the other hand, the smoking gun test can establish sufficient conditions for accepting causal inferences. In this case, sufficient conditions require the presence of both system-level incentive and domestic-level opportunity for Russia’s use of coercion. Moreover, it is necessary to show that Russia’s use of specific coercive tools and tactics were directly enabled by the two independent variables. If a given hypothesis passes, it substantially weakens rival hypotheses. This means to fully establish causal inference, the hypotheses must pass both the hoop as well as the smoking gun tests.

To implement both tests and demonstrate causal inference, each case chapter is divided into three stages of analysis. Stages 1 and 2 focus on the gathering of empirical evidence regarding the system- and domestic-level variables as part of the hoop test. The analysis in Stage 3 converts the empirical evidence into causal linkages, which are used to support or reject the hypothesis in question as well as assess the validity of the IOI Model.

2.8.3 Stage 1: Evaluation of the Role-Relative Power Gap Across Time (IV1)

The purpose of Stage 1 is to gather qualitative data regarding Russia’s role specificity, scope, clarity, local acceptance, and formality. The qualitative data is subsequently coded in Stage 3 to determine the magnitude of the role-power gap, which constitutes the system-level incentive (IV1) for Russia’s use of different gray zone tools and tactics in a given location.

First, in each selected case region, the local competing identity narratives are examined to determine the one which Moscow selected as a platform to implement its local
perceived role. These local narratives incorporate ethnic, religious, and economic markers as well as major historical events, which Russia perceives as important.

Second, it is necessary to select the specific points in time, during which Russia’s role specificity, scope, clarity, degree of local acceptance, and formality should be assessed. For each country or region case, data points A and B are determined according to what Hart (1976) identifies as consequential events.\textsuperscript{114} Point C is determined relative to the onset of a crisis. This is illustrated in Figure 2.5 below.

The concept of consequential events stipulates that actors tend to share control over events that are mutually significant for either their economy, security, or society, but vie for control over the specific outcomes which may inflict severe damage to their political circumstances. In this research, the signing of important treaties, memoranda of understanding, or instances of negotiation or bargaining, which are consequential for Russia’s self-prescribed role in a specific region, are key anchor points for the selection of points of observation A and B.

The first three components of role (specificity, scope, and clarity) around each consequential event are evaluated based on discourse analysis. Krippendorf (2003), Fischer and Forester (1987), Stone (1997), Roe (1994), as well as Schon and Rein (1994) draw attention to the role of language or 'narrative stories' in explaining policy choice and intent.\textsuperscript{115} For example, discourse analysis has been used to evaluate the framing of certain issues such as ideological expression in U.S media, the portrayal of peace movements during conflict,\textsuperscript{116} policy framing in non-violent political competitions,\textsuperscript{117} or complexity of political rhetoric in the Canadian House of Commons.\textsuperscript{118}
Each case chapter incorporates discourse analysis, such as interpretation of speeches of Russia’s leadership, on the basis of which inferences regarding role specificity, scope and clarity can be made. In cases where data may not be gathered from speeches by Russian executive or legislative branch representatives, analysis of statements and perspectives by government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs) are assessed as indicators of the Kremlin’s perspective.

This research relies on pragmatic content analysis, in which ‘how’ a message is delivered is the focus, as opposed to semantical content analysis in which merely the presence or absence of specific words in association with a subject implies causation. For the purpose of this study, semantical analysis is insufficient as it can only determine the type of role being articulated, while complex characteristics such as role specificity, scope, and clarity cannot be inferred through systematic capturing of a single word or phrase across speeches and cases. Moreover, to capture the complexity of framing Krippendorf (2003) argues for the use of assertion analysis, which encapsulates both the frequency and characterization of specific objects or phenomena. For example, such analysis has been conducted by Jenne (2007) who used public statements as proxies for the measurement of treatment of minority groups by host governments and lobby groups.119

Role acceptance and formality, which constitute the role enactor’s power over the audience, are also determined through content analysis. To determine role acceptance by the local population, each case chapter examines role-affirming social mobilization as a function of 1) local legislative efforts in support of Russia’s perceived role; 2) local public opinion. For example, in cases of regional protector role perception by Russia, local opinion polls are an important indicator of local sentiment toward a potential military
alliance with the enactor of the role; 3) level of attendance of local population at role-affirming events such as commemorations; 4) the degree of alignment of local priorities with Russia’s perceived role.

Subsequently, to ascertain the degree of role formality, each case chapter assesses the level of commitment of the local population to Moscow’s perceived role. Content analysis of local-cross border agreements, memoranda of understanding (MOUs), and major international treaties are evaluated to determine whether they are binding or allow for unilateral withdrawal, as well as the duration of commitment.

Because role acceptance and the degree of formality are hypothesized to constitute an actor’s power over the audience, it is important to identify that the extent of each of these role components is indeed a function of Russia’s efforts as the role enactor. Thus following the evaluation of these role components, each chapter also incorporates an analysis of how role acceptance and degree of formality are affected by Russia’s non-coercive gray zone tools and tactics prior to crisis onset.

**Figure 2.5.** Stage 1: Evaluation of the Gap Between Perceived Role and Power
2.8.4 Stage 2: Evidence of Domestic-Level Opportunity for Coercion (IV2)

Following the qualitative evaluation of the role components, each chapter assesses the domestic-level opportunity (IV2) for Russia’s use of different gray zone tools and tactics. The type of ethnic-based movement is used to evaluate Russia’s domestic-level cost-benefit considerations for using coercive gray zone tools and tactics. To this end, each case study incorporates a review of secondary literature such as reports and recent scholarly studies to evaluate the characteristics of the local ethnic-based movement.

For example, Wood (1981) identifies a number of necessary conditions, or indicators, for a secessionist movement. First is geographical preconditions, which include the existence of a separable territory that contains the bulk of the secessionist group. Second, there are social preconditions, which are operationalized as the existence of a bond among people that causes them to consider themselves a group distinct from others. Third, there are economic preconditions, which are formed on the basis of some economic exclusion from the rest of society. Fourth, there are political preconditions such as the perceived illegitimacy of the political system or incumbent central regime by a group. Finally, there are psychological preconditions that prime all other preconditions and the overall desire for an independent home on the part of the secessionists. However, in the case of irredentism, another indicator is present: the active will of the group to be incorporated into another state, along with their territory.

2.8.5 Stage 3: Results, Hypothesis-Testing and Analysis

The purpose of the results and analysis section in each case chapter is to test the corresponding hypothesis and causal mechanisms using the corresponding case study to
determine the validity of the IOI Model in explaining Russia’s chosen intensity of coercion in a given region (DV).

First, based on the qualitative data gathered in Stage 1, role specificity, scope, clarity, acceptance, and formality are coded between 1 (low) to 5 (High). The purpose of this is to determine the magnitude of each component. Based on these numeric values, the gap between role and power can be determined, and thus, the potential decline in role as a consequence of crisis onset. The spectrum of numeric values associated with each role component is represented in the Coding Table in Appendix A. The Table is an operationalization of Sarbin and Allen’s (1968) five identify categories, on the basis of which the extent of role and power expectation can be assessed.121

Each of the five role components is broken into five qualitative categories and corresponds to numerical values. First, role specificity is assessed by examining the number of dominant narratives. For example, ‘low role focus’ entails multiple narratives, with no narrative leading, while ‘very high role focus’ is determined through the emphasis on a single dominant narrative supported by Russia in a given location. Second, the degree of role scope is determined by the geographic focus of the perceived role with regard to a specific region(s) or city. For example, ‘low geographic’ focus involves a perceived role that is applicable to an entire state while ‘very high geographic’ focus is operationalized as a perceived role pertaining to a specific location, such as a city, within a specific sub-national jurisdiction. Third, the degree of role clarity is determined by the number of components present within a given narrative. The greater the number of outlined details, or individually defined components of the perceived role, the lower the level of ambiguity regarding the specific role. For example, a focus on only one role component often leaves
much ambiguity regarding the entirety of the role. This translates into ‘low role detail.’ On the other hand, a focus on five individual components creates significant clarity regarding Russia’s perceived role details.

Concurrently, the results and analysis section of each case chapter provides a summary of the type of local ethnic-based movement, secessionism or irredentism, and how it translates into a cost and opportunity for the application of gray zone tools and tactics. These include ease of application or withdraw of support as well as the depth of commitment to the local ethnic-based movement.

In sum, these different combinations of system-level incentives and domestic-level opportunities are hypothesized to affect Russia’s choice to use various intensities of coercive gray zone tools and tactics. The final component of each ‘results and analysis’ section is an assessment of whether the intensity of coercion indeed corresponds to the cost-benefit calculation, thereby completing the last step of the smoking gun test. The next chapter examines Russia’s use of coercive gray zone tools and tactics in Abkhazia following crisis onset in August 2008, through the above three stages of analysis. Therein, the validity of the theoretical linkages of the IOI Model is tested.


9 Ibid.


13 Ibid.


See T. Sarbin., and V. Allen, “Role Theory.”


See Carment and Belo (2020), 140.


See Alexis Heraclides, “The Ending of Unending Conflicts: Separatist Wars.” Millennium 26, no. 3 (December 1997): 679–707 and Svante E. Cornell,


41 See Naomi Chazan and Donald Horowitz.


45 See Brecher, 1993.


50 Even though power distribution adjustment is one of the key outcomes of crises for states, Roberts et al. (2017) identify that non-state actors often play a central role in crisis onset. They found that among 105 foreign policy crises occurred between 1987 and 2015,


60 Ibid.


62 Ibid.


64 Ibid.


See Abramo Organski (1968) *World politics*, 2d edn, Knopf, New York,


Differentiation is based on Carment et al. in *Who Intervenes: Ethnic Conflict and Interstate Crisis* (2006).


See Doran (2000), 32.


The departure of Viktor Yanukovych and the killing of the police officer represent the triggering events of the crisis onset in Ukraine (2014) and Georgia (2008), respectively. In Ukraine, the departure of Yanukovych was followed by increased hostility between the conflicting political factions within Ukraine as well as between the ‘caretaker’ government in Kyiv and the Kremlin. See “Ukraine’s Former PM Rallies Protesters after


86 Ibid, 137.


88 See Collier.


90 Jason Seawright and John Gerring, “Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options.” *Political Research Quarterly* 61, no. 2 (June 2008): 294–308.

91 Ibid.


97 For 2000 Foreign Policy Concept, see https://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm; For 2008 Foreign Policy Concept, see http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/786; For 2013 Foreign Policy Concept, see https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/0413pp_monaghan.pdf ; For 2016 Foreign Policy Concept, see https://www.rusemb.org.uk/rp_insight/

Ibid.


See Gary King et al., 129-133.


The Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are not considered in this research. Even though these states may fit the ‘Russia’s near abroad,’ ‘timeframe 2000 to 2019,’ ‘politically-relevant dyads,’ as well as ‘representative or typical cases criteria,’ they do not fit the ‘crisis-induced foreign policy decision-making’ criterion. Prior to the states’ accession into NATO in 2004, there was no crisis to reveal Russia’s role-power gap or facilitate the emergence of a local ethnic-based movement as a platform for intervention. In other words, there was no crisis to initiate system-level *incentive* or domestic-level *opportunity* for Russia’s use of gray zone tools and tactics. During the August 2008 crisis associated with Abkhazia and February 2014 crisis related to Ukraine, the Baltic states were already members of NATO. This means a comparison of the Baltic states to cases of Abkhazia and various locations in Ukraine would be misplaced, as NATO membership could be the decisive variable affecting Moscow’s approach.

All names of regions and cities examined in this research, which are located in Ukraine, rely on the Ukrainian-language spelling. Russian (phonetic) spelling is used in circumstances where it corresponds to academic, policy, or other scholarly material in Russian language or their direct translation into English.

See Collier, 2011.

113 As noted in a footnote in Chapter 1, it should be recognized that even in my efforts to improve readers’ understanding of Russia’s foreign policy behavior in gray zone conflict with a high level of objectivity, subjectivity is still present. The coding of the elements of perceived role and power, which are based on the power cycle theory, allow me to assess system-level incentive for the application of coercive gray zone. The elements of role and power, such as role specificity and degrees of clarity, acceptance and formality, are based on Sarbin and Allen’s (1968) social psychology research. However, a high degree of subjectivity persists in how these role and power elements are operationalized into coded values, which are subsequently used to determine the role-power gap and thus, incentive for the use of coercive gray zone tools and tactics.


121 See T. Sarbin,. and V. Allen, “Role Theory.”
Chapter 3  Russia’s Campaign in Abkhazia: Assessing the High Incentive and Opportunity for Gray Zone Coercion

3.1 Introduction

Russia’s application of coercion in Abkhazia is a puzzling case as similar role decline could be anticipated in Abkhazia and Crimea by Moscow following crisis onset, but the intensity of coercion was greater in the former case. This variation raises the question of why did Russia choose to apply high-intensity coercion in support of Abkhazia following the crisis onset on 1 August 2008?

Russia’s application of force in Abkhazia indicated Moscow’s willingness to resist challenges from perceived adversaries across its ‘near a broad,’ such as NATO, and a commitment to protecting ‘compatriots.’¹ In other words, Russia’s military and unconventional operations in August 2008 were an early indicator of hardening in Moscow’s foreign policy posture regarding former Soviet republics and a readiness to operationalize its June 2000 Foreign Policy Concept (FPC).² This willingness by Moscow to preserve its perceived protector role across the ‘near abroad’ and commitment to protecting ‘compatriots’ continued into the conflict in Ukraine, which is examined in subsequent chapters.

The escalation of tensions between Moscow and Tbilisi began on 16 April 2008 when the President of Russia Vladimir Putin signed a decree authorizing Russia’s support for the “people of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.”³ On 23 April 2008 a UN Security Council meeting was convened, where the U.S, France, and the United Kingdom demanded revocation of Moscow’s decree.⁴ A further military escalation took place when Russia shot down two Georgian drones over Abkhazia on 20 April 2008.⁵ In May, Moscow unilaterally boosted the number of peacekeepers authorized by the Commonwealth of Independent
States (CIS) to over 2,500. In July 2008, tensions were heightened further with the launch of the military exercise Immediate Response 2008 by the United States and other allies, such as Georgia. Concurrently, Russia launched the Caucasus Frontier exercise. However, the triggering event, initiating crisis onset, was the detonation of an explosive device that killed Georgian police officers in Tskhinvali on 1 August 2008. Following this event, the competition for dominance increased in the South Caucasian region between Russia and Georgia, with the latter also being supported by the U.S and NATO. To counteract the anticipated role decline, Russia intervened with a specific combination of coercive gray zone tools and tactics.

Using the Incentive-Opportunity Intervention (IOI) Model, this chapter examines Russia’s intensity of coercion in Abkhazia (DV) following crisis onset as a function of the perceived role-power gap (IV1) and the characteristics of the local ethnic-based movement (IV2).

This relationship is tested through hypothesis (A): If role exceeds power by a large margin, and the local movement is secessionist, Russia will utilize high intensity of coercion. Based on Table 2.3 in Chapter 2, this coercion intensity involves the use of conventional military force as well as covert security operations, support for non-state militias, economic pressures, cyber operations, diaspora influence, and information operations.

Using content analysis of peer-reviewed academic research, original government statements, and speeches, this chapter finds that the system-level incentive for Russia’s application of coercion in support of Abkhazia was high. Concurrently, the local secessionist movement established a low cost, or in other words a significant domestic-
level opportunity, for the application of coercive gray zone tools and tactics following crisis onset in August 2008. Based on these two sets of factors, favorable conditions were created for Russia to employ a high intensity of coercion, combining conventional military, cyber, and information operations, thereby supporting the above hypothesis.

To test hypothesis (A), this chapter engages in a hoop test. As a starting point, the chapter outlines the competing narratives associated with Abkhazia. This section establishes why Russia selected the Abkhaz ethnic narrative to operationalize its perceived protector role in the region. Subsequent parts of the chapter are used to gather qualitative data for the assessment of the power-role gap – the system-level incentive for intervention based on the IOI Model.

First, the chapter engages in content analysis of peer-reviewed sources, formal political statements, and news articles to assess the degree of generality, scope, clarity, acceptance, and formality of Russia’s role for three consequential events (or short periods): 1) 2003 Sochi Summit, 2) 2006 Kodori Gorge Conflict, and 3) several months preceding the onset of the 1 August 2008 crisis. These consequential events were selected because they represent the top three occasions within the examined period (January 2000 to August 2008), the outcome of which Russia needed to control. In turn, this control over outcomes enabled Moscow to maintain its protector role in Abkhazia in light of perceived competition from NATO. Therein, persuasion and Active Measures, targeting local acceptance and cross-border formalization of its role, are also assessed across the three consequential events (or short periods) as contributors to Russia’s regional power prior to crisis onset.
Subsequently, content analysis of peer-reviewed sources, government documents, and news articles is used to assess the last two components of the model. The domestic-level opportunity variable, operationalized as the type of local ethnic-based movement prior to crisis onset, is examined as a proxy for the anticipated cost of Russia’s application of coercive gray zone tools and tactics. The last part of the qualitative data section provides the facts associated with Russia’s coercive tools and tactics used following crisis onset (DV).

In the results and analysis section, the chapter converts the qualitative data associated with Russia’s perceived role and power in Abkhazia into quantitative metrics based on the Coding Table in Appendix A. This quantification of the perceived role and power components enables the assessment of the size of the role-power gap and thus, the degree of system-level incentive for the application of coercive tools and tactics. Next, the chapter examines the costs imposed on Russia’s application of coercion by the local secessionist movement in Abkhazia. In sum, the specific combination of system- and domestic-level variables, and their impact on Russia’s decision-making, support the validity of the IOI Model. The last section of the chapter presents a policy conclusion and recommendations for policymakers and conflict management practitioners. Before any recommendations can be made, however, the first step is to identify the narrative which Russia selected as a political backdrop for its role preservation efforts in the region.

3.2 Narratives and the Basis of Russia’s Role Formation for Abkhazia

The purpose of the following section is to highlight the two narratives which could become a means to operationalize Russia’s perceived protector role in Abkhazia. Either of the narratives could serve as motivation for Moscow’s application of coercion following
the crisis onset in August 2008. However, aside from the two narratives discussed below, the pluralistic and ethno-nationalistic ones, there are individual histories associated with the smaller ethnic groups who resided in Abkhazia. These remain outside the discussion, however, as they are relatively irrelevant to Russia’s gray zone conflict in Abkhazia. The subsequent discussion and analysis highlight that the ‘ethno-linguistic narrative,’ which was supported by the Abkhaz elites, became symbiotic with the ‘conservative’ ideology which dominated in the Kremlin starting from the early 2000s. As a consequence, the ‘ethno-nationalistic narrative’ became conducive for Russia’s efforts to preserve its perceived role as the sole security provider for the Southern Caucasian region. Table 3.1 below provides a summary of the two competing narratives and Russia’s treatment of them.

### 3.2.1 Pluralistic Abkhazia

Even though the Abkhaz ethnic group was in a position of political pre-eminence within the territory, vulnerability and insecurity were felt among all ethnic groups toward each other, often to a similar degree. However, the sources of fear and distrust were different. Because of the historic plurality of Abkhazia, inter-ethnic relations in the territory have often been “multiple-minority” rather than “majority-minority” relations. Especially following the onset of conflict in 1992, a significant component of local identity for many Abkhazians has been pluralism, with a focused on the return of communities, such as Georgians, displaced by the violence. This pluralistic narrative resembled the Soviet-era narrative of ‘friendship of the people’ (‘Druzhba Narodov’), which focused on the peaceful co-existence of ethnic groups under an ethnically unaffiliated government.

Government policies incorporated democratic political developments and the vision of a pluralistic society, albeit superficially. These developments were a function
of combining pragmatic geopolitical calculations and local culture. On one hand, the
democratization agenda, and by implication the creation of a pluralistic society, was seen
as a platform to gain recognition by the international community for the Abkhazian
government. On the other hand, the narrative of ethnic tolerance was linked to local
traditions of hospitality in Abkhazia.

As a consequence of inter-ethnic conflict starting in 1989, Abkhazia underwent a
demographic shift. According to a pre-War 1989 census, ethnic Georgians constituted 45
percent, while the Abkhaz numbered 17.8 percent, Armenians were 14 percent, and
Russians were 7.6 percent of the population. However, following the War in Abkhazia
(1992-1993), political tensions with Georgia, and the displacement of tens of thousands of
people, transformed local demographics. By the early 2000s, approximately 50 percent of
local residents were Abkhaz, 19 percent were Georgians, 17 percent were Armenians, 9
percent were Russians, and 0.5 percent were Greek.

The push for a pluralistic state following the War, however, was met by two key
challenges. The first challenge for pluralism in Abkhazia was the absence of social and
economic linkages among the ethnic communities. Even though widespread knowledge of
the Russian language enabled inter-ethnic communication, and movement across the
Abkhazian territory was unhindered, the communities were generally isolated from one
another.

The second challenge was that many ethnic Abkhaz, who constituted the largest
ethnic group, feared the return of a minority-majority (or pluralistic) society and the
prospect of losing political pre-eminence. Thus for many Abkhaz, the maintenance of
national identity in the territory was paramount.
3.2.2 The Abkhaz Nationhood and the Politics of Fear

The nation-building project in Abkhazia emerged as resistance to perceived “Georgian imperialism.” Few remember that the first republic of the Soviet Union, where the local political elites defected to the nationalist opposition, was Georgia. However, the emergence of an anti-Georgian resistance movement was not unique to Abkhazia. Similar sentiments facilitated ethno-nationalism in South Ossetia, which in turn became Russia’s second protectorate in the South Caucasian region. To secure the pre-eminence of the Abkhaz ethnic group in governance and jurisprudence, local institutions were designed to prevent the incorporation of other ethnic groups. For example, the 1994 Constitution did not recognize the pluralistic nature of Abkhazian society. Such lack of recognition of ethnic diversity or protection of local minority rights was at least partially responsible for the domination of the Abkhaz majority across institutions.

Moreover, the Georgian population in the Galli region, with close links to Tbilisi, became a cause for concern for the Sukhumi government. Many in Abkhazia, and not just ethnic Abkhaz, saw their security as potentially undermined by ethnic diversity. As a consequence, the return of ethnic Georgians following the 1992 War was restricted to the Galli region through legislation. It was perceived by the Sukhumi government that the re-claiming of property and land did not interfere with the interests of the Abkhaz population in the capital. However, this ‘capturing’ of the Abkhazian region by a single ethnic group was also a function of the chaotic political environment in the Caucasian region, which followed the collapse of the Soviet Union.

As noted by Derluguian (2005), the end of the Soviet era ushered in a severely disorganized political environment in the Caucasian region, where the democratization of
local governance and economic structures was difficult. The political landscape became ripe for the local elites, the old Soviet *nomenklatura*, and the emerging business entrepreneurs to divide existing economic assets and political influence among themselves. With a lack of institutional basis and a clear long-term vision for the territory, Abkhazia became, what Posen (1993) would call, a ‘captured state.’

According to statistics from 2007, non-Abkhaz groups in Abkhazia were under-represented at all levels of political life. At the national level, of the 35 members in the Abkhazian legislature, three members were Armenian, three were Russian, and two were Georgian. Representation in the executive branch was also weighted disproportionately towards ethnic Abkhaz. Among the 19 government members, one was Russian and one Armenian; there were no Georgians or other non-Abkhaz at this level. Even though such ethnic-based political domination of Abkhazia was not conducive for long-lasting peace, this format of governance was symbiotic with Moscow’s own political identity and its role perception in the South Caucasian Region.

### 3.3 Russian-Abkhazian Relations: Drawing on Moscow’s Conservative Political Identity

Russia’s perceived role in the Caucasian region formed on the basis of three early post-Soviet political discourses, which in turn guided its actions in Abkhazia. The liberal identity, which formed in Moscow and other large cities in the late 1980s and 1990s, focused on relationship-building with the U.S and Western European states. It emphasized liberal markets, democratization, rejection of the Orthodox Church, and dismissal of ethnonationalism. In comparison, the conservative identity defined Russia as an ethno-nationalistic state and rejected democracy as an inherent virtue. Moreover, it saw the military as a key component of Russia’s power and identity. Advocates of this discourse
saw liberals as unpatriotic or a ‘fifth column’ as well as the separation of Moscow from other independent post-Soviet republics as unnatural. Finally, the centrist discourse recognized Russia as a unique entity, encapsulating both elements of European social democracy and a recognition of the merits of its Soviet heritage such as ‘friendship of the peoples’. Centrists rejected ethnonationalism, instead focusing on the ‘Rossianin’ (or resident-citizen of Russia) identity, which captured the country’s multiethnic characteristics.

These identities were also embodied in different organs of government in Moscow. Russia's liberal identity was potent in the early years of the post-Soviet era. It was perceived to be an heir to Gorbachev's liberal economic and social ideals. Most notably, these ideas were housed in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and government departments focused on economic affairs. On the other hand, intelligence and security organs (or ‘power agencies’), as well as the General Staff of the Russian Armed Forces emphasized conservative and, to a limited extent, centrist values. During the Yeltsin era, the foundation of Russia’s perceived role applicable to Abkhazia was based on a hybrid of these identities.

This hybridity of identities in Russia’s foreign policy was well represented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrei Kozyrev’s interview on 24 November 1993. Kozyrev argued that there ‘[were] two [potential] extreme routes to take with regard to Russia’s influence over the ‘near abroad’: to hold on (conservative) - this is hopeless, or, pull out completely from this traditional influence (liberal) this would be an unwarranted loss . . . however [we would be] wrong to ignore the role of the United Nations (UN) and
Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE); it would be extreme to hand over this sphere to these organizations.\textsuperscript{36}

With the ascendance of Vladimir Putin and his allies from the security agencies to power, conservative values began to dominate Russia’s perception of the Southern Caucasus region.\textsuperscript{37} These conservative values, in turn, marginalized the ‘pluralistic Abkhazia narrative’ and became symbiotic with the ‘Abkhaz nationhood narrative’ as well as the politics of fear therein. A key reason is that the pluralistic narrative was perceived to be synonymous with a liberal-democratic political orientation. Based on the conservative identity, this was especially adversarial to Russia’s perceived regional protector role in the Southern Caucasus as it would have inevitably drawn the region toward an alliance with NATO, and the West more generally. Support for the ethno-nationalistic narrative in Abkhazia guaranteed a difficult relationship between the territory and Georgia, as well as the international community, thereby preserving Sukhumi’s ‘protectorate’ status with Moscow.

The figure below summarizes the relationship between Russia’s own political identity, its perceived role in Abkhazia, and Moscow’s preferred local narrative.

\textbf{Figure 3.1.} Relationship Between Russia’s Political Identity, Perceived Role in Abkhazia, and Preferred Local Discourse.
Table 3.1. Identity Narratives in Abkhazia and their Treatment by Russia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative Details</th>
<th>Pluralistic Abkhazia</th>
<th>The Abkhaz Nation and the Politics of Fear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Minority-majority politics.</td>
<td>• Majoritarian; dominant ethnic group politics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Democratic institutional development.</td>
<td>• Politics of fear in relation to Georgia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Endeavor toward peaceful co-existence of Abkhaz, Georgian, Russian, Armenian, and other ethnic groups within Abkhazia.</td>
<td>• Limited democratic institutional development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Political inclusion.</td>
<td>• Domination of the Abkhaz ethnic group in social, economic, and political spheres.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Akin to Soviet-era ‘friendship of the peoples’ narrative.</td>
<td>• Political exclusion of non-Abkhazian ethnic minorities from leadership and influential positions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia’s Position Toward Narrative</td>
<td>Accepted by Russia in the 1990s; corresponded to relatively high influence of liberal discourse in Russian politics; rejected in 2000s with dominant conservatism.</td>
<td>Relatively less accepted in the 1990s than pluralistic narrative. Increasingly accepted in the 2000s; corresponded to Russia’s increasingly influential conservative discourse in relation to the South Caucasus.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4 Consequential Period 1: March 6-7, 2003 Sochi Summit

The purpose of the following sections is to qualitatively assess the components of Russia’s role and power in Abkhazia around the 2003 Sochi Summit. Subsequently, this information contributes to the quantitative assessment of the role-power gap, which represents Moscow’s system-level incentive to apply coercion in Abkhazia.

The 6-7 March 2003 Sochi Summit brought together Russia’s Vladimir Putin, Georgia’s President Eduard Shevardnadze, and Abkhazia’s Prime Minister Gennady Gagulia to discuss conflict resolution between Tbilisi and Sukhumi. Moreover, the parties discussed the restoration of railway service from Sochi to Tbilisi, through Abkhazia. The Summit positioned the Kremlin as the defender of Sukhumi’s interests, as Abkhazia’s leader Gennady Gagulia was invited only to be a part of the Summit. When Gagulia was
not a party at the negotiations table, Russia represented Sukhumi’s interests. For example, the terms of the return of Georgian refugees to Abkhazia following the 1992 War were largely negotiated by Russia.\textsuperscript{38}

The qualitative analysis below sheds light on several key components of Russia’s perceived role and power in Abkhazia. First, Russia de-facto supported the Abkhaz ethno-nationalistic discourse as means of preventing reunification with Georgia and in turn, the decline of Russia’s protector role in Abkhazia. Second, such support for ethno-nationalism by Russia was not unique to Abkhazia. A similar narrative provided the foundation for Russia’s support for South Ossetia’s independence from Georgia. Third, Russia’s narrative in Abkhazia around the Sochi Summit focused on two main components: a) non-resumption of conflict between Sukhumi and Tbilisi,\textsuperscript{39} and b) continued stationing of Russian peacekeeping as the main guarantors of regional security. Fourth, the degree of local acceptance of Russia’s protector role in Abkhazia remained low as there were no role-affirming events supporting Moscow’s protector role either prior, during, or following the Sochi Summit; moreover, local legislative efforts to recognize Russia’s role were counterbalanced by significant levels of distrust for Moscow by local elites and society. Finally, Russia’s protector role was guaranteed, at least in the short run, by the binding Moscow Agreement of 14 May 1994 on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces. This agreement was also reinforced by a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) agreement and United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 934. Moreover, by 2003 several inter-regional agreements were made between Abkhazia and Russia’s Oblasts to de-facto recognize Abkhazia’s status as a legal international entity. Table 3.2 below summarizes the discussion and findings in the subsequent four sections.
3.4.1 Russia’s Articulation of Role and Protector Responsibility in Abkhazia

Leading up to the 2003 Sochi Summit, Vladimir Putin claimed to support the territorial integrity of Georgia on several occasions.\textsuperscript{40} Alluding to the Chechen Wars of the 1990s and early 2000s, which undermined Russia’s own territorial integrity, he noted that Moscow supported its neighbors’ territorial integrity.\textsuperscript{41} By implication, this meant recognition of Abkhazia as part of Georgia. However, such statements contradicted Russia’s efforts to maintain its monopoly on regional security and support for the de-facto independence of Sukhumi from Tbilisi.

In practice, Russia’s policies on Abkhazia aligned with the views of nationalistic politicians like Vladimir Zhirinovsky and Dmitry Rogozin, as opposed to Putin’s rhetoric of reconciliation. Between 2002 and 2003, Russia’s nationalistic political forces made the “protection of Abkhazia” one of their main political concerns.\textsuperscript{42} For example, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, a nationalist leader of the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR), was an enthusiastic supporter of Abkhazia’s independence from Tbilisi with the help of Russia’s peacekeepers. His political efforts also coincided with Dmitry Rogozin of the Rodina party. Both leaders supported Sukhumi’s ethno-nationalistic discourse, claiming the Abkhaz people have the right to their homeland.\textsuperscript{43} This rhetoric, however, was not unique to Abkhazia as the same politicians supported Ossetian secession in Tskhinvali, with Moscow’s help.\textsuperscript{44}

Few remember that the terms of return of Georgian refugees to the Gali region in Abkhazia, and prevention of full integration of Georgians, was negotiated by Russia at the Sochi Summit of 2003.\textsuperscript{45} Russia had no interest in supporting a pluralistic society in Abkhazia, which could risk the region’s entrance into the international community and in
turn, a dilution of Russia’s protector role in the Southern Caucasus. CIS (or Russian) peacekeepers oversaw the return of ethnic Georgians to Abkhazia. However, suspicions regarding Russia’s true intentions with its peacekeepers were already raised a decade prior. For example, throughout 1995 Russian peacekeeping forces did little to prevent the massacre of hundreds of Georgians in Eastern Abkhazia.

The Boden Initiative of 2002 demonstrated the disparity between Putin’s rhetoric and Russia’s de-facto policies regarding Abkhazia. In July-August 2002, the Boden Initiative, meant to facilitate Abkhazia’s autonomy within a unified Georgia, placed Russia at the centre of negotiations. The failure of this initiative, often attributed to a conscious effort by Russia to derail the process, solidified Sukhumi’s position as a protectorate of Moscow and maintained Abkhazia separate from Tbilisi. Even though the maintenance of its monopoly on security in Abkhazia was important for Moscow, the level of role-affirming social mobilization in Abkhazia to support this role remained low.

3.4.2 Degree of Local Acceptance of Russia’s Role as Protector

Abkhazians saw Russia as a guarantor of their security, but at the same time had significant distrust towards Moscow’s intentions. Prior to the Sochi Summit of 2003, the Abkhaz parliament appealed to Russia to guarantee its sovereignty. Moreover, in December 2001, the Foreign Minister of Abkhazia, Sergei Shamba, insisted that the mandate of Russia’s peacekeepers was renewed. However, this was not necessarily out of a genuine yearning for a stronger relationship with Moscow, but for instrumental reasons if Sukhumi was to keep its independence from Tbilisi. By the end of 2002, over 50,000 Abkhazian residents applied for Russian passports in the Krasnodar region in Southern Russia. This application for Russian citizenship was promoted by the Sukhumi
government until 2005.\textsuperscript{53} The timing of this initiative also corresponded with the emergence of Russia’s policy priority to protect ‘compatriots’ in the post-Soviet region.\textsuperscript{54} In the event of a war, Russia’s involvement as a protector would thus be legitimized. However, this acceptance of Russia’s role was largely overshadowed by deep distrust and the level of genuine role-affirming social mobilization in support of Russia’s protect role remained low.

Preceding the 2003 Sochi Summit, the government in Sukhumi was highly distrusting of Moscow based on three main grievances.\textsuperscript{55} First, during the War between Tbilisi and separatists in Abkhazia in 1992-1993, Russian weapons were supplied to Georgian forces.\textsuperscript{56} Second, Russia was party to a CIS blockade of Abkhazia to defeat the separatists throughout the 1990s.\textsuperscript{57} Finally, Russia did not recognize the results of the October 1999 independence referendum in Abkhazia.\textsuperscript{58} These events demonstrated Moscow’s unreliability as a protector or ally and facilitated a low level of acceptance of Russia’s role by the Abkhazian government and its people until the outbreak of hostilities in August 2008.

\textbf{3.4.3 Formalization of Russia’s Perceived Role in Relation to Abkhazia}

The level of entrenchment (or formalization) of Russia’s protector role in Abkhazia was based on three key state- and regional-level agreements. The first guarantee of Russia’s role as protector of Abkhazia, preceding the Sochi Summit of 2003, was the Agreement on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces, also known as the 1994 Moscow Agreement. Second, starting in the early 2000s, Abkhazia gained extensive regional-level ties with Russia’s Oblasts (or sub-national jurisdictions). These ties reinforced Russia’s role as an economic sponsor of Sukhumi’s ethno-nationalistic secessionist government.
The 14 May 1994 Moscow Agreement became the main legal tool that legitimized Russia’s perceived role as protector of Abkhazia. The bilateral agreement between Georgia and Abkhazia, mediated by CSCE and Russia, allowed the presence of a Russian peacekeeping force in Abkhazia. The agreement was supported by the UNSC Resolution 934. Moreover, Russia’s presence in Abkhazia was also reinforced by a CIS resolution.\(^{59}\) As a consequence, the stationing of the CIS (or Russian) peacekeepers was to be extended on a semi-annual basis.\(^{60}\)

However, in October 2002, Georgia’s parliament and President Eduard Shevardnadze attempted to remove Russia’s peacekeeping force. Tbilisi claimed that Russia was unhelpful in decisively resolving the conflict as it was partial to the Abkhazian side.\(^{61}\) In response, the UN General Secretary highlighted that the replacement of Russian troops would be unlikely as fewer troops were available for such purposes globally following the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks.\(^{62}\) Russia’s perceived protector role in Abkhazia, however, was not only operationalized through an agreement on military presence in the region.

Local-level economic linkages between Russia and Abkhazia meant that Russia could undertake the role of economic sponsor-protector in the territory. In the 1990s, Russia’s economic involvement in Abkhazia was limited to private individuals who conducted small-scale cross-border trade and smuggling of essential goods, such as food and clothing.\(^{63}\) However, in the early 2000s, in spite of CIS trade restrictions with Abkhazia, Russia’s economic activity with the territory increased substantially. For example, the Rostov Oblast in Russia reached an agreement with Abkhazia to use its ship repair facilities.\(^{64}\)
In July 2003, Georgia’s President Eduard Shevardnadze wrote an open letter to Russia’s President Vladimir Putin highlighting Russia’s violations of the 1996 CIS agreement. The CIS deal forbade unilateral economic and political contacts with Abkhazia without consultation and approval from Georgia’s government. In response, the Kremlin issued a statement claiming that the sanctions against Abkhazia were counterproductive to conflict resolution. In turn, this defection from the original CIS agreement made Russia the dominant trading partner for Abkhazia. However, the 2003 Sochi Summit highlighted that the level of acceptance and formalization of Russia’s protector role in Abkhazia were substantially the consequence of Moscow’s persuasion, of Active, measures deployed around key events.

### 3.4.4 Russia’s Persuasion Measures around the 2003 Sochi Summit

Going into the negotiations at the 2003 Sochi Summit, the parties were clear that Russia was partial to the Abkhaz separatists. Russia’s persuasion measures leading up to the Summit enabled Moscow to sway Georgia’s position in its favor and in turn, also agree to outcomes favorable to Sukhumi. The ability to influence Georgia at the negotiations in favor of Sukhumi also improved trust between Moscow and Abkhazia, whose leaders mostly distrusted the Kremlin. In advancing Sukhumi’s interests at the negotiations table, Russia was hoping to 1) showcase Moscow as a reliable partner to Sukhumi and thereby, facilitate the acceptance of Moscow’s protector role by Abkhazia, as well as 2) further cement and legitimize its formal protector role, which was previously attained through the 1994 Moscow Agreement involving Georgia.

Moscow’s persuasion measures leading up to the Sochi Summit of 2003 were focused on Georgia’s reliance on Russia’s energy supplies. Throughout the 1990s and early
2000s, disruption in natural resources supplies to Georgia coincided with elections and key bilateral negotiations involving Russia.\(^7^0\) In August 2002, Russian gas company Itera was able to gain a controlling stake of Tbilgaz, Georgia’s main gas distributor.\(^7^1\) With such significant influence, Moscow’s persuasion operations became well-synchronized with negotiation sessions. For example, on 3 March 2003, three days before the Sochi Summit, Itera cut energy supplies to Georgia.\(^7^2\) Natural resources supplies remained compromised for the duration of the Summit and full restoration corresponded with a conclusion of an agreement between the parties.\(^7^3\) However, the use of such persuasion measures by Russia, to bolster its regional power, was not an isolated occasion. Rather, as shown in the next consequential period, they became a pattern in Russia’s behaviour toward Georgia.

3.5 Consequential Period 2: 22 - 28 July 2006 Kodori Gorge Conflict

The purpose of the following four sections is to qualitatively assess the components of Russia’s role and power in Abkhazia ahead of the 2006 Kodori Gorge Conflict. Subsequently, this information contributes to the quantitative assessment of the role-power gap, which constitutes Moscow’s system-level incentive to apply coercion.

In July 2006, Emzar Kvitsiani, a warlord with a stronghold in the Abkhazian Kodori Gorge, began to defy his Georgian superiors when they tried to disarm his militia. On 25 July 2008, Georgia sent a group of armed police and a military unit to force the militia’s disarmament. Even though Kvitsiani was instrumental in Georgia’s resistance against Abkhaz separatists in the 1990s, his forces proved to be useful in keeping Tbilisi’s influence out of Abkhazia. The Abkhazian military supported Kvitsiani’s soldiers with munitions, while Russia supported the effort through the information space and provision of food supplies.\(^7^4\)
The qualitative analysis below sheds light on several key components of Russia’s perceived role and power in Abkhazia. First, leading up to the 2006 Kodori Gorge Conflict, Russia supported the ethno-nationalistic discourse as means of preventing reunification with Georgia and in turn, the decline of its protector role in Abkhazia. Second, Moscow’s support for Abkhazia’s nationalism was not unique; it was akin to Russia’s backing of Ossetian separatism in Tskhinvali. Third, Russia’s narrative in Abkhazia around the 2006 Kodori Gorge Crisis focused on two main components: a) fear of potential Georgian incursion, and b) continued stationing of Russian peacekeeping as the main guarantors of regional security. Fourth, the degree of local acceptance of Russia’s protector role in Abkhazia remained low as there were few role-affirming events supporting Russia’s perceived role; moreover, just as in the case around the 2003 Sochi Summit, local legislative efforts to recognize Russia’s role were counterbalanced by deep-rooted distrust for Moscow. Finally, Russia’s protector role continued to be guaranteed by the binding Moscow Agreement of 14 May 1994 on a Ceasefire and Separation of Forces, which was confirmed by UNSC Resolution 934. Moreover, the inter-regional ties between Abkhazia and Russian Oblasts (or subnational jurisdictions) persisted through this period. Table 3.2 below summarizes the discussion and findings in the subsequent sections.

3.5.1 Russia’s Articulation of Role and Protector Responsibility in Abkhazia

Prior to the July 2006 Kodori Gorge Conflict, as in the case of the previously-discussed 2003 Sochi Summit, President Vladimir Putin’s rhetoric contradicted Moscow’s de-facto policy on Abkhazia. In practice, Russia supported Abkhaz's national self-determination over a pluralistic Abkhazia, which would likely slip away from Moscow’s control if the territory adhered to this identity narrative.
Preceding the July 2006 Kodori Gorge Conflict, Russia’s position supported the ethno-nationalistic narrative, which provided the normative basis for Abkhazian self-determination. However, this position was not unique to Abkhazia as it was also applicable to South Ossetia. Deputy of the State Duma and Vice-chair of the Committee on CIS Affairs and Compatriots Relations Konstantin Zatulin was instrumental in the formulation of Moscow’s policy toward Abkhazia. In a May 2006 interview, Zatulin noted that Russia must not “procrastinate in supporting Abkhaz self-determination.”76 “It was Russia’s responsibility to protect the Abkhaz people from Tbilisi.”77 Later in the interview, the Deputy noted that it was unlikely for Georgian refugees in Abkhazia to participate in any referendum for self-determination as Tbilisi would probably block their participation.78 He did not provide details on how such an operation by Tbilisi would take place. However, any lack of participation from ethnic Georgians, he noted, should not stop a referendum from taking place to secure the freedom of the Abkhaz people.79 Zatulin further legitimized an Abkhaz national referendum, without Georgian participation, claiming that Sukhumi had the right to independence as much as Montenegro several days prior, on 21 May 2006. This message was echoed by Russia’s President.

On 5 April 2006, three months prior to the Kodori Gorge Conflict, Vladimir Putin met with Presidents Sergei Bagapsh of Abkhazia and Eduard Kokoity from South Ossetia. During the meeting, Russia’s President provided security guarantees to the two territories.80 Moreover, he claimed that the Russian peacekeepers were the key instrument for the maintenance of peace in the region – as mandated by the CIS agreement and UNSC Resolution 934.81 Moscow also encouraged Georgia’s President Saakashvili to meet separately with the Abkhazian and Ossetian leaders to discuss a peace process in the days
prior to the trilateral meeting involving Russia. Moscow envisioned itself as a peace broker between the parties, but Saakashvili refused to meet with the two secessionist leaders. Even though Moscow continued to envision itself as the protector of Abkhazia, the local level of acceptance of Russia’s perceived role remained low.

3.5.2 Degree of Local Acceptance of Russia’s Role in Abkhazia.

The degree of local acceptance of Russia’s perceived role as protector was low in Abkhazia. There were several indicators to determine the low level of acceptance. First, formal resolutions by the Government of Abkhazia or decrees by the President of Abkhazia, recognizing Russia’s role as protector, only began to emerge after the 2008 War with Georgia. Based on the archive of the Government of Abkhazia, there were no such role-affirming resolutions in 2006. Second, there were only small-scale events supporting Russia’s role as protector in 2006. Those were mostly confined to few people, who marched on the streets on Sukhumi holding signs with pictures of Abkhaz fighters and Russian peacekeepers. Finally, following the 2004 elections in the territory, trust for Moscow significantly declined as local elites and the population perceived that Moscow was unduly manipulating local elections, thereby preventing the genuine expression of local free will. However, even with such low support for Moscow’s role, international legally binding agreements guaranteed Russia’s presence in the region.

3.5.3 Degree of Formality of Russia’s Role in Abkhazia

The legal basis for Russia’s role as protector in Abkhazia, preceding the Kodori Gorge conflict, remained the same throughout the early 2000s. As in the case of the previously-examined consequential event (or short period), the 14 May 1994 Moscow Agreement was the key legal document that legitimimized Russia’s perceived role as protector of Abkhazia.
The Agreement was supported by the UNSC Resolution 934 and the CIS agreement on the deployment of (Russian) peacekeepers in Abkhazia. The Agreement had to be renewed on a semi-annual basis, with Georgia’s approval. However, even after the Kodori Gorge fighting ended, when it was clear that Russia was partial to the secessionist fighters. In turn, Moscow was to remain the main security provider for Abkhazia, as allowed by the UN-mediated multilateral dialogue with Abkhazian, Georgian, and Russian officials.

3.5.4 Russia’s Measures in Support of Abkhazia Around the 2006 Kodori Gorge Conflict

The purpose of Russia’s support for the separatists in the Kodori Gorge following the escalation of tensions with Georgia was to 1) keep Georgian forces out of Abkhazia, thereby 2) help maintain Sukhumi’s independence from Tbilisi, and 3) defend Moscow’s monopoly on regional security.

On 24 July 2006, Georgian police and military units began an armed assault on the separatists in the Kodori Gorge. Deputy Commander-in-Chief of Russia’s Ground Forces Valery Yevnevich said that the operation of the Georgian troops was launched in violation of the Collective Peacekeeping Forces located in Abkhazia. Moreover, even before the onset of violence in Kodori, Russian peacekeepers delivered supplies to the separatists once they switched allegiance away from Tbilisi.

In sum, the foregoing discussion shows that the characteristics of Russia’s perceived protector role in Abkhazia remained constant relative to the previously-examined period around the 2003 Sochi Summit. Moscow envisioned itself as the sole security provider for the South Caucasian Region and its support for the nationalist government in Sukhumi was perceived as an effective means to operationalize this role. To this end, Moscow’s peacekeepers, which were legitimized by the various international agreements, were
instrumental in keeping Georgian security forces out of Abkhazia. This reliance on Russian forces to maintain the de-facto independence of Sukhumi from Tbilisi continued into the pre-crisis onset period examined in the next four sections.

3.6 Consequential Period 3: Months Preceding the 1 August 2008 Crisis Onset

The purpose of the following sections is to qualitatively assess the components of Russia’s role and power in Abkhazia preceding the crisis onset on 1 August 2008. Subsequently, this information contributes to the quantitative assessment of the role-power gap, which constitutes Moscow’s system-level incentive to apply coercive gray zone tools and tactics in the region.

Prior to crisis onset, Russia’s perceived role and power in Abkhazia could be characterized based on several components. First, Moscow’s narrative was highly focused on Abkhazia’s right for national independence, as a function of the ‘othering’ of Georgia. Second, there was a moderate geographic focus as Moscow’s narrative was also applicable to South Ossetia. Third, Russia was focused on the politics of fear in relation to Georgia and the Russian peacekeepers as security providers. Fourth, there was a low role-affirming social mobilization in Abkhazia in support of Russia’s perceived protector role. Finally, Russia’s role continued to be operationalized through the 1994 Moscow Agreement, the CIS agreements to station Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia, and the UNSC Resolution. Table 3.2 below summarizes the qualitative data associated with Russia’s perceived role and power discussed in the following four sections.

In July 2008, two concurrent exercises took place, led by Russia and the U.S, which in turn contributed to an escalation of tensions between Abkhazia and Georgia. The U.S-led exercise, Immediate Response 2008, incorporated over 1,600 Georgian military and
national guard members. The purpose of the exercise was to entrench U.S and NATO regional presence as well as expand Georgia’s capacity to fight and thereby, dilute Russia’s monopoly on regional security. To counter these efforts, Russia led a simultaneous military exercise, Caucasus Frontier 2008, with one of its key stated goals to train its military if assistance was required for its peacekeepers in Abkhazia.

3.6.1 Russia’s Articulation of Role and Protector Responsibility in Abkhazia

In the months preceding the onset of the 1 August 2008 crisis, Russia focused its attention on the issue of Abkhaz independence and Moscow’s role therein. Moreover, Kremlin and Russian State Duma statements between April and July 2008 demonstrated that Russia’s CIS-mandated peacekeepers were perceived to be its most important asset guaranteeing its role as the sole security provider for Abkhazia. However, the same statements also refer to Russia’s similar security guarantor role in South Ossetia.

For example, on 21 April 2008, the Russian State Duma asked President Vladimir Putin to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Duma Deputies argued that such a recognition of sovereignty could help Moscow carry out its protector role in the event of a conflict with Tbilisi. In response, instead of addressing the question of sovereignty, Vladimir Putin instructed his Government to develop plans on delivering economic and security assistance to the territory. However, to carry out these aid plans to Sukhumi, a perceived external enemy was necessary.

To this end, Russia focused on the narrative of imminent Georgian aggression against Abkhazia, which corresponded with the Abkhaz ethno-nationalistic government’s greatest fear – or political tool to maintain power. In July 2008, Russia’s representatives at the UNSC, and on Russian state-owned media channels, warned about a possible attack.
They pointing to several occasions of Georgian Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) scouting Abkhazian territory. Russia’s escalation of threat perception, however, began much earlier with official statements by the Foreign Ministry of Russia (MID). The series of statements began on 29 April 2008 with the note “Some Facts about the Characteristics of Tbilisi’s Politics.” The statement concluded that Tbilisi was in an “active phase of planning attacks” on both Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

However, the unwillingness of Russia’s leadership to officially recognize the sovereignty of Abkhazia (and South Ossetia) leading up to the crisis onset in August 2008 was necessary to maintain the legitimacy of its peacekeepers. On 23 April 2008, the Chair of the Committee of the Federation Council (Russia’s upper chamber) for CIS Affairs Vadim Gustov, emphasized that the peacekeepers are Russia’s most important asset in the South Caucasus for the maintenance of peace. Gustov noted that recognition of Abkhazia (or South Ossetia) could make “Russia’s peacekeepers stationed in these territories immediately invalid as the agreement was contingent upon the territory remaining a [de-jure] part of Georgia.”

Subsequently, the number of CIS-mandated Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia rose to over 2,500 soldiers, just short of the 3,000 people established by the CIS agreement. Following the increase in troops numbers, on 18 July 2008, Georgia detained five Russian peacekeepers on the border with Abkhazia. Tbilisi claimed their armored personnel carrier collided with the car of a Georgian woman. In response, Moscow claimed through the MID and state-owned media that it was a provocation to de-legitimize its peacekeeping efforts in the region. Even though the above Russian actions indicated a high level of conviction in its protector role, local perception in Abkhazia did not correspond.
3.6.2 Degree of Local Acceptance of Russia’s Protector Role

The degree of acceptance of Russia’s role in Abkhazia remained low leading up to the 1 August 2008 crisis onset. This can be determined by several indicators associated with role-affirming social mobilization in the territory. First, at the time, there was no official legislation to recognize Moscow’s role as protector. There were several occasions between May and July 2008 when the President of Abkhazia declared that Russia could “come to Abkhazia’s help in the event of a war.”\textsuperscript{102} However, these remarks corresponded with the occasional escalation of political tensions with Tbilisi. In the absence of such escalations, no such rhetoric emerged from Sukhumi.\textsuperscript{103}

Second, there was no significant social mobilization to affirm Moscow’s role as protector among the local population. There were several small demonstrations in support of Moscow’s CIS-sanctioned peacekeeping operation in Abkhazia throughout the summer of 2008.\textsuperscript{104} At the same time, resentment of Russia by the local population in Abkhazia was evident due to Moscow’s massive influence. There was a widespread perception that Russia has sought to manipulate electoral processes in Sukhumi, as it was allegedly done prior in 2004.\textsuperscript{105} Moreover, elites and many in the public perceived that Russia attempted to exploit the region for its political gains. Moreover, a significant portion of the population openly accused the Kremlin of trying to annex Abkhaz lands against popular will.\textsuperscript{106} Even though the local population in Abkhazia generally distrusted Moscow, the Kremlin was able to maintain its role leading up to the crisis onset in August 2008 through the 1994 Moscow Agreement.
3.6.3 Degree of Formality of Russia’s Role in Abkhazia

Leading up to the crisis onset on 1 August 2008, the same two international agreements entrenched Russia’s role as protector of Abkhazia. The 14 May 1994 Moscow Agreement remained as the main legal basis which legitimized Russia’s perceived role as protector of Abkhazia. The agreement allowed up to 3,000 Russian (or CIS) peacekeepers to be stationed in the territory. Moreover, this regional agreement continued to be supported by UNSC Resolution 934. However, Russia’s formal role as protector of Abkhazia was not recognized through a direct, long-term, agreement with Sukhumi until 30 April 2009 through the “Law on the ratification of the Agreement between the Republic of Abkhazia and the Russian Federation on joint efforts to protect the state border of the Republic of Abkhazia.” However, the ability of Moscow to maintain some acceptance of its role among local Abkhazians, as well as the legal legitimacy of its peacekeeping force, was a function of persuasion measures.

3.6.4 Russia’s Active Measures Leading up to Crisis Onset

Starting in late April 2008, Russia began a targeted media information campaign, which emphasized a potential Georgian invasion of Abkhazia. This information campaign was complementary to the secessionist government’s ethnically-charged messaging, which framed the ‘Georgian enemy’ as the main adversary. The key message in Russia’s state-owned media was that in the event of a war, Sukhumi could be left alone to Tbilisi’s assault, unless Russia stepped in as its protector. This instigation of fear was intended to facilitate Sukhumi’s submission to Moscow’s protection. Moreover, this information campaign was supplemented by several provocations by Moscow to affirm its storyline.
The first of these provocations was on 16 May, 2008, when the Russian Security Service (FSB) announced that it had intercepted a Chechen spy working for Georgia.\textsuperscript{110} The alleged agent was identified as Ramzan Turkoshvili, a Russian citizen of Georgian origin who was recruited by Georgian’s intelligence services to aggravate the political situation in the Caucasus.\textsuperscript{111} However, no proof of the allegations was provided by Russia’s intelligence agency. The only statement was that the spy tried to help rebels in Chechnya and the South Caucasus region. Russian media covered the story with dozens of reports on key state-owned channels and online platforms in Russia and Abkhazia.\textsuperscript{112} However, this operation was only the first among a series of similar activities.

On 17 June 2008, Georgia detained four Russian peacekeepers and a military truck on the de-facto border between Georgia and Abkhazia. The Georgian Interior Ministry stated that the peacekeepers violated the 1992 Moscow and CIS agreements and by implication, the UNSC resolution. Georgian officials showed evidence that they were transporting 35 boxes of ammunition, anti-tank mines, and guided missiles.\textsuperscript{113} These weapons were forbidden by the agreements.\textsuperscript{114} However Russian media presented the event as a provocation by Tbilisi.\textsuperscript{115}

In turn, these campaigns and provocations appeared to be successful at compelling the government in Sukhumi to support Russia’s protector role through its CIS-mandated peacekeeping force. For example, on 30 June 2008, the Abkhaz secessionist government announced that the Georgian ‘special services’ were responsible for terrorism in Abkhazia.\textsuperscript{116} On 8 July 2008, the U.S State Department called for the presence of international police forces on the Abkhazian-Georgian border to replace the CIS-mandated
Russian peacekeepers. However, Abkhazian leader Sergei Bagapsh rejected the U.S proposal.\textsuperscript{117}

**Table 3.2. Summary of Trends in Russia’s Perceived Role and Relative Power Across the Consequential Events (or Short Periods) in Abkhazia (and Georgia)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role and Power Component</th>
<th>6-7 March 2003 Sochi Summit</th>
<th>22 - 28 July 2006 Kodori Gorge Conflict</th>
<th>Months Preceding the August 2008 Crisis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Specificity</td>
<td>Very high role focus with single dominant narrative applicable to Abkhazia. Support for the right of national self-determination of the Abkhaz was symbiotic with Russia’s own ‘conservative’ ideology which became dominant among Russia’s ruling elites; this narrative elevated the importance of Russia as the sole security provider in the South Caucasian region.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Scope</td>
<td>Moderate-high geographic focus. Russia’s support for the ethno-nationalistic secessionist movement and/or government largely overlapped with its support for South Ossetia.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Clarity</td>
<td>Moderate role detail. Two main components of Russia’s perceived role: a) non-resumption of conflict between Sukhumi and Tbilisi, and b) continued stationing of Russian peacekeeping as the main guarantors of regional security.</td>
<td>Moderate role detail. Two main components: a) politics of fear vis-à-vis Georgia, which fit the Abkhaz government’s ethno-nationalistic ideological foundation, and b) stationing of CIS-mandated and UNSC supported, Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Acceptance</td>
<td>The degree of acceptance of Russia’s role through role-affirming social mobilization was low. There was some acceptance by local political elites of reliance on Russia for protection; there were minor events in support of Russian peacekeepers. However, Russia’s interference in local political processes created resentment by the local population as well as elites.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Formality</td>
<td>Russia’s protector role was entrenched by the 14 May 1994 Moscow Agreement; CIS-mandated Russian peacekeepers were stationed in Abkhazia; UNSC Resolution 934 supported UN monitoring of the situation and the presence of Russian peacekeepers.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.7 Secessionism in Abkhazia

The purpose of the following section is to qualitatively evaluate the domestic-level opportunity (IV2) for Russia’s application of coercion in Abkhazia based on the type of local ethnic-based movement present prior to the crisis onset in August 2008. When considering intervention in an ethnic-based dispute, the type of movement with which an intervener would have to engage represents a significant component of the overall intervention costs.

Chazan and Horowitz (1990), Heraclides (1990), and Carment (1993) show that intervention in irredentist movements is costlier relative to secessionism. This is based on the depth of commitment and its duration, as well as international costs because the endeavor requires the direct undermining of the territorial integrity of another state. Since support for irredentism ultimately requires the addition of a territory and its people to the ‘mother’ country, it becomes more difficult to assist the movement covertly. Committed and protracted support inherent to intervention in irredentist conflict increases the chances of exposure of aid operations and thus, the intervener paying international costs. On the other hand, involvement in secessionism is a lower-cost endeavor compared to irredentism considering that states can easily withdraw support and the depth of commitment is generally lower. The implication is that with the presence of a secessionist movement, a third-party intervener can engage in high-intensity operations, the cost of which can, at least partially, be counterbalanced by the lower cost of support for secession.

Abkhazia’s road to independence began in the early Soviet period. The region’s secessionism fits the stricto sensu definition of the phenomenon because the local ethnic-based movement made several declarations of independence throughout its history in hope
of forming a political entity separate from Russia or Georgia. In 1921, following the invasion of the Southern Caucasus by the Red Army, a Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic was formed. During the same year, Abkhazia was legally transformed into the independent Socialist Soviet Republic of Abkhazia. However, in 1931 Abkhazia lost its independence and was incorporated by the Soviet Government in Moscow as an autonomous region of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. This autonomy was only a formality, and the loss of independence was resented by the Abkhaz population. In fact, Abkhazians protested for independence on four occasions throughout the Soviet period: in 1957, 1967, 1978, and 1989. Moreover, Abkhaz actions toward independence were not confined to peaceful demonstrations.

The 1992-1993 War in Abkhazia was one of the most significant efforts by Abkhaz secessionist forces to gain independence from Tbilisi. In June 1992, Abkhaz militias seized control of Georgian government buildings in Sukhumi and raised the Abkhaz national flag. In response, Georgia’s armed units attacked Sukhumi on 14 August 1992 and the secessionist government fled to Gudauta in North-Eastern Abkhazia.

By December 1992, Georgian government forces recaptured large parts of Abkhazia, including Sukhumi. However, from July to September 1993, Abkhaz secessionists backed by Russia conducted a counter-offensive on Sukhumi, once again capturing the city on 26 September 1993, and pushing back Georgian forces. This battle also established the contemporary (de-facto) Abkhazia-Georgia border. This campaign and re-capturing of Sukhumi by Abkhaz militias led to a mass forced emigration of ethnic Georgians from Abkhazia. This was identified by various states and international organizations as ethnic cleansing.
In the post-Soviet era, Abkhazians which have been forced to rely on Moscow for physical and economic security sought cooperative relations with Russia without being fully integrated with it. However, Moscow’s relationship with Sukhumi has often been subjected to political discord. Russia has, either in rhetoric or in practice, recognized Abkhazia’s right to independence from Tbilisi. However, this support corresponded with continuous pressure to keep Sukhumi within its sphere of political, economic, and military influence.

This dynamic created resentment and friction between the Kremlin and the secessionist leadership in Sukhumi. Moreover, this protracted friction established a perception among the local population that Russia was attempting to exploit them for political gains. Even with such pushback by many Abkhazians, the ethnic-based secessionist movement created permissive conditions for Moscow’s application of coercion in the territory. These coercive actions in Abkhazia following crisis onset are examined in the following four sections.

3.8 Russia’s Coercion in Abkhazia Following Crisis Onset

The purpose of the following section is to assess Russia’s specific combination of coercive tools and tactics applied, in support of Abkhazia’s secessionist government, following the crisis onset on 1 August 2008. This is the dependent variable (DV) of the IOI Model and constitutes the last component necessary for the hoop test to test hypothesis (A) as well as the Model’s validity in application to Russia’s foreign policy choices. The purpose of Russia’s operations in Abkhazia was not only to stave off Tbilisi’s incursions but also entrench Moscow as the sole security guarantor for Sukhumi. Table 3.3 below
provides a summary of Russia’s application of coercive gray zone tools and tactics against Georgia in support of Abkhazia.

As I will show in the following sections, Russia used high-intensity coercive gray zone tools and tactics in Abkhazia (and Georgia) in the form of conventional military operations. However, Russia’s kinetic actions in Abkhazia were reliant on a much larger effort involving cyber and media tools and tactics as ‘shaping operations,’ before kinetic engagement. As noted in Chapter 2, such primary reliance on non-kinetic tools and tactics is a hallmark of gray zone conflict.

3.8.1 Military Operation in Abkhazia

Even though Russia’s military operations began in South Ossetia as early as 8 August 2008, Moscow’s actions in support of Abkhazia were launched some days later. On the morning of 8 August, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin condemned Georgia’s government for "aggressive actions" in Abkhazia and that Tbilisi’s actions could compel countermeasures by Moscow. In turn, Russia acted on this warning.

The first confrontation between Russian and Georgian forces involving Abkhazia took place between Russia’s Black Sea Fleet and Georgia’s Navy on 10 August 2008. Twelve Russian navy vessels sailed from Sevastopol to Abkhazia on 9 August 2008. Russia’s Defence Ministry declared that on 10 August Georgian naval vessels breached its declared security zone around the ships, after which the Black Sea Fleet vessels engaged the alleged violators. Moreover, a Defence Ministry spokesperson claimed that Georgia’s ships attempted to attack Russia’s vessels twice before countermeasures were taken. As a consequence of the battle, one Georgian boat was sunk by a Russian
warship. However, this encounter only marked the beginning of a larger application of coercion by Moscow in support of Abkhazia.

Russia’s military personnel and equipment moved into Western Georgia from Abkhazia on 11 August 2008. Russian troops captured police buildings in Zugdidi, a city on the Georgian side, adjacent to the disputed Abkhazian border. On the same day, Russian troops captured a Georgian military base in Senaki. Following the capturing of these strategic locations, Russia demanded that Georgia’s military be disarmed or it could face continued military action.

Moscow’s operations throughout Georgia appeared to be unhindered by major resistance from Tbilisi. However, these operations depended on large-scale cyber and media campaigns, which were deployed ahead of the kinetic operations. They created disorganization and demoralization in Georgia’s military and civilian government structures.

3.8.2 Cyber operation(s)

A goal of Russia’s cyber operations in Georgia was to disrupt the coordination of Georgia’s military and disable effective communication between central organs of government in Tbilisi and the population. These operations could be characterized as denial of service (DDoS). The hacking operations, which began on 19 July 2008 disabled most websites operated by Georgia’s government by 10 August 2008. The completion of the cyber operations corresponded with the beginning of Russia’s kinetic operations in Abkhazia. By August 11, Georgia’s government was largely unable to communicate with either military or civilian organs of government as well as the local population using the internet.
3.8.3 Media and information operations

In tandem with its (DDoS) operations, Moscow used media campaigns to promote Georgia’s military actions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as genocide. This was done to delegitimizing Georgia’s President Mikhail Saakashvili. According to Russian media, Georgia’s alleged ‘genocide’ against the minority populations of Abkhazia and South Ossetia resulted in approximately 2,000 deaths. However, these claims were later proven to be false.

The impact of such media operations on local morale in Georgia remained ambiguous as Tbilisi blocked most Russian-language media channels by 9 August 2008. However, these media campaigns also targeted public opinion in Abkhazia, where Russian channels dominated the information space, and these stories of alleged genocide positioned Moscow as the saviour of the Abkhaz nation.

Table 3.3 below summarizes the key facts associated with Russia’s high-intensity coercion in Abkhazia following crisis onset on 1 August 2008. Figure 3.2 below identifies Russia’s intensity of coercion (DV) relative to other cases examined in this research.
Table 3.3. Summary of Russia’s Coercion in Abkhazia (and Georgia) Following Crisis Onset

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intensity of coercion</th>
<th>Intervention Format</th>
<th>Example(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High Intensity</td>
<td>Conventional/Open</td>
<td>• Direct military between Russian and Georgian Navies off the coast of Abkhazia on August 10, 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Military Operations</td>
<td>• Russia opened the Abkhazian front on August 11, 2008; Russian forces attacked government buildings in Zugdidi and a Georgian military base in Senaki.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cyber operations</td>
<td>• Denial of service (DDoS) operations against Georgia’s government websites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Disabled effective communication among government organs as well as the ability to communicate with the civilian population and security structures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media and</td>
<td>• Attempt to discredit Georgia’s President Saakashvili.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>information</td>
<td>• Russian media focused on the narrative that Georgia was committing genocide against ethnic minorities in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>operations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3.2. Intensity of Coercion Chosen by Russia (DV) for Abkhazia Relative to Other Cases post-Crisis Onset

3.9 Results and Analysis

Based on the qualitative evidence gathered in this chapter, Russia’s high intensity of coercion in Abkhazia indeed appears to be a function of the large role-power gap and the presence of a local secessionist movement. As a consequence, this supports the validity of the IOI Model. The purpose of the following section is to 1) analyze the trends in Russia’s perceived role and power based on the qualitative data, 2) quantify the
components of perceived role and power, and 3) assess whether the following hypothesis is confirmed or rejected: *hypothesis (A) if role exceeds power by a large margin, and the local movement is secessionist, Russia will utilize high intensity of coercion.* This relationship between the independent and dependent variables is represented in Figure 3.4, box 1 below.

The empirical data gathered through the application of the IOI Model to the Abkhazia case shows how the cost-benefit calculation from Moscow’s perspective corresponds to Russia’s de-facto intensity of coercion in the region following crisis onset on 1 August 2008. This chapter concludes that Moscow had both of the necessary conditions, the system-level *incentive* (IV) and domestic-level *opportunity* (IV), to employ a high intensity of coercion (DV) in Abkhazia following crisis onsets. However, to demonstrate the causal relationship, both independent variables must be operationalized and evaluated.

A practical approach to assess the degree of Russia’s system-level *incentive* to apply coercion is through the quantification of the gathered qualitative data for all consequential events (or short periods). The coding of the role and power components across the three consequential periods, as highlighted in Table 3.4 below, yields this gap. This is the first part of the *hoop test.* Moreover, this exercise enables the assessment of Russia’s anticipated decline in perceived role following crisis onset relative to Russia’s de-facto power in Abkhazia.

Across all three consequential events (or short periods), Russia supported Abkhazia’s ethno-nationalistic narrative and the secessionist government in Sukhumi. Moscow’s perceived protector role in the South Caucasian region, and the willingness to
employ the local ethnic-based narrative as a vehicle to operationalize this role, was in line with the dominant ‘conservative’ ideology in the Kremlin. The pluralistic identity narrative in Abkhazia, which entailed support for the return of Georgian refugees and their integration, was largely ignored as it would entail the ‘internationalization’ of Abkhazia and likely removal of Moscow’s monopolistic position as a security provider. Based on the Coding Table in Appendix A, this focus on a single narrative is reflected in a score of 5 for all examined consequential events (or short periods) in Table 3.4 below.

However, such support for secessionism in Abkhazia was also part of Russia’s policy to aid ethnic-based secessionism in Tskhinvali, South Ossetia. The foregoing discussion demonstrates that Russia articulated its policy priorities in Abkhazia, often in tandem with references for South Ossetia. Thus, based on the Coding Table in Appendix A, Russia’s focus on two sub-jurisdictions within a given state, in this case, Georgia, is reflected in the score of 3 for all the periods examined in Table 3.4 below.

Regarding role clarity, Moscow focused on two challenge areas in each consequential event (or short period). Preceding the 6-7 March 2003 Sochi Summit, Moscow focused on peace maintenance between Georgia and Abkhazia. Even though Russia was de-facto supportive of Abkhaz national sovereignty, the official narrative from the Kremlin focused on the maintenance of Abkhazia as a part of Georgia. This position was meant to demonstrate consistency with similar positions such as Kosovo remaining a part of Serbia and more importantly, Chechnya remaining a part of Russia. Official recognition of Abkhazia as a sovereign nation, or the use of a ‘double-standard,’ would have likely undermined the legitimacy and credibility of Russia’s position regarding all of the above secessionist territories. Moreover, the legitimacy of Russia’s peacekeeping
operations is dependent on Abkhazia remaining a (de-jure) part of Georgia. Thus, to operationalize its role as protector, the second priority in Russia’s view was support for its CIS- and UNSC-mandated peacekeepers.

In the subsequent consequential periods, the 2006 Kodori Gorge Conflict and months preceding the 1 August 2008 crisis, Russia focused on the dissemination of the ‘politics of fear’ in relation to Georgia as well as support for its peacekeeping force. In fact, these two components were symbiotic because the latter was presented as the remedy against potential aggression from Georgia. Moreover, the dissemination of the ‘politics of fear’ was complementary to the ethno-nationalistic ideology of the Sukhumi government, which employed the ‘othering’ of Georgia as a key platform for the maintenance of local power. However, the high emphasis on an external enemy like Georgia was also the consequence of Russia’s own anxiety regarding Tbilisi’s enhanced relations with the U.S and NATO alliance after the Rose Revolution of 2004. This focus on two main role components was coded with a score of 2 for all the periods examined, based on the Coding Table in Appendix A. Even though Russia was determined to maintain its role as the sole security provider in the South Caucasian region, the level of local acceptance of Moscow’s perceived role did not correspond.148

The degree of local acceptance of Russia’s protector narrative was consistently low across all three examined consequential events (or short periods). As noted in the foregoing chapter, there were minor social events associated with Russia’s peacekeeping efforts in Abkhazia, demonstrating a minimal degree of social mobilization in support of Moscow’s perceived protector role. Moreover, any formal recognition of Russia’s role as protector of
Abkhazia only appeared in local legislative documents following the end of the conflict with Georgia at the end of August 2008.

The low level of acceptance can largely be attributed to a perception among the local population and elites that Moscow was overstepping its ‘acceptable’ involvement in Abkhazia. Local elites and members of the public resented Russia’s alleged manipulation of local politics. Moreover, Moscow was perceived as an unreliable partner due to its support for the CIS blockade of the region, thereby preventing Abkhazia’s secession from Tbilisi in the 1990s. Concurrently, many remembered that Russian weapons trickled to Georgian forces during the 1992-1993 conflict, thereby enhancing Tbilisi’s capacity to wage war against Sukhumi. Thus, based on these criteria, the low level of acceptance is reflected in the consistent score of 1 across all examined periods, as per the Coding Table in Appendix A. Even though the level of local acceptance prior to crisis onset negatively affected Russia’s power in the region, the Kremlin was able to maintain some power in Abkhazia through treaty agreements.

The degree of formalization of Russia’s role remained moderate to high through all the examined consequential events (or short periods). Georgia, Russia, and by implication Abkhazia, were highly committed to Moscow’s protection of the territory as a consequence of international legally binding treaties. The combination of the 1994 Moscow Agreement, the CIS agreement, and UNSC resolution 934 guaranteed the continuation of Russia’s peacekeeping operation in Abkhazia. However, the validity of Russia’s mission was premised on the renewal of the documents by both Russia and Georgia on a semi-annual basis. Based on the Coding Table in Appendix A, this consistently moderate-high level of
commitment to Russia’s protector role by all parties is reflected in a score of 3 in Table 3.4 below for all periods examined,

In sum, based on the quantification of the qualitative data gathered in this chapter, the gap between Russia’s role and power components is large, constituting 10 points across all consequential events (or short periods). This role-power gap is noted in Table 3.4 and visualized in Figure 3.3 below, based on the power cycle theory.

As explained in Chapter 2, the degrees of local acceptance of, and commitment to, Russia’s protector role through international treaties are the two components that matter for the assessment of Moscow’s power following crisis onset. After 1 August 2008, competing security providers such as Georgia and NATO became highly active in the Southern Caucasian region. In turn, the introduction of these competitors, and their ‘pro-western’ security narratives in the Southern Caucasian Region, established an unacceptable risk of protector role decline for Moscow.

On one hand, Russia’s perceived role decline provided a high system-level incentive to apply coercion and preserve its perceived role. However, the lower cost associated with intervention in secessionism, relative to irredentism, established sufficient conditions for Moscow to employ high-intensity gray zone coercion in support of Abkhazia.

The deep-rooted secessionist movement in Sukhumi established relatively low-cost permissive conditions for Russia’s application of coercion in Abkhazia. The qualitative data demonstrates that the secessionist movement in Abkhazia substantially formed as a resistance to Tbilisi and to create an independent Abkhaz nation. As noted in the foregoing discussion, Abkhaz calls for independence were similarly suppressed by the Soviet and the
independent Tbilisi government over decades. In turn, such political friction between Sukhumi and Tbilisi created a permissive environment for Russia to escalate its action from persuasion or Active Measures to high-intensity coercion following crisis onset on 1 August 2008.

Russia’s high-intensity coercion exploited the pre-existing social fracturing to entrench its protector role in Abkhazia. A key benefit of intervention in secessionism is the ability of third parties to withdraw their support at will. The evidence in section 3.8 shows the variability of efforts, and the ease of increasing or withdrawing support, for Russia across the three consequential events and following crisis onset. This reflects the low level of commitment possible when supporting the secessionist movement, as identified by Chazan and Horowitz (1990). For example, Russia’s flexibility, or low level of commitment toward Abkhazia could be observed in Moscow’s reluctance to recognize Abkhazia as a sovereign nation, but at the same time provide some economic support for Sukhumi through illicit trade. Moreover, the local political resentments of Moscow, as a function of high reliance on Russia for economic and political support, helped the Kremlin keep Sukhumi at an ‘arm’s length’ when necessary.

The onset of the crisis on 1 August 2008 ushered in potent narratives which were incongruent with Moscow’s vision. The new narratives, introduced by Georgia and backed by its NATO partners, emphasized the necessity for Abkhazia to integrate with Tbilisi and the removal of Russian peacekeepers from the territory. In practice, Georgia’s government expected it would enjoy political and military backing from Western powers, to remove Russia’s peacekeepers in Abkhazia. However, this never happened.
In its application of coercion (DV) in Abkhazia following crisis onset in August 2008, Moscow wanted to prevent a decline in its perceived protector role. First, Russia’s operations were meant to defend its peacekeeping forces, which were guaranteed by the CIS agreements and legitimized by the UNSC. Moreover, Russia argued that Georgia’s aggression maintained the need for its peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia. By framing Georgia as the aggressive side, the Kremlin was trying to demonstrate the necessity of its peacekeeping mission and promote the continuation of the 1994 Moscow and CIS agreements. Figure 3.5 below provides a comprehensive summary of the sequential decision-making by Russia to employ coercion following crisis onset, as a function of the system-level incentive and domestic-level opportunity.

Table 3.4. Quantitative Assessment of Incentive for Intervention in Abkhazia; Role Power Gap (IV)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Specificity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Role focus; quantity of narratives.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Scope</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Geographic focus.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Clarity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Role detail through specific challenge areas.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Acceptance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Role-affirming social mobilization.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Formality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cross-border commitments.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap Between Relative Power and Role Scores</td>
<td>14 - 4 = 10</td>
<td>14 - 4 = 10</td>
<td>14 - 4 = 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Role-Power Gap</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The scores in this table are based on the Coding Table in Appendix A; all scores for role specificity, scope, clarity, acceptance, and formality are of 5.
**Figure 3.3.** Russia’s Role-Power Gap (IV) in Abkhazia Across Three Consequential Events (or Short Periods)

**Figure 3.4.** Relative Intensity of Coercion as a function of Role-Power Gap and Type of Ethnic Movement in Abkhazia (Georgia)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role and Power Gap IV <em>(Incentive)</em></th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Large</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Movement Type IV (Opportunity)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irredentism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odesa (3) No Coercion (DV)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crimea (2) High-Medium Intensity Of Coercion (DV)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secessivism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kharkiv (4) Low Intensity Of Coercion (DV)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abkhazia (1) High Intensity Of Coercion (DV)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Figure 3.5.** Sequence of Russia’s Decision-making in Application of Coercion in Abkhazia Following Crisis Onset

1. **Crisis Onset**
   1 August, 2008
   Reveals the gap between perceived role and power.
   Threatens the reduction of Russia’s role in Abkhazia due to competition with rival actors.

2. **Russia’s Perceived role overextends power in Abkhazia**

3. **Necessary Condition (IV) #1**
   High Strategic-level Incentive for Coercion in Abkhazia
   Large gap between perceived role and relative power.

4. **Necessary Condition (IV) #2**
   High Domestic-level Opportunity for Coercion in Abkhazia
   Relatively lower cost of application of coercion involving a secessionist movement.

5. **Sufficient conditions were met for high-intensity coercion.**
   Russia employed coercive measures including military intervention, DDoS cyber operations and targeted media operations.

### 3.10 Conclusion and Policy Implications

The foregoing analysis sheds light on the harmful impact of protracted repression of ethnic-based secessionist movements on regional peace and security. Similar phenomena can be observed in other locations in Eastern Ukraine, Odesa, and Crimea, where a central government attempted to force the integration of national minorities into the increasingly nationalizing state. These will be examined in subsequent chapters.

A key finding in the above chapter is that Moscow’s foreign policy considerations to apply coercion are similar when supporting its kin as well as national minorities unrelated to the dominant ethnic group in Russia. However, this is likely a consequence of both groups being perceived as ‘compatriots’ by the Kremlin. In Abkhazia, Moscow’s protector role was part of a larger effort by Russia to preserve its perceived role as the sole security provider for the South Caucasian Region. Support for ethnic Abkhaz’s self-
determination and the maintenance of Tbilisi’s forces out of the territory meant to achieve this end. Moreover, Abkhazians fit Russia’s broader legal definition of ‘compatriots,’ thus support for their cause to secede from Tbilisi was perceived by the Kremlin as a legitimate endeavour.¹⁵³

Based on the above discussion, it is apparent that Russia’s considerations to apply coercion across international borders were a function of both the system-level incentive and domestic-level opportunity. As in comparable cases across Ukraine, this observation sheds light on various opportunities for conflict resolution involving Russia. On one hand, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to weaken Russia’s perceived protector role over its traditional sphere of influence. As shown in the Abkhazia case, Moscow’s perceived protector role appeared to harden with increased competition from alternative security providers such as NATO in the South Caucasian region. Looking ahead, in places where Moscow strongly perceives itself as the sole security provider, a significant challenge from NATO is likely to cause a reaction from Russia.

On the other hand, tangible steps can be taken to manage Russia’s gray zone conflict activities by focusing on its domestic-level opportunity to apply coercion across international borders. Ethnic-based movements provide permissive conditions for intervention; moreover, applicants of coercion may only pay a moderate cost in their support for secessionism due to flexibility of commitment and shallow depth of involvement. We observed this with Russia’s hybrid policy of supporting unity with Georgia while providing de-facto support to Sukhumi’s ethnically-dominated government. Considering these factors, policymakers ought to focus on concrete measures to assure
minority rights are protected in law and practice, and that self-determination movements do not turn into political ‘pressure cookers’ ripe for external exploitation.
The term ‘compatriots,’ and the requirement for their protection, appeared in Russian Federal Law of May 24, 1999 No. 99-FZ, “On the state policy of the Russian Federation in Relation to Compatriots Abroad.” Article 1. According to the law “compatriots include persons and their descendants, who live outside the territory of the Russian Federation and relevant as a rule to the peoples historically living on its territory, as well as the ones made their free choice in favor of spiritual, cultural and legal connection with the Russian people whose relatives in a direct upline previously resided in the territory of the Russian Federation. These include: 1) persons of the nationality of the Soviet Union living in the states that were part of it gained the citizenship of these states or became stateless persons and 2) natives (immigrants) from the Russian state, the Russian republic, the RSFSR, the USSR and the Russian Federation had the appropriate nationality and became citizens of a foreign state or stateless persons.


The FPC re-frames NATO as a direct geopolitical threat; second, it highlights the need for increased interaction and political and economic integration vis-à-vis post-Soviet neighbors; finally, it identifies a need to increase international activity in defense of geopolitical interest and promotion of a multipolar world order. Foreign Policy Concept documents from 2008, 2013, and 2016 echo these messages. For 2000 Foreign Policy Concept, see https://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm; For 2008 Foreign Policy Concept, see http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/786; For 2013 Foreign Policy Concept, see:


https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-new-cold-war-hots-up-ji5dihtrjkm.


Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., 306-307
14 Clogg 319,
15 Ibid., 320.
16 Clogg, 307-308
17 Ibid., 308
18 Ibid., 311.
20 Clogg, 311.
21 Ibid,
22 Ibid., 308.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid., 308-309.
25 Derluguian, 220.
26 Ibid.
28 Clogg, 314.
30 Ibid., 234.
31 Ibid., 234-237.
33 Hopf, 235.
35 Ibid.
36 Nezavisimaia Gazeta, 24 November 1993
39 Ibid., 231
40 Laure Delcour and Kataryna Wolczuk, "Spoiler or Facilitator of Democratization?: Russia's role in Georgia and Ukraine." Democratization 22, no. 3 (2015): 460.
41 Coppieters and Legvold, 231.
42 Ibid., 252.


Coppieters and Legvold, 241


Coppieters and Legvold, 240.

Ibid., 207.

Ibid., 207-208.


Coppieters and Legvold., 224-226.

Ibid.


Coppieters and Legvold., 224-226.

See Human Rights Watch, Georgia/Abkhazia: Violations of the Laws of War and Russia’s Role in the Conflict, 1 March 1995, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a8274.html


See “Georgia/Abkhazia (1990-present),” Political Science, University of Central Georgia, https://uca.edu/politicalscience/dadm-project/europerrussiacentral-asia-region/georgiaabkhazia-1990-present/

MacFarlane, 511.

Coppieters and Legvold, 235

Ibid., 234.


Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid. 241.

Add citation about distrust for Moscow by Abkhaz leaders.


Ibid.

Ibid., 228.

Ibid.
http://www.self.gutenberg.org/articles/eng/2006_Kodori_crisis?View=embedded' and
75 "Vladimir Putin Calls on Abkhazia and South Ossetia to Build a Common State with
Georgia. The Parties Must Restore Mutual Trust, Putin Said [Владимир Путин
призывает Абхазию и Южную Осетию строить общее государство с Грузией.
Стороны должны вернуть взаимное доверие, заявил Путин]." Эхо Москвы. January
76 "Zatulin: The Referendum on the Independence of Montenegro Creates a Pretext for
Holding Such Referendums in the Unrecognized States [Затулин: Референдум о
независимости Черногории создает повод для проведения подобных референдумов
в непризнанных государствах]." Regnum. May 24, 2006.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 "Putin Met with De Facto Leaders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia [Путин встретился
с де-факто лидерами Абхазии и Южной Осетии]." Civil.ge. April 6, 2005.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Based on the archive of the Government of Abkhazia, the earliest legal framework to
recognize Russia’s role as protector in the territory was the 17 September 2008 “Law on
the Ratification of the Treaty On Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between
the Republic of Abkhazia and the Russian Federation." Later, the Law was supplemented
by other cooperation aspects such military-technical cooperation, for example, through
the “Law on Ratification of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of
Abkhazia and the Government of the Russian Federation on Military-Technical
Cooperation.” The 2008 Law was supplemented with further cooperation with Russia in
November 2014 through the “Law on the ratification of the Treaty between the Republic
of Abkhazia and the Russian Federation on Alliance and Strategic Partnership. See
“Decrees and Order of the President of Abkhazia,”
http://presidentofabkhazia.org/doc/mezhdunarodnye-dogovory.php
84 Ibid.
85 Iskra Kirova, "Public Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution: Russia, Georgia and the EU
http://www.rferl.org/content/a_russian_land_grab_in_abkhazia/3542144.html
87 Russia’s formal role as protector of Abkhazia was recognized through an agreement
with Sukhumi on 17 September 2008 “Law on the Ratification of the Treaty On
Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between the Republic of Abkhazia and
the Russian Federation." Cross-border ties were later supplemented through the 30 April
2009 “Law on the ratification of the Agreement between the Republic of Abkhazia and
the Russian Federation on joint efforts to protect the state border of the Republic of
90 See Cohen and Hamilton.
94 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
102 Minaev, 19-23.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid. 23-24.
106 Ibid.
114 Ibid.


117 Ibid.


119 Ibid.

120 Alexis Heraclides (1990), 341-346.


122 Ibid., 60-61.

123 Ibid., 60.


125 Ibid.


129 Ibid, 308.


132 Ibid.


134 Ibid.

135 Ibid.


137 Ibid.

138 Ibid.


See "Georgia's Cyber Left Hook."


For example, local elites believed Russia was manipulating their local election results. See Whitmore “A Russian Land Grab in Abkhazia?” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. http://www.rferl.org/content/a_russian_land_grab_in_abkhazia/3542144.html


The broad definition of Russian ‘compatriot’ appeared in Russian Federal Law of May 24, 1999 No. 99-FZ, “On the state policy of the Russian Federation in relation to compatriots abroad.” Article 1. According to the law “compatriots include persons and their descendants, who live outside the territory of the Russian Federation and relevant as a rule to the peoples historically living on its territory, as well as the ones made their free choice in favor of spiritual, cultural and legal connection with the Russian people whose relatives in a direct upline previously resided in the territory of the Russian Federation. These include: 1) persons of the nationality of the Soviet Union living in the states that were part of it gained the citizenship of these states or became stateless persons and 2) natives (immigrants) from the Russian state, the Russian republic, the RSFSR, the USSR and the Russian Federation had the appropriate nationality and became citizens of a foreign state or stateless persons


Abkhazians fit the definition of ‘compatriots’ the guideline of “persons of the nationality of the Soviet Union living in the states that were part of it gained the citizenship of these states or became stateless persons” from Russian Federal Law of May
Chapter 4 Russia’s Gray Zone Engagement in Crimea: The Cost-Benefit Analysis of Deploying the “Little Green Men”

4.1 Introduction

Russia’s intervention in Crimea formed an expectation for many academics, policymakers, military practitioners, and political pundits that Moscow would use similarly gray zone tools and tactics in other parts of Ukraine following the crisis onset in February 2014. Some argued that a welcoming local political environment would create ripe conditions for intervention.1 Others claimed that Russia’s fear of a shifting balance of power relative to NATO would guide its behavior.2 In practice, such predictions failed to manifest.

Considering these expectations regarding Russia’s behavior were largely based on its actions in Crimea, they also indicate that the reasons for Russia’s use of coercion on the peninsula were not well understood. This chapter addresses the question of why did Russia choose its specific intensity of gray zone tools and tactics in Crimea following the crisis onset in February 2014? Through the application of the Incentive-Opportunity Intervention (IOI) Model, this chapter shows that the type of coercion employed by Russia in Crimea was a function of both system- or domestic-level variables.

In Crimea, Russia envisioned itself as a regional protector of the people and territory. Much of its identity was defined through successful and unsuccessful military campaigns against geopolitical adversaries such as the Ottomans, during the Imperial era, and the Great Patriotic War (or Second World War 1941-1945).3

The chapter also highlights that relative to any of the other cases examined in this research, Russia consistently maintained a high degree of role specificity, a narrow geographic scope, as well as clarity in its articulated narrative in Crimea prior to the
February 2014 crisis onset. However, the local degree of acceptance and the formalization of this perceived role between Crimea and Russia were lower than Moscow’s expectations. This gap between perceived role and power created significant fear in the Kremlin that Russia could be displaced as a regional protector on the peninsula following crisis onset. Thus, Moscow was incentivized to use gray zone tools and tactics as a response to an unacceptable risk of role decline. However as noted above, the system-level incentive is not sufficient to comprehensively explain Russia’s behavior in Crimea.

Irredentism was a major political force in Crimea since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The first wave of pro-Russia nationalism was associated with the 1992 Constitution of Crimea. Moreover, between 1993 and 1995, the pro-Russian bloc was the most powerful political faction in Crimea.  

Local irredentism continued into the twenty-first century but was generally suppressed or ignored by the Kyiv authorities. Often, these efforts involved campaigns of linguistic and cultural Ukrainianization and were directed by the President of Ukraine. The 2005 Orange Revolution contributed to uncertainty regarding the future of the Russian language and Crimean cultural memory within Ukraine. Moreover, the various campaigns to diminish local Crimean linguistic and cultural identities resulted in a political backlash and increased regionalism. In turn, the local irredentist movement established a permissive environment for Russia’s intervention. However, Moscow’s actions were moderated by intervention costs.

Using the IOI Model, this chapter examines Russia’s decisions to use a specific intensity of gray zone tools and tactics in Crimea (DV) as a function of its role-power gap (IV1) and the characteristics of the local ethnic-based movement (IV2). These variables
serve as proxies for system-level and domestic-level components of the cost-benefit analysis, respectively.

This relationship is tested through hypothesis (B): *If role exceeds power by a large margin, and the local movement is irredentist, Russia will utilize high-medium intensity of coercion.* Based on Table 2.3 in Chapter 2, such coercion intensity entails the use of covert military and security operations, alongside other gray zone tools and tactics such as material support for non-state militias, economic pressures, cyber operations, diaspora influence, and information operations.

Using content analysis of peer-reviewed academic research, government reports, speeches, and surveys, this chapter shows that the system-level *incentive* for Russia’s deployment of covert operations in Crimea was a consequence of a large role-power gap and the presence of a deep-rooted irredentist movement. A necessary condition, the system-level *incentive*, was present for Russia. Standalone, this encouraged Moscow to use high-intensity tools and tactics, akin to the case of Georgia in August 2008. However, the large role-power gap was not sufficient to employ a high intensity of coercion, because the local irredentist movement created costly conditions for intervention. However, this high cost of intervention in Crimea was lowered through the use of gray zone tools and tactics.

As noted in Chapter 2, the reason for the examination of the intensity of coercion through the tactics, operations, and tools used, as opposed to outcome-based metrics, such as calculation of battle-related deaths, is a practical one. Understanding why certain tactics are used means that deterrence or appropriate measures can be formed to address them in the future before any violence takes place.
To test the validity of the IOI Model, this chapter employs a *hoop test* analysis to assess whether the two necessary conditions, system-level *incentive*, and domestic-level *opportunity*, yield the anticipated conditions for the use of high-medium intensity of gray zone tools and tactics. To this end, the chapter is divided into several parts to measure the role-power gap (or *incentive*) and the second independent variable - the type of local ethnic-based movement (or *opportunity*). Lastly, the chapter assesses whether the coercion intensity was indeed affected by the system- and domestic-level conditions.

First, the chapter outlines the competing narratives associated with Crimea and the reasons for Russia’s selection of the regionally-centered and ‘heroism’-based narratives, as the basis of its protector role. Subsequent parts of the chapter are used to gather qualitative data for the assessment of the power-role gap – or the *incentive* for intervention component of the IOI Model. Next, the chapter engages in content analysis of peer-reviewed sources, formal political statements, and news outlets to assess the degree of generality, scope, clarity, acceptance, and formality of Russia’s role for the following three consequential events (or short periods): 1) May-June 2006 NATO-Ukraine Seabreeze Exercise, 2) signing of the April 2010 Kharkiv Pact between Russia and Ukraine, and 3) the two months preceding the crisis onset on February 23, 2014, when President Yanukovych fled Kyiv. These consequential events were selected because they represent the top three occasions within the examined period (Jan 2000 to Feb. 2014), the outcome of which Russia needed to control to maintain its role and relative power in Crimea. Thus, Active Measures targeting local acceptance and formalization of its role are also assessed across the three consequential events (or short periods) to determine Russia’s regional power prior to crisis onset.
Subsequently, content analysis of peer-reviewed, speeches, and news sources is employed to examine the last two components of the IOI Model. The characteristics of the ethnic-based movement prior to crisis onset, the second domestic-level independent variable, are assessed as a proxy for the anticipated cost of Russia’s coercion in Crimea. Finally, the last part of the qualitative data section provides the facts associated with Russia’s gray zone tools and tactics applied in Crimea after 21 February 2014.

In the results and analysis section, the chapter converts the qualitative data associated with Russia’s role and power in Crimea into quantitative metrics using the Coding Table in Appendix A. This quantification of the perceived role and power components enables the assessment of the magnitude of the role-power gap and thus, the degree of system-level incentive for the application of the specific intensity of coercive gray zone tools and tactics. Next, the chapter examines the costs imposed on Russia’s application of coercion by the local irredentist movement. In turn, the specific combination of system- and domestic-level variables, and their impact on Russia’s decision-making in Crimea, provides support for the validity of the IOI Model.

The last section of the chapter offers a policy conclusion as well as recommendations for policymakers and conflict management practitioners. However, before assessing the system- and domestic-level incentives for gray zone engagement and implications for conflict management, it is necessary to identify the identity narrative, which became the basis of Russia’s envisioned protector role in Crimea.

4.2 Narratives and Russia’s Role Formation in Crimea

The purpose of the following sections is to identify the three dominant narratives, which emerged throughout Crimean history and became influential on the local political
landscape. The narratives, along with Russia’s perception of them, are summarized in Table 4.1 below. It would be inaccurate to label these narratives as ‘competing’, considering one narrative has decisively dominated Russia’s philosophy in relation to Crimea. The central narrative, linking the peninsula with Moscow, focuses on the region as a key battlefield of various wars fought between the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union against various historical adversaries. This dominant narrative marginalized two other weaker narratives. The Tatar narrative, associated with the Crimean Khanate, is part of the ethno-linguistic memory of the indigenous Crimean Tatar population. Throughout Russian and Soviet history, the storyline was disregarded as marginal due to its perceived incongruence with dominant-group and local Moscow-centric political narratives. Finally, the weakest and the most factually ambiguous is the Ukrainian Crimea narrative, which in the post-Soviet era, was largely tied to the transfer of peninsula to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR); however, this narrative, as in the case of the Tatar, has not gained significant legitimacy and was dismissed by locals as well as Moscow authorities.

4.2.1 Crimea as Russia’s Battlefield

The key component in Russia’s mythology vis-a-vis Crimea is the narrative of the heroic city of Sevastopol. Building on this, the Black Sea Fleet is an integral part of Russia’s historical foundation. Campaigns associated with the Crimean War (1853-1856) and World War Two (1941-1945) have been perceived by the Imperial and Soviet governments as an embodiment of Russia’s military glory.

This narrative formed the foundation of Russia’s self-prescribed role as protector of Crimea in the post-Soviet era. A former commander of the Fleet, Admiral Igor Kasatonov, who left Sevastopol in 1992, stressed in an interview with the Russian
newspaper Literaturnaia Rossiia that Russia in any form cannot be imagined without its
glorious Black Sea fleet. He claimed that to deprive Russia of the Black Sea Fleet and its
naval bases in Crimea would mean setting it back three centuries to the times before Peter
I. Moreover, unlike the other Tatar and Ukrainian myths associated with Crimea, Russia’s
myth is more inclusive. It was not based on ethnic, or even linguistic, boundaries but on
the commonly shared history of battle and suffering associated with a defined geographic
location.

The territorialization of national mythmaking was a common trend among imperial
powers across history, and Russia was no exception. Moreover, local battlefields
historically played an important role in the process of territorialization of such myths, as
they not only had a significant impact on the regional populations but determined the
economic and political fate of empires.

The mythology pertaining to Sevastopol first emerged from the Crimean War
(1853–1856) when the city was blockaded and besieged by the French, British, Ottoman,
and other military forces. Despite the numerous defeats in battle, Russia’s population
began viewing the city as a symbol of heroism and the fighting spirit of the Empire against
aggressive international adversaries. Following the defeat and signing of the Treaty of
Paris of 1856, the city was constructed as a monument to Russia’s Imperial glory.
However, with the onset of the Second World War, Crimean territory, with Sevastopol as
the epicenter, once again emerged as a strategic battleground that reinforced the
inseparability of Crimea from Russia’s history and identity.

The events of the Second World War elevated the status of Sevastopol to a “Hero
City” of the Soviet Union. Following the War, the city adopted an identity as a monument
to both Russian and Soviet heroism, giving birth to a “double myth” - a Czarist and a Soviet one that was unified in post-Soviet Russia.” The German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 enhanced the Soviet glorification campaign, which presented a heroic image of Russia’s Imperial past to motivate the local fighting spirit in Crimea. The Second World War in the Soviet Union and present-day Russia is referenced as the Great Patriotic War, a term echoing Russia’s campaign against Napoleon Bonaparte in 1812. Sevastopol was again besieged from 1941 to 1942, although this time by Nazi Germany, and the defenders of the city displayed heroism in their defense of Sevastopol.

New myths based on the events of the War came into existence, and old ones contributed to their emergence in a significant way. One of them was the myth of Sevastopol, the re-emergence of which was of special significance for the war effort. Sevastopol was again besieged in 1941–42, this time by the Germans, and the defenders of the city again displayed true heroism. The breakup of the Soviet Union has not only meant for Russia the loss of imperial assets, but also the loss of its soul. Even though the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, and the memory of the Czarist era has been confined to history books and museum exhibitions, the mythology of the ‘defender of Crimea and Sevastopol’ continued to live and thrive in the Russian political consciousness. In turn, this ‘heroic battlefield’ storyline marginalized other indigenous narratives.

4.2.2 Tatar Crimea Narrative

Following three and a half centuries of autonomous governance, as part of the Crimean Khanate, the Crimean Tatars population formed its own narrative associated with what they perceive to be their indigenous homeland. The story also develops a corresponding, albeit relatively marginal, the narrative of a pre-Second World War multi-
ethnic Crimea, where the Tatar Language was one of the main regional languages. Even though the narrative incorporates multiethnic elements, it is largely ethnically centered. Thus, it is more exclusive than Russia’s battlefield mythology associated with Crimea. This exclusivity was largely a consequence of the defensive posture Tatars had to adopt upon their return from exile.28

The Tatar deportations by the Soviet regime in May 1944 solidifies the normative ties of the Tatar group(s) to its homeland.29 Upon their return from exile, the Tatars found themselves to be in the minority on the peninsula, which was became dominated by ethnic Russians and Ukrainians. Even though this task was especially difficult during the Soviet era, the Tatar myth was also important to prevent their full assimilation into the new majority group.30

The myth around the “lost homeland” helped the Tatars define ethnic, and cultural, boundaries and therefore differentiate between their ‘ingroup’ and ‘outgroup’. But therein lies the problem with the myth: it is difficult to be part of it if you are not a Crimean Tatar.31 In practice, whether justified or not, the myth had a hostile undertone that often mobilized many opponents from the local Russian (and Ukrainian) population - and especially from the Moscow authorities throughout history.32 Even though the Crimean Tatar narrative did not enjoy widespread support from the local population, the Ukrainian myth experienced even greater challenges.

4.2.3 An Attempt at a Ukrainian Crimea Narrative

Even though ethnic Ukrainians represented some 25 percent of the population during the Soviet era, and over 15 percent following the collapse of the Communist regime, a well-defined Ukrainian myth associated with the peninsula did not crystalize.33 After a
quarter-century of post-Soviet independence, the Ukrainian state or the local Ukrainian population, still had no conception of its own in regard to the peninsula. What can be described as a Ukrainian narrative associated with Crimea is ambiguous and speculative.

A myth crystallization process was initiated as a result of a decree issued on 19 February 1954 by the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Union to transfer the peninsula to the Ukrainian SSR. The decree recognized the “integral character of the economy, the territorial proximity and the close economic and cultural ties between the Crimea Province and the Ukrainian SSR.” Thus, it entrenched a legal-political tie between the territory and the rest of Ukraine.

A new Ukrainian myth could have also crystallized around Crimea’s present cultural and geographic assets. It has been suggested by some Ukrainian intellectuals in the post-Soviet period to shift the peninsula’s image as a central hub of the Black Sea region and focusing on the transformation of the area into a communications center. Furthermore, the elevation of Crimea’s image through such a focus could complement the Ukrainian Crimea identity that emerged as a result of the Soviet-era territorial transfer, because the myth would be inclusive; it would focus on economic assets, without ethnically or linguistically defined boundaries. However, Russia’s treatment of any myth associating Crimea with Ukraine was met with hostility.

For example, in June 2015, the Russian government delegitimized the 1954 transfer of the Crimean Oblast to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. The Russian Prosecutor General’s Office (PGO) published a legal assessment noting that the transfer was in fact out of line with the Constitution of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and the Soviet Union. The PGO noted that the Presidium of the Supreme Council gathered on
19 February 1954 with only 13 of 27 members present at the meeting. Thus, there was no quorum, but the decision was reached unanimously. This decision by the PGO, however, was not a standalone phenomenon. It was the result of a deep-rooted conviction by Russia’s government of its role as the protector of Crimea.

The table below summarizes the three narratives associated with Crimea.

**Table. 4.1** Summary of Narratives Associated with Crimea and Treatment by Russia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Competing Narratives of Crimea</th>
<th>Crimea as Russia’s Battlefield</th>
<th>Ukrainian Crimea</th>
<th>Tatar Crimea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative Details</strong></td>
<td>Siege, fighting, and ‘heroism’ associated with the city of Sevastopol. Focused on war efforts associated with the Crimean Crimean War (1853–1856) and Great Patriotic War (Second World War 1941-1945). Territorialized narrative and not ethno-centric.</td>
<td>Largely unformed. The 1954 transfer of Crimea to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic is the most potent element. Not an ethno-centric narrative.</td>
<td>Lost ‘motherland’ of the Tatar people under the Crimean Khanate (1441–1783). Based on marginalization, and forced deportations, and assimilation of ethnic Tatars. Incorporates a strong ethnic boundary to define the victimized group. Has often been perceived as hostile by the local population and authorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Russia’s Position Toward Narrative</strong></td>
<td>Dominant, decisively accepted, and supported narrative throughout Russian, Soviet and post-Soviet history.</td>
<td>Narrative associating Crimea with independent Ukraine is dismissed.</td>
<td>Marginalized, rejected, or disregarded.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.2.4 Russia’s Post-Soviet Protector Narrative: A Balance of Heroism and Victimhood in Battle**

Even with Crimea’s legal separation from Moscow following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the question of how Russia will continue to exercise its role as protector of the people and territory remained. The stationing of the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea
continued to be a priority for Russia following the collapse of the Soviet Union as the optimal method to operationalize its protector role.\textsuperscript{42} The ongoing military presence in the region played both a formal and symbolic role in sustaining Russian national discourses about Crimea and its innately Russian character in the post-Soviet period.\textsuperscript{43}

To legally cement this role, the Black Sea Fleet Accord was signed in May 1997 in Kyiv.\textsuperscript{44} It permitted Russia to operationalize its self-prescribed role as a protector by leasing space from Ukraine for twenty years.\textsuperscript{45} Moreover, Russia and Ukraine agreed to split the Fleet evenly, but Kyiv agreed to sell a share of its portion to Russia, allowing Moscow to maintain approximately 82 percent of the Fleet.\textsuperscript{46} The Accord also granted Russia the right to keep its main naval base at and gave the right to lease 18,500 hectares of land in Crimea, including important facilities and infrastructure. However, the agreement stipulated that it would share the Sevastopol facilities with Ukraine’s Navy.\textsuperscript{47} Even with the departure of Yeltsin in December 1999, Russia’s political agenda on Crimea remained unchanged, and leading up to the February 2014 crisis onset, Moscow’s upheld its narrative as protector of the local people and territory.

4.3 Consequential Period 1: 2006 NATO-Ukraine ‘Seabreeze Exercises’ and Resistance to Competing Security Providers

The purpose of the following sections is to qualitatively assess the components of Russia’s perceived role and power in Crimea around the 2006 Seabreeze Exercises. Later this information will contribute to the quantitative assessment of the role-power gap, which constitutes Moscow’s system-level \textit{incentive} to apply coercion. As noted by Kuzio (2005), Wilson (2005), and Lane (2008), the Orange Revolution of 2004/2005 was among the most significant destabilizing, and thus consequential political movements, in post-Soviet Ukraine.\textsuperscript{48} On one hand, it inspired the organization of a large portion of the country’s civil
society into a strong movement to reinstate social justice. On the other hand, it resulted in the overturning of election results, enabled the election of the socially conservative and pro-Western leader Viktor Yushchenko, and created resentment among minority populations. Moreover, leaders of the Orange Revolution were also poised to do away with much of the pro-Russia sentiment originating from political adversaries such as Victor Yanukovych. This meant Viktor Yushchenko and his allies would take Active Measures to undermine the narratives associated with Ukraine’s history linking much of the country’s achievement with Russia or Moscow’s role as a security guarantor for Kyiv. The conservative leadership attempted to introduce competing security providers such as NATO into the Ukrainian political-security landscape to dilute Moscow’s historic role. The first decisive step was the incorporation of Ukraine in the Partnership for Peace (PFP) in February 1994. Even though Russia’s Black Sea Fleet was not removed from Crimea due to treaty obligations, such reorientation of Kyiv’s security policy toward NATO directly clashed with Russia’s position as the sole protector of Crimea and Sevastopol. The proposed NATO Seabreeze Exercise of 2006 embodies this clash of interests. Table 4.2 below summarizes the discussion and findings in the subsequent sections.

4.3.1 Russia’s Articulation of Role and Protector Responsibility

Russia’s articulation of its perceived role as a protector and security guarantor for the Crimean Peninsula was based on a combination of campaigns to strengthen its own narrative and undermine opposing positions. Comments made by Russia’s leaders were built on the importance of Crimea, especially the port of Sevastopol, to its national identity as a security guarantor for the region.
The political fighting between Crimean and Kyiv authorities, surrounding the planned 2006 NATO-Ukraine Sea Breeze highlight 1) Russia’s desire to maintain the deep-rooted historic ‘protector’ role in Crimea and 2) the local population’s resistance to the introduction of an alternative regional narrative by the Yushchenko government. In the summer of 2006, the Sea Breeze military exercise was to be hosted in Crimea by Ukraine alongside the U.S and seventeen other participating states. On 27 May 2006, the U.S merchant ship Advantage arrived at the port of Feodosiya with construction material and equipment for use in the Sea Breeze exercise. The cargo was important for the construction of a temporary multinational training base to be built at Starry Krym in Crimea. The U.S began the formal process by hosting an Initial Planning Conference at the Ukrainian Naval Institute in Sevastopol in October 2005. However, Russia’s opposition to the events was swift.

President Vladimir Putin opposed the naval exercise in Crimea declaring that the “Azov–Black Sea basin is in Russia’s zone of strategic interests” and “the Black Sea provides Russia with direct access to the most important global transport routes, including economic ones.” Moreover, representatives of Russia’s Legislature articulated their discontent with the warming of NATO-Ukraine relations. For example, the Chair of the Russian State Duma Committee for Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Affairs and Relations, Andrey Kokoshin, claimed that Ukraine is being dragged into an alliance with NATO and away from its rightful place alongside Russia. The history of the Heroic City of Sevastopol and Black Sea Fleet were invoked. Other representatives of the Duma argued that Ukraine’s relationship with NATO would lead to “many negative consequences
for relations between our fraternal peoples." However, the exercises were also met with opposition from the local Crimean population.

4.3.2 Degree of Local Acceptance of Russia’s Role as Protector

The Feodosiya protests (May to June 2006) were an indicator of the Crimean leadership’s unwillingness to resign to Kyiv’s reorientation toward NATO. Rather, there was an indication of acceptance of Russia’s ‘historically legitimate role as the security guarantor for the peninsula. The pro-Russia movement at the time was led by the local branch of the Party of Regions, the Natalia Vitrenko Bloc, and the Communists who were in the governing coalition in the Verkhovna Rada (Parliament) of Crimea. Their efforts were also supported by three main pro-Russia non-governmental organizations.56

The day after the arrival of the U.S Navy ship Advantage the Feodosiya town council declared the town a “NATO-free area.” Within a week following this declaration, the Parliament of Crimea declared the peninsula a “NATO-free territory.”57 Residents of Feodosiya picketed the port and displaying placards with anti-NATO slogans, while many of the protesters held Pro-Russia posters.58 Citizen barricades prevented the American troops from preparing for the Sea Breeze exercise, in turn forcing them to retreat and the exercise to be abandoned. However, even with such decisive re-orientation toward NATO by the Kyiv authorities, Russia’s participation in Crimea’s security is part of several preceding bilateral treaty obligations.

4.3.3 Degree of Formality of Russia’s Protector Role in Crimea

From Russia’s perspective, its formal role as the protector of Russian ‘compatriots’ was entrenched on the peninsula, albeit temporarily, through several signed treaties. On 28 May 1997, Russia and Ukraine signed three agreements regarding the future of the
Soviet-era Black Sea Fleet. Ukraine also agreed to lease the majority of its facilities in Sevastopol to the Russian Black Sea Fleet until 2017. The terms of the Treaties gave Russia an exponentially larger military footprint, and thus a dominant position over the security of the peninsula.

Under the Partition Treaty, the Soviet Black Sea Fleet at the Sevastopol complex was partitioned between Russia and Ukraine’s Navies, each acquiring 81.7 percent and 18.3 percent, respectively. Aside from Naval Vessels, the Treaty on the Presence on the Territory of Ukraine allowed Russia to maintain up to 25,000 troops, 24 artillery units, 132 armored vehicles, and 22 warplanes in Crimea - a force unmatched by Ukraine’s capabilities. However, the maintenance of the above high level of acceptance and formalization of Russia’s role as the protector of Crimea was not independent of Russia’s conditioning operations.

4.3.4 Russia’s Active Measures Around the NATO-Ukraine Sea Breeze Exercises

The most influential pro-Russia regional organization, funded by the former Mayor of Moscow Luzhkov, was The Russian Community of Crimea (Russkaya Obchina Kryma). With links to Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the organization disseminated Russia’s narrative as a regional protector of Crimea and its people. The second organization, the People’s Front Sevastopol-Crimea-Russia organized rallies in Yevpatoria, demanding that the Crimean leadership holds a referendum on the accession of the peninsula into Russia. Finally, the Moscow House in Sevastopol served as a relatively marginal platform for the dissemination of pro-Moscow attitudes among Crimeans in the early 2000s. Even though such pro-Russia non-governmental organizations (NGOs) played an important role in the persuasion of the local population to
accept the Russian narrative, local educational institutions created the specialists who led the campaigns.

The Moscow State University had a Black Sea Branch, founded by a treaty signed between Russia and Ukraine in 1997, played an important role in the persuasion of the local population to accept Russia’s role as a regional protector in Crimea.\(^{62}\) The main building of the University was protected by the Russian Armed Forces. Teaching at the institution was conducted to a large degree by former Russian military and intelligence officers, who emphasized a pro-Russian narrative in the curriculum and the glory of the tsarist and Soviet history in the region. In 2006, the Black Sea Fleet allocated almost a million USD for local information campaigns in Crimea and much of these resources were channeled to local Crimean NGOs and educational institutions.\(^{63}\) The school of journalism at the University Branch produced specialists who were then employed by local pro-Russia media organizations in Crimea and for work on publications produced by Russia’s Black Sea Fleet.\(^{64}\) Such operations reinforced the Russian protector narrative but also undermined the warming of Ukraine’s political relationship with NATO as well as discredited the emerging competing narrative over Crimea emanating from Kyiv.

According to Ukrainian political and security authorities, the Feodosiya protests were suspected to be the consequence of prolonged ‘soft’ intervention, or through persuasive diplomacy by Russia, which motivated local Crimean elites and co-opted local media organizations. Claims were made by the Ukrainian Defence minister in August 2006, that the protests showed that certain Russian forces were meddling in Ukraine’s internal affairs. The Ukrainian Security Council also believed that Russian agents were
participants in the demonstrations in Feodosiya and elsewhere. Moreover, the Russian media was also accused of shaping the negative perception of NATO by the population.  

However, throughout 2005 and 2006, whether as a result of persuasion by Russia or independent convictions, surveys in Ukraine indicated that a majority of the Ukrainian citizens were opposed to the country’s NATO membership. The opposition to the accession to the Alliance was especially evident in the Eastern part of the country and in Crimea, where Russia’s Black Sea Fleet is stationed.

As a response to the warming of Ukraine’s relationship with NATO, in September 2006 Russian ships conducted a joint exercise with the Turkish navy. This exercise was meant to reassert the two country’s historically rooted leadership role as local security guarantors in the Black Sea region. The joint initiative became known as the Black Sea Harmony. Sergey Ivanov, Russia’s Minister of Defence, noted that Russia and Turkey, the two Black Sea countries possessing modern navies “are [the nations] responsible for security in the Black Sea region.” In practice, Russia’s efforts in the exercise were primarily meant to signal its major role in Crimean security. Even though the Yushchenko administration discredited and undermined Russia’s role and power in Crimea, this agenda was abandoned following the Ukraine Presidential Election of 2010.

4.5. Consequential Period 2: The 2010 Kharkiv Pact and Solidifying Russia’s Protector Role

The purpose of the following section is to qualitatively assess the components of Russia’s role and power in Crimea around the Kharkiv Pact signing. Later this information will contribute to the quantitative assessment of the role-power gap, which constitutes Moscow’s system-level incentive to apply coercion. The results of the Ukrainian Presidential Election in January–February 2010 brought significant changes to Ukrainian
foreign policy – especially its relations with Russia. The leader of the pro-Russian Party of Regions Viktor Yanukovych won the election, having defeated former Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko in the second round. This eliminated pro-Orange Revolution political functionaries from many national leadership positions countrywide and facilitated an opportunity for a détente in the strained Kyiv-Moscow relations. A key event that indicated Kyiv’s re-orientation toward Russia was the signing of the Kharkiv Pact in April 2010. The Pact also served as the anchor for a number of important observations: 1) Russia continued a strong self-identification as the legitimate and unchallenged security provider in Crimea; 2) Russia used economic persuasion in an effort to maintain its regional role and power; and 3) Russia solidification of its role through treaty obligations; 4) there was continuously strong acceptance of Russia’s role by local elites and politicians in Ukraine and Crimea; concurrently, however, there was declining active acceptance of Russia’s regional protector role by the local population in Crimea. The evidence demonstrating these trends is presented in the following subsections. Table 4.2 below summarizes the discussion and findings in the subsequent sections.

4.5.1 Russia’s Articulation of Role and Protector Responsibility

Around the period of the signing of the Kharkiv Pact of 2010, Russia’s government continued to emphasize its role as the rightful protector of Crimea’s population and territory. Moscow’s stated position was characterized by a strong focus on the battle-related glory of Crimea, a strong geographic boundary of its role as a security provider, and the incorporation of several nuances associated with its perceived role. Thus, relative to the previous consequential event (or short period), Russia’s role continued to be defined by a high degree of specificity, narrow geographic scope, and a high degree of clarity.
The Kremlin-funded organization Russkiy Mir provides a window into Moscow’s perceived protector role associated with Crimea. Between March and April 2010, the organization disseminated various stories highlighting the importance of Russia as the protector of Crimea and its people throughout history. For example, Sergei Tsekov, the Chair of the Russian Community of Ukraine, stated that thanks to the Black Sea Fleet of Russia, all of Ukraine’s southern lands (or the Northern Black Sea territory) became part of modern Ukraine. He argued that Crimea was “conquered at the cost of great losses from the Turkish-Ottoman invaders and saved it from a hard struggle with European ‘partners’ who systematically tried to conquer these lands.”

Another example includes a story titled “Compatriots in Crimea celebrated the day of liberation from the Nazis,” which advertises a public demonstration by the Russian community of Crimea held in the village of Chernomorskoye. Russkiy Mir also notes the attendance of the Chair of the Black Sea regional organization (or movement) "Russian Unity" as well as deputy of the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Vitaly Rudakov, who urged to “pay more attention to the patriotic education of young people, who fell upon the flow of distorted information about the Great Patriotic War.”

Even though Russia’s articulated a protector narrative, which highlights collective heroism in battle under the direction of Moscow, the degree of active local acceptance of this role has decreased.

4.5.2 Degree of Local Acceptance of Russia’s Role as Protector

In general, several polls of the local population in Crimea (and Southeast Ukraine) indicated that people in Crimea had a positive response to the Kharkiv Pact, thereby signaling their acceptance of Russia’s perceived role as the security provider for the
peninsula. According to one poll conducted in May 2010, immediately following the signing of the agreement, more than half (55 percent) of the residents of the South-East (including Crimea) have a positive view of the Accords. They have also indicated that the agreements provide reciprocal benefits, both in terms of security and economics for both Russia and Ukraine.\textsuperscript{70}

However, toward the end of early 2011, in the same jurisdictions, surveys indicated that active support for the Kharkiv Pact has declined. At the time, the agreements were considered mutually beneficial mainly by residents of the South-East of Ukraine with 42 percent displaying positive opinions. Another poll confirms this decline stating that by early 2011, in Southeast Ukraine (including Crimea), the agreement for the prolongation of the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea gained 41 percent support, while 38 percent would vote against a similar deal at the time of polling.\textsuperscript{71}

Moreover, the issue of the stationing of the Black Sea Fleet, as well as relations with Russia, were among the least important issues to concern the local population, which exhibited relative apathy to non-economic issues.\textsuperscript{72} Even though the Crimean people did not see the stationing of the Black Sea Fleet, and thus its protector narrative as a top issue, Moscow used local pro-Russia organizations to persuade the local population of this importance.

4.5.3 Degree of Formality of Russia’s Protector Role in Crimea

Following several weeks of negotiations, in April 2010 presidents Yanukovych and Medvedev signed the Kharkiv Pact. A key component of the deal was Russia’s continued military presence in Crimea in exchange for long-term discounts on natural gas for Ukraine. The Kharkiv Pact enabled Moscow to continue exercising and further solidify its
role as a regional protector, unchallenged by alternative security providers like the US and/or NATO. Russia’s Black Sea Fleet was allowed to continue its leasing of facilities and troops stationing arrangements in Sevastopol until the year 2042. At the post-signing press conference, in concordance with his counterpart from Russia, President Yanukovych stated that “the Black Sea Fleet is a guarantor of security for Crimea and for all nations bordering the Black Sea basin.”73

Russia’s largest state-owned gas provider Gazprom granted Ukraine a ten-year, thirty percent discount on gas, bringing down the price by about one-hundred dollars per thousand cubic meters from a rate of just above three hundred. Yanukovych supported the arrangement claiming stated that the gas discount deal gave Ukraine a profit of forty billion dollars over the ten-year period. The Yanukovych government explained that the main reason that compelled him to conclude the agreement was the disastrous situation in which Ukraine found itself as a result of his predecessor's agreements with Russia, signed by Yuliya Tymoshenko in 2009. Yanukovych denounced them as “enslaving” and “deadly for the Ukrainian economy.” However, various analysts have labeled this maneuver by Russia as engagement in ‘pipeline politics’ and claimed that Yanukovych’s statements were not the result of objective considerations, but an indication of his kowtowing to Moscow.74

4.5.4 Russia’s Active Measures Around the 2010 Kharkiv Pact Signing

Various Active Measures, largely aimed at the mobilization of local public support in Ukraine, were deployed to influence the outcome of the negotiation of the Kharkiv Pact, which took place in Moscow several weeks prior to signing. Russia’s public mobilization campaigns were targeted at regions such as Crimea, which represent the main support base of Ukraine’s Yanukovych government and the Party of Regions. Ukraine’s Prime Minister
Mykola Azarov and Energy Minister Yuriy Boyko arrived in Moscow in late March 2010 to negotiate the agreements; their arrival corresponded with the launch of various campaigns.

For example, on 17 March 2010 the organization, along with its ally the Unity Party, organized a rally in Simferopol demanding the creation of a new political, economic and military alliance with Russia. Such rallies were accompanied by media and commemoration campaigns that lasted for months prior to the signing of the Kharkiv Pact. Moreover, the Moscow-backed organization Russian Community of Crimea (Russkaya Obchina Kryma) was instrumental in the ideological support for the Russian protector narrative prior to, as well as after, the signing of the Kharkiv Pact.

4.6 Consequential Period 3: Russia’s Regional Protector Role Before the February Crisis

The purpose of the following sections is to qualitatively assess the components of Russia’s role and power in Crimea in the months preceding the crisis onset in February 2014. Later this information will contribute to the quantitative assessment of the role-power gap, which constitutes Moscow’s system-level incentive to apply coercion. In the months prior to the fleeing of Yanukovych from Kyiv on February 23, 2014, there were several co-existing circumstances that contributed to the Kremlin’s growing anxiety in relation to Crimea: 1) Russia’s leadership clearly articulated the narrative of its role as the protector in Crimea; 2) the role of Russia as the regional protector is reinforced by the Kharkiv Pact; however 3) there is an indicated decline in active acceptance of Russia’s role as a regional protector by the local population in Crimea and a misalignment between the priorities of the local population and Moscow’s ethos. These trends are examined in the subsequence
subsections. Table 4.2 below summarizes the discussion and findings in the subsequent sections.

4.6.1 Russia’s Articulation of Role and Protector Responsibility

Russia’s articulation of its role in Crimea as a regional protector was indicated through statements from Russia’s leadership as well as pro-Russia organizations. In a December 2013 press conference, televised by (Russia Today) RT and other state-run media organizations, President Putin’s comments reflect the positions by Medvedev at the Kharkiv Pact conference with Yanukovych in 2010. Putin presented a strong security dimension to Russia’s relationship with Crimea, using the same language as Medvedev and Yanukovych, that the Black Sea fleet is a guarantor of regional and broader security. Moreover, he confirmed that Russia’s concerns are not only to defend itself against its enemies but that Moscow is concerned for the wellbeing of compatriots on the Crimea peninsula.  

4.6.2 Degree of Local Acceptance of Russia’s Role as Protector

Even though Moscow articulated that security, whether for its ‘compatriots’ or the Black Sea Fleet, was paramount, the Crimean population did not echo the sentiment to the same degree. Many local Crimeans continued to attend events associated with the Black Sea Fleet as well as commemorations of the Great Patriotic War.  According to a USAID poll conducted in Crimea from 16 to 20 May 2013, the priorities of Crimeans were misaligned with those of the various Russian or Moscow-affiliated entities. First, in a survey question, 68 percent of respondents ranked unemployment as the most important issue facing Crimea. In the second place, with 50 percent of respondents, was a concern for the price of growth. Only 12 percent of respondents considered relations with Russia
as a top priority, 4 percent were concerned with Russian language status, and 2 percent with the Black Sea Fleet. However, even with such unfavorable statistics, Moscow-backed organizations continued their information campaigns to elevate the level of importance of the issue within the local population.

4.6.3 Degree of Formality of Russia’s Protector Role in Crimea

Through the treaty obligations outlined in the Kharkiv Pact of 2010, a consistent level of formalization of Russia’s protector role remained until the crisis onset in February 2014. The Pact continued to be the foundation of Russia’s protector role in Crimea, with the Black Sea Fleet constituting its main feature. At the same time, local cross-border cultural ties continued to be reinforced through non-governmental organizations. For example, the Russian Community of Crimea, an organization with links to Kremlin-funded entities such as Rossotrudnichestvo continued to engage in cross-border cultural exchanges, focused on the maintenance of a common memory of the role of Sevastopol as a ‘hero city’ of the Great Patriotic War. However, the maintenance of such a high level of cross-border formalization of Russia’s protector role and the level of acceptance by the local population was not formed independently of various Active Measures during the pre-crisis onset period.

4.6.4 Russia’s Active Measures Leading up to Crisis Onset

Starting in November 2013, Russia-backed organizations in Crimea began an active campaign to resist the anti-Yanukovych factions gaining momentum locally and in Kyiv. They demanded that authorities in Kyiv cease to “stand by while right-wing forces were gaining political legitimacy in the rest of Ukraine.” In December 2013, the Moscow-backed organization Russian Community of Crimea (Russkaya Obchina Kryma), along
with its allied political party Russian Unity, organized a rally against the Euromaidan, calling for the joining of the Customs Union with Russia.\textsuperscript{82} Such activities were accompanied by continuous information dissemination to discredit the Euromaidan and anti-Yanukovych forces and increase Crimea’s political association with Russia.\textsuperscript{83} However, such soft persuasion actions by organizations escalated to aggressive campaigns following the onset of crisis when Yanukovych fled Kyiv.

The table below summarizes the trends in the components constituting Russia’s perceived role and relative power across the three consequential events (or short periods).
Table 4.2. Qualitative Summary of Trends in Russia’s Perceived Role and Relative Power Across the Consequential Events (or Short Periods)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role and Power Components</th>
<th>NATO-Ukraine Seabreeze Exercises May-June 2006</th>
<th>Kharkiv Accord of 2010 Signing</th>
<th>Two months preceding 2014 crisis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Degree of Specificity</strong></td>
<td>High and consistent; Russia’s narrative as a sole security provider to Crimea and its people with no competing narrative(s).</td>
<td></td>
<td>A low level of perceived threat from the Kyiv authorities caused the further decline in acceptance of Russia’s security provider role; low ranking of importance of relations with Russia or Black Sea Fleet stationing among local concerns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Degree of Scope</strong></td>
<td>High and consistent. Russia’s narrative is geographically bespoke to Crimea, with the ‘Hero City’ Sevastopol being the central component of the narrative.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Degree of Clarity</strong></td>
<td>High and consistent; Russia’s narrative incorporates several sub-components including: 1) the Black Sea Fleet, 2) a historic monopoly on security, 3) a ‘heroic’ Sevastopol, and 4) the memory of battles spanning many centuries, 5) an antagonistic NATO.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Degree of Acceptance</strong></td>
<td>High level of acceptance of Russia’s security-provider narrative was reactionary. Perceived high level of threat to Crimean security, language rights and cultural memory from the Kyiv authorities following the Orange Revolution; Local anti-NATO sentiment was high.</td>
<td>Decline in active acceptance and importance relative to previous period as level of perceived physical, cultural and linguistic threat following Yanukovych election in 2010 declined.</td>
<td>The level of formality remained the same relative to the previous period due to the Kharkiv Pact’s continuation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Degree of Formality</strong></td>
<td>moderate level of formalization of Russia’s monopoly on security in Crimea through three agreements reached on 28 May 1997: Russia and Ukraine agreed on facilities leases, division of assets, stationing of troops; Treaty expiration in 2017 and unilateral withdraw allowed.</td>
<td>Formality increased compared to the previous period due to the signing of the Kharkiv Pact: Russia’s Black Sea Fleet was allowed to continue its leasing of facilities and troops stationing arrangement in Sevastopol until the year 2042; unilateral withdraw allowed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Active Measures by Russia Targeting Acceptance and Formality and</strong></td>
<td>Russian Community of Crimea (Russkaya Obchina Kryma) with links to Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs disseminated Russia’s narrative as a regional protector of Crimea and its people; the People’s Front Sevastopol-Crimea-Russia organized rallies in Yevpatoria, demanding that the Crimean leadership holds a referendum on the accession of the peninsula into Russia; Moscow State University had a Black Sea Branch in Crimea which educated pro-Moscow local youth and disseminated anti-NATO sentiments.</td>
<td>During negotiations in Moscow, Unity Party organized a rally in Simferopol demanding the creation of a new political, economic and military alliance with Russia Moscow-backed organization Russian Community of Crimea (Russkaya Obchina Kryma) organized common history/commemoration events calling for unity with Moscow.</td>
<td>Moscow-backed organization Russian Community of Crimea (Russkaya Obchina Kryma), along with its allied political party Russian Unity, organized a rally against the Euromaidan, calling for the joining of the Customs Union with Russia; information dissemination from Russian and pro-Russia media channels.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.7 Crisis Onset: Yanukovych Flees Kyiv and Moscow’s Uncertainty Over Crimea

As shown by Carment et al. (2019), a foreign policy crisis for Ukraine began on 22 February 2014, after Yanukovych fled to Russia and the fierce clashes between protesters and local law enforcement. Carment and James (1995) and Wilkenfeld and Brecher (2019) identify two necessary conditions of an international crisis. First, it is a change in the type and/or an increase in the intensity of disruptive, that is, hostile verbal or physical, interactions between two or more states, with a heightened probability of military hostilities. These conditions were satisfied in Crimea as the political rift between Kyiv and Crimean authorities expanded. At the time, it became likely that if Crimea was to remain a part of Ukraine, it was probable that Russia’s historically-rooted narrative of the sole protector of Crimea was going to be incongruent with potential new reality. Based on the pro-E.U and US positions by the new leadership in Kyiv, it became possible that NATO forces would also set up a base on the peninsula. The movement of NATO forces into Crimea would be accompanied by the emergence of a security narrative and ethos that would dilute and disempower the one articulated by Moscow. Alongside these considerations, Moscow feared that the post-revolution government would unilaterally withdraw from the Kharkiv Pact within months. Ultimately from Moscow’s perspective, the risk of losing its role as a regional protector in Crimea following the February 2014 crisis was much greater than after the 2005 Orange Revolution and the subsequently planned NATO-Ukraine military exercises. Some 150,000 Russian troops went on alert, as a response to a heightened risk of military engagement in Ukraine.

In Crimea, the local leaders of the autonomous republic were trapped between opposing interests from Kyiv politicians and the priorities of the deposed Yanukovych
administration. From one side, the Speaker of the Regional Parliament, Sergey Konstantinov remained a strong supporter of president Yanukovych. As the leader of the Crimea branch of the Party of Regions, Konstantinov was deeply involved in Yanukovych’s business connections. As an expression of political support, on 22 February 2014 Konstantinov initiated a letter of parliamentary loyalty to Yanukovych. From the other side, there were ongoing negotiations between representatives of Crimea’s pro-Russian parties and Crimea’s ‘intelligentsia’. With the situation uncertain, Konstantinov established an alliance with little-known pro-Russian Crimean MP Sergey Aksyonov, the leader of a micro faction in the Crimean parliament, who soon presented himself as the new leader of Crimea. Large pro-Russian rallies in Simferopol and Sevastopol soon followed, accompanied by patrols by Cossacks. Moreover, street clashes between pro-Russian protestors and pro-Ukrainian activists as well as Crimean Tatar Mejlis left three people dead. In turn, the departure of Viktor Yanukovych from Ukraine on 21 February 2014 created fear among the Russian diaspora in Crimea and motivated the local ethnic-based movement to fight against the new authorities in Kyiv.

4.8 Irredentism in Crimea: Permissive but Costly Conditions for Gray Zone Coercion

The purpose of this section is to determine the impact of the domestic-level independent variable (IV2) on Russia’s decision to apply gray zone tools and tactics in Crimea. Irredentism was a credible political force in Crimea since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The general consensus is that the rise of irredentism in Crimea was a phenomenon largely independent from Moscow – especially in the early 1990s. As noted in the theory chapter, what matters for this analysis in terms of secessionism or irredentism is the
presence or absence of an organized movement that either desires to secede from a larger state or join another state.

The permissive conditions for the rise of irredentism in Crimea were present before the collapse of the Soviet Union. As noted by Sasse, (2007), in January 1991, 93 percent of Crimeans voted in favor of granting the territory status of an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic within the Soviet Union. Then-President Gorbachev was entirely disconnected from the process. Subsequently in the Ukrainian referendum on 1 December 1991, 54 percent of the voters in Crimea backed the independence of Ukraine from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. This was significantly lower than the 91 percent country-wide average. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Crimea was re-incorporated into Ukraine as an autonomous republic. However, the significant autonomy the peninsula received within Ukraine as a result of the Soviet-era referendum enabled the emergence of pro-Russia political forces.

The Yeltsin administration did not provide assistance or support to pro-Russia factions in Crimea. However, there was an attempt by local political factions in Sevastopol to drag the Russian president into Crimean affairs. Even though Yeltsin did not actively provide political support to nationalist factions in Crimea, the early nationalization of Russia was supported with various potent historical narratives about the country’s greatness. For example, a key occasion when Yeltsin noted the Sevastopol narrative (or myth) was during the celebration of the end of the Great Patriotic War in Moscow on May 9, 1994. This was perceived (or framed) by pro-Russia nationalists in Crimea as moral support by Moscow, even though the target of this remark was the Russian audience – not the Crimeans.
The first wave of pro-Russia nationalism was associated with the 1992 Constitution of Crimea. The first Crimean parliament backed the new constitution on May 6, 1992. The document defines the peninsula as a “Sovereign State,” which would be able to control its own international relations and law enforcement. However, this attempt was rejected by the national parliament (Rada) in Kyiv. Instead, a new constitution was drafted which defined Crimea’s status as a Republic within the unitary Ukrainian state. Even though compared to the originally proposed constitution, the new document limited the local government from entirely bypassing Kyiv in its foreign relations, it allowed closer relations with Russia. This constitution ultimately paved the way for pro-Russia irredentist factions to realize their goals of moving politically closer to Moscow.

From 1993 to 1995, the pro-Russian bloc was the most powerful faction in Crimea. In January 1994 Yuriy Meshkov was elected to the office of Crimean president with 73 percent of the total vote. As part of his efforts to unite Crimea with Russia, he tried to implement several policies to integrate the peninsula with Russia. First, he tried to force the rotation of the Russian ruble. Second, he encouraged the issuing of Russian passports for the population of Crimea. Finally, he moved Crimea to the Moscow time zone. In tandem with Meshkov, the Prime Minister of Crimea called the local leadership the “Moscow government of Crimea” throughout his six-month term in office. Even though the pro-Russia forces were in power, there was considerable political infighting with many simply desiring to maintain autonomy – not reunite with Russia. However, these factions were relatively smaller and less powerful. Moreover, incompetence by local politicians and bureaucrats in solving material issues to improve the standard of living
meant that the population lost trust in their leaders. However, even with such mismanagement, irredentism began to gain local political momentum.

The growing irredentist sentiment within the local population continued to be ignored in the latter 1990s in policies from Kyiv under President Kuchma and support for the ethnic-based movement remained outside President Yeltsin’s agenda. Unlike his predecessor, in 1995 Ukraine’s president Kuchma took personal control over the situation in Crimea, over which he claimed the Kyiv government was losing control. He abolished the post of the President of Crimea, thereby removing the pro-Moscow Meshkov from his post. Even though the April 1996 Crimean Constitution further restricted the autonomy of the region, there were a number of issues that remain ambiguous. A key issue that remained undefined in the new document was the citizenship of Crimean. Moreover, the June 1996 Constitution of Ukraine recognized the peninsula as the Autonomous Republic within Ukraine, allowing it to maintain its own parliament but further limiting its ability to conduct independent business and bypass Kyiv. Pro-Russian nationalists (separatists) were politically ostracized from 1994 to 2004. However, the 2006 Crimean Parliamentary elections in Crimea brought the Party of Regions to power. This enabled the integration of these previously marginalized voices into the Crimean political landscape. However, the rise of irredentism in Crimea, and the series of aforementioned events were not arbitrary. Rather, there were concerns that conditions for Crimeans would deteriorate within the increasingly nationalizing Ukrainian state.

Aasland (2002) highlights that in fact, it is not the status quo condition to which minority groups may be the most sensitive but rather to the deterioration of conditions for national minorities. In 1992 Ukraine had approved a Law on National Minorities. As
noted by Besters-Dilger (2007), this Law won praise from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) High Commissioner on Minorities. The right to be taught in one's native language in public educational establishments or national cultural societies was initially reflected in this Law and subsequently incorporated into the 1996 Constitution of Ukraine. In Crimea, some 82 percent of the population consider their mother tongue as Russian. According to USAID polls conducted prior to the crisis onset in February 2014, the threat to the Russian language was a low concern for the population. However, the statistic is the perception of threat within the Crimean peninsula. The issue of minority languages becomes especially potent when considering the Crimean population’s participation in political life and economic opportunities within the entire country.

The 2005 Orange Revolution contributed to uncertainty regarding the future of the Russian language within Ukraine and facilitate a cultural backlash and increased regionalism. More importantly, the risk of abrupt exclusion for national minorities became a credible threat based on rhetoric from Kyiv. Exclusion from the labor market, social isolation, political participation, lack of economic resources are key components of social exclusion. These elements of exclusion are closely linked with language, as people who primarily operate in minority languages that remain legally unrecognized, can not quickly or effectively integrate into the larger civil society and labor market or fully participate in the political life of the nation. To achieve such exclusion, a strong emphasis was placed on anti-Soviet (and anti-Russian) symbolism following the Orange Revolution. Ukrainization campaigns with slogans such as “one nation, one language, one Church” or “think in Ukrainian” were launched immediately following the election of 2006. Moreover,
Viktor Yushchenko posthumously awarded Stepan Bandera the title Hero of Ukraine. Soviet-era Second World War Memorials were destroyed in Western Ukrainian cities like Lviv. Following these symbolic gestures, the Yanukovych cabinet, backed by the Verkhovna Rada, began to enforce the use of the Ukrainian language in public offices, schools, and the media. In response to this, in mid-2006 many districts and municipal councils in the Eastern and South parts of Ukraine began introducing the Russian language in their official affairs. By the request of Yushchenko, Ukrainian courts ruled against the implementation thus defeating many of the initiatives of local governments. However, this did not stop these local authorities from continuing to operate in Russian. Ultimately the political infighting between then Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and President Viktor Yushchenko, and their mutual accusations of corruption, provided the space for the re-emergence of Russia-friendly loci of power.

In the 2010 Presidential Election, Victor Yanukovich, who campaigned on the platform of minority language recognition, gained more than 70 percent of the votes in both Crimea and Donbas, which were strong supporters of the law "On the principles of the state language policy" of 2012. This was an improvement in minority language rights that did not last long. In 2014 the Verkhovna Rada repealed the law. Aking to 2008, this escalated the perception that minority language rights, and thus other opportunities, are under attack within Ukraine. Such repeated disenfranchisement of Crimeans created the permissive conditions for Russia to intervene as their protector.

4.9 Russia’s Gray Zone Tactics in Crimea and Coercion Following Crisis Onset: Assessing the Dependent Variable (DV)

The purpose of this section is to determine the dependent variable of the IOI Model or the intensity of Russia’s coercion following the crisis onset in February 2014. For
Russia, the security and integrity of its large Black Sea Fleet in Crimea was vital for the maintenance of its role as a regional protector. The original “Sevastopol Myth” was invoked by Putin on 18 March 2014, in his speech to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation. The official pretext for Russia’s swift engagement in Crimea was associated with the protection of ‘compatriots’ (Sootechestvenniki). Following the onset of the crisis, as in other cases in Ukraine, although deploying a different maximum level of coercion, Russia employed various tactics to influence the level of acceptance and formalization of its protector role in Crimea. From Russia’s perspective, the incorporation of the territory into the Russian Federation created the most permissive environment to address both aspects, thus all employed resources and tactics contributed to the achievement of this outcome. Table 4.3 below summarizes Russia’s gray zone operations in Crimea.

4.9.1 Russia’s Covert Security Operations in Crimea

The Crimean operation used swiftness and the element of surprise to establish fait accompli on in the operational environment in Crimea, thus making any counter actions by Ukraine nearly impossible. Using the 25,000 troops stationed in Crimea and special unmarked military units to capture and disarm Ukrainian soldiers located at strategic locations, Russia deployed a covert military operation. The stationing of the naval troops in Sevastopol increased Russia’s military potential in Crimea, but the critical stages of the military takeover were implemented by elite troops who were newly deployed from Russia in early 2014 for this purpose.

As noted by Bukkvoll (2016), Russian victory was secured by the deployment of regular military personnel into the peninsula, however, the initial action by Special
Operations Forces (SOF) and other special and elite forces elements was the decisive element in Russia’s success.\textsuperscript{117} As noted by Ukrainian officials, and later confirmed by the Ministry of Defence of Russia, the key to the success of the covert operation, colloquially known as the ‘little green men’, in Crimea was the deployment of the 18th Motor Rifle Brigade, 31st Air Assault Brigade, and 22nd Spetsnaz Brigade. They amounted to a total of up to 10,000 operatives.\textsuperscript{118}

On 27 February 2014, the local Parliament was seized by unmarked troops. However, the legislature remained functional and by the end of the day, a new regional Premier Sergey Aksyonov would come to power. Crimea’s status referendum took place on 16 March 2014 and the Ukrainian flag was removed from the Crimean Parliament. At that same time in Kyiv, an emergency meeting of the Council for National Safety and Defence was held. Minutes from that meeting show that only acting president Oleksandr Turchinov voted to impose martial law on Crimea. These operations were accompanied by disruptive cyber operations and telecommunication sabotage.

4.9.2 Russia’s Cyber Operations in Crimea

As noted by Stinissen (2015), conventional and clandestine operations were conducted against the personal telephones of members of the Ukrainian legislature, and the mobile communication infrastructure of Ukrainian security forces. These can be classified as Distributed Denial of Service operations.\textsuperscript{119} The pro-Moscow group CyberBerkut disseminated disruptive hacks and disinformation against NATO.\textsuperscript{120} In Crimea, cyber operations were also supplemented by armed operations – often against the same targets. For example, kinetic operations were employed in the takeover of Ukrtelecom offices and operatives cut telephone and internet cables in strategic locations.
4.9.3 Diaspora Influence Through Local Organization(s)

Pro-Russia organizations were key for the mobilization of popular support of Russia’s intervention. Following the departure of Yanukovych from Kyiv on February 21-22, 2014, many such local organizations, with ties to Russia, began to disseminate information elevating the level of threat from the new Kyiv government and, as claimed, their radical right-wing supporters. This created a perception of imminent physical threat to the Crimean population. In turn, such agitation of deep-rooted fears of potential repressions encouraged the mobilization of gang-like groups in Crimea who vowed to defend the peninsula with arms.

Immediately following the ousting of Viktor Yanukovych, “self-defense brigades” (Narodnaia Druzina) were formed as a paramilitary force to resist the new government in Kyiv. The name Narodnaia Druzina suggests a Soviet-era phenomenon when civilian volunteers were placed on street patrol duties or as auxiliaries to local law enforcement.

Following crisis onset in February 2014, the pro-Russia Unity Party was a key entity used to mobilize protests, who in turn seized several local government buildings including the parliament of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. On 27 February 2014 approximately 600 Unity Party supporters engaged in a standoff and clashes with over 4,000 Crimean Tatars and supporters of the Euromaidan-Crimea movement. Following the addition of Crimea to Russia, the Party was amalgamated into United Russia – the dominant party in Russia’s State Duma (Parliament).

4.9.4 Targeted Media Operations in Crimea

At the same time, according to a RAND report, Russian language media, in tandem with local pro-Russia organizations, continuously escalated the severity of perceived threat
through media campaigns. As highlighted by Carment et al. (2019), local social networks created the permissive condition to make such operations especially effective. In terms of social media and non-traditional techniques of influence, we see that even prior to the conflict, Russian-language television solidified local social networks within the Russian-speaking diaspora in Crimea. These campaigns were escalated following the Ukrainian crisis onset in Feb 2014. As noted by RAND, there were three main objectives to Russia’s information campaign during the seizure of Crimea: 1) delegitimizing the post-Yanukovych government in Ukraine, 2) hyperbolizing the grave danger to Russians within Ukraine, 3) displaying broad support among the local population for Crimea’s “return home” to Russia. This information was disseminated through Russian television networks which had a large audience on the peninsula as well as pro-Russian organizations. The table below provides a summary of Russia’s operations post-crisis onset.

Table 4.3. Summary of Russia’s Maximum Coercive Actions in Crimea Following Crisis Onset (DV)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maximum Intensity of Coercion</th>
<th>Intervention Format</th>
<th>Example(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High-medium</td>
<td>Covert Military/Security Operation(s)</td>
<td>Deployment of the special unmarked military (‘little green men’) and mobilization of 25,000 troops stationed in Crimea to capture and disarm Ukrainian soldiers located at strategic locations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disruptive Cyber operations</td>
<td>Disruptive cyber operations against Ukrtelecom and various hacking campaigns by CyberBerkut.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diaspora influence through local organization(s)</td>
<td>Unity Party used to mobilize pro-Russia supporters to resist Tatar pro-Maidan counterparts; “self-defence brigades” (Narodnaia Druzina) mobilized to patrol streets.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.1. Intensity of Coercion Chosen by Russia for Crimea Relative to Other Cases post-Crisis Onset (DV)

| Targeted media and information operation(s) | Dissemination of “Crimea return home” through various television and online channels; delegitimization of the post-Yanukovych government. |

None | High

Odesa | Kharkiv | Donbas | Crimea | Abkhazia

4.10 Results and Analysis: Explaining Russia’s Intervention in Crimea based on the IOI Model

When examining Russia’s intervention in Crimea (DV), as a function of the role-power gap (IV) and the characteristics of the local ethnic-based movement (IV), Moscow’s cost-benefit calculation in its foreign policy decision-making becomes understandable. The high role-power gap, relative to Odesa, Kharkiv, and Donbas, created the incentive, and thus a necessary system-level condition, to encourage the specific intensity of coercion. However, sufficient conditions were not met for the deployment of military operations, akin to Georgia. The anticipated high cost of military intervention in the local irredentist movement acted as moderating factor on Russia’s use of coercion. Thus, the qualitative data gathered through the application of the IOI Model to the case of Crimea supports hypothesis (B): If role exceeds power by a large margin, and the local movement is irredentist, Russia will utilize high-medium intensity of coercion. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 4.3, box 2 below.

As a first step, however, it is necessary to assess the magnitude of the power-role gap as the system-level incentive to apply coercion. The quantification of the components of role and power across the three consequential events (or short periods), as highlighted
in Table 4.4 below, is an effective method to assess this gap. This is the first part of the *hoop test* to determine whether the necessary conditions associated with an *incentive* for intervention were met. Moreover, this exercise enables the assessment of Russia’s potential decline in role following crisis onset.

Looking at the narrative emanating from the leadership in Moscow, Russia maintained a consistently high level of specificity, scope, and clarity in its perceived protector role in Crimea across all three periods examined. Russia’s protector narrative was not challenged by or interweaved with, another competing narrative – as in the case of the Donbas, for example. The narrative was geographically confined and unique to Crimea. The level of clarity was high due to the incorporation of several sub-components, the dominant of which is the Black Sea Fleet stationing in Sevastopol. Thus, the characteristics of role specificity, scope, and clarity were coded as 5 for all three examined consequential events (or short periods), based on the Coding Table in Appendix A. However, the high scores of the above role components do not match the level of acceptance of Russia’s perceived role by the local population in Crimea.

There was a significant decline in the degree of acceptance of Russia’s perceived protector role by the Crimean population between the first and third consequential events (or short periods). In fact, the decline in acceptance had the greatest impact on the gap between Russia’s perceived role and power in Crimea. This decline in the acceptance of Russia’s protector role in Crimea could generally be attributed to a decline in perceived threat by the Crimean population posed by the Orange Revolution of 2005 and subsequent events, such as NATO-Ukraine exercises.
Prior to the election of Yanukovych, the prioritization of Russia’s role as protector of Crimea, in terms of security, linguistics, and culture, was largely reactionary to events in Kyiv. As noted in the foregoing discussion, with the election of Yanukovych in 2010, surveys showed that Crimeans became relatively apathetic to security-related issues such as the Black Sea Fleet and re-oriented their attention to local economic stagnation. This is reflected in Table 4.4 in the decline in acceptance score from 5 to 2 between 2006 and 2013 based on the Coding Table in Appendix A. Even with continuous persuasion, for example through Moscow-funded patriotic organizations and media campaigns, the decline in acceptance was not offset. However, albeit the decline in acceptance, Moscow was able to rely on strong cross-border treaty commitments, which solidified its role as protector of the Crimean people and territory.

Between 2005 and 2013, the level of formalization of Russia’s protector role in Crimea increased, although insignificantly. The relatively low level of formalization of Russia’s perceived role in Crimea in 2005 could primarily be attributed to the effects of the Orange Revolution, in which Moscow’s narrative as protector was generally incongruent with Kyiv’s agenda. However, the Crimean leadership’s unwillingness to resign to Kyiv’s reorientation toward NATO and continued formal recognition of Russia’s role meant that Moscow’s protector ties enjoyed a significant degree of local formalization around the 2006 Exercises. For example, as noted in the above discussion, Crimeans displayed their support through the anti-NATO protests in Feodosia in 2006.

Subsequently, the level of support for Russia’s perceived protector role increased between 2006 and 2010 and remained consistent until 2013. This is due to the entrenchment of Moscow’s perceived protector role through the Kharkiv Pact. The election of President
Yanukovych in 2010 enabled Moscow and Kyiv to sign the Kharkiv Pact. This increased the level of commitment to Russia’s protector role, as Ukraine became compelled to its recognition in the long term. This increase in cross-border commitment to Moscow’s perceived role is reflected in the increased score from 3 to 4 from 2006 to 2010 in Table 4.4 below. The consistent effect of the signing of the Pact is reflected by the same score of 4 between 2010 and 2013, based on the Coding Table in Appendix A.

Even though Russia’s role as the protector of Crimea was formally recognized, there were key factors that prevented a maximum level of cross-border formalization of Moscow’s role. First, the Kharkiv Pact had an expiration date – albeit a temporally distant one. Moreover, the agreement allowed unilateral withdrawal by either Ukraine or Russia. Considering the presence of strong opposition to the Accord in Kyiv, the departure of Yanukovych and the potential re-election of pro-Orange Revolution factions may have resulted in the termination of the agreement. However, the results in Table 4.4 may also indicate an internal correlation between the levels of formalization and acceptance of Russia’s protector role.

The degree of formalization of Russia’s role appears to be negatively correlated with the acceptance of its role by the local Crimean population. As shown in Table 4.4 below, the level of formalization increased, while the level of acceptance declined. In the case of Crimea, a possible causal chain responsible for this effect is the following: 1) election of Yanukovych enabled 2) the signing of the agreements in Kharkiv. This, in turn, 3) decreased the security threat perceived by Crimeans emanating from pro-Orange Revolution politicians. The elimination of the socio-political and cultural threat enabled a shift in priorities to economic issues, and 4) the decrease in the relevance of the issue
facilitated a decrease in the *active* acceptance of Russia’s role by the local population. The data used to assess the acceptance of Russia’s protector role was the ranking of various important issue areas for Crimeans. Thus, it is possible that the *real* degree of acceptance remained constant between 2010 and 2013; it simply transitioned to more passive support of Russia’s protector role.

In sum, the difference in role and power values between 2005 and 2013 in Table 4.4 below reflect a consistently large gap between Moscow’s perceived role and ability to maintain regional power in Crimea. This large role-power gap is reflected in a score of 15 points across all consequential periods and is also visualized in Figure 3.4 below. However, based on the IOI Model, the role-power gap discussed above only represents the system-level *incentive* for the application of gray zone tools and tactics.

The local irredentist movement in Crimea established a costly environment for the application of gray zone tools and tactics for Russia. The cost would have been especially high if conventional military force was employed, akin to Abkhazia in August 2008. As noted by Heraclids (1989), intervention in irredentism carries significant costs associated with international reputation and potential consequences as the endeavor requires the undermining of the territorial integrity of another state. On the other hand, support for secessionism, as opposed to irredentism, is a much more effective and flexible tool of influence because it is substantially easier for a state to use its support selectively and reverse it when concessions are given. With the use of high-intensity coercion, or military intervention, Russia could incur the costs associated with entrenched commitment, as well as the full responsibility for undermining Ukraine’s territorial integrity.
By moderating the intensity of its operations in Crimea, Russia could avoid much of the cost associated with intervention in the territory’s irredentist movement. For example, as noted in the above discussion, the covert operations using the “little green men” enabled Russia, attribute the outcome in Crimea to the will of the local population, as opposed to its troops and proxy fighters. Using such ambiguity, Russia avoided much of the international reputation costs associated with the undermining of the territorial integrity of Ukraine - at least temporarily. Moreover, by moderating its intensity of coercion using gray zone tools and tactics, Russia was able to avoid the substantial costs associated with commitment requirements to the irredentist movement once intervention took place. For example, considering the little ‘green men’ were not identified by Russia as its own troops, until after the Annexation of Crimea, covert operations enabled Moscow to more easily withdraw or reverse its support from the peninsula at any point, before the achievement of its desired outcome. In turn, this symbiosis between Russia’s selected intensity of gray zone coercion and the characteristics of the system- and domestic-level variables support the IOI Model. The sequential decision-making, based on these variables, is visualized in Figure 4.5 below.
Table 4.4 Quantitative Assessment of Incentive for Intervention in Crimea; Role-Power Gap (IV)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Specificity</td>
<td>Role focus; quantity of narratives.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Scope</td>
<td>Geographic focus.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Clarity</td>
<td>Role depth through specific challenge areas.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Acceptance</td>
<td>Role-affirming social mobilization.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Formality</td>
<td>Cross-border commitments.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gap Between Relative Power and Role Scores

| 23 - 8 = 15 | 22 – 7 = 15 | 21 - 6 = 15 |

Role-Power Gap Average 15 Points

Note: The scores in this table are based on the Coding Table in Appendix A; all scores for role specificity, scope, clarity, acceptance, and formality are of 5; Blue: role components; Red: power components.

Figure 4.3. Relative Intensity of Coercion as a Function of the Role-Power Gap and Type of Ethnic-based Movement in Crimea

IV: Role and Power Gap (Incentive)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Large</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irredentism</td>
<td>Crimea (2) High-Medium Intensity Of Coercion (DV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odesa (3) No Coercion (DV)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV: Movement Type (Opportunity)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seccessionism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kharkiv (4) Low Intensity Of Coercion (DV)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4.4. Russia’s Role-Power Gap (IV) in Crimea Across Three Consequential Events (or Short Periods)

Figure 4.5. Sequence of Russia’s Decision-making in the Application of Coercion in Crimea Following Crisis Onset

1. **Crisis Onset**
   Reveals the gap between perceived role and power; threatens reduction of Russia’s role in Crimea due to competition with rival actors and their competing narratives.

2. **Russia**
   Assesses role-power gap magnitude in Crimea.

3. **Necessary Condition (IV) #1**
   High System-level *Incentive for Coercion in Crimea*. High incentive for intervention as gap between perceived role and relative power is large.

4. **Necessary Condition (IV) #2**
   Low Domestic-level *Opportunity for Coercion in Crimea*. High cost of application of coercion involving an irredentist movement.

5. **Application of gray zone tools and tactics phase**.
   Russia employed high-medium intensity of coercive gray zone tools and tactics in Crimea following crisis onset.
4.11 Conclusion and Policy Implications

The case of Russia’s application of coercive gray zone tools and tactics in Crimea presents several lessons for academics, policymakers, and security practitioners, as well as international organizations in their conflict management efforts.

The case of Crimea demonstrates that neither system- nor domestic-level considerations are individually sufficient to comprehensively account for Russia’s decisions to employ coercive gray zone tools and tactics. As noted in Chapter 2, academics and policy practitioners tend to rely on either type of explanation for Moscow’s behavior. For example, if taken standalone, the presence of an irredentist movement, with a high cost of intervention, is likely to result in highly restrained intervention. However, this was not the case in Crimea, where Russia deployed covert security operations.

The foregoing analysis highlights the need to incorporate system-level incentive to account for Russia’s decisions to deploy gray zone tools and tactics in Crimea. Therein, the consistently large gap between perceived role and power on the peninsula established an unacceptable risk of role decline for Russia. The onset of the crisis in February 2014 introduced various adversarial state and non-state actors with competing narratives for Crimea, which were incongruent with Moscow’s vision for the peninsula. From its perspective, if Russia did not act preventively following crisis onset, it could have lost its perceived protector role over a peninsula. As I highlighted in this chapter, Crimea has been a key pillar of Russian national identity, which formed over centuries. However, the purpose of this insight into Russia’s behavior is to improve conflict management approaches to fit the contemporary gray zone conflict environment.
If a local irredentist movement exists, what policy actions can be taken to further moderate the intensity of gray zone coercion? The temptation may be to raise intervention costs further, for example through the threat of punishment if an incursion occurs. However, an accurate assessment of whether a threat will be effective at deterring potential interveners is difficult. In cases of miscalculation, third parties may choose intervention, which in turn may result in the onset of violence. At the system level, it would be a difficult task for any outside entity to address or eliminate Russia’s deep-rooted conviction of its protector role on the peninsula. However, the multi-level approach used in the foregoing analysis may present a possible solution.

The Crimea case highlights that to lower the risk of intervention, targeting the domestic-level permissive conditions may be an effective conflict resolution strategy. The mobilization of the ethnic-based movement on the peninsula was substantially a response to policies from Kyiv, which employed various campaigns to marginalize Russian speakers and their cultural memory. However, the ‘othering’ of Crimeans for the purpose of contrasting, and elevating Ukrainian language and culture, did not result in long-lasting peace. Russia was using the opportunity presented to it, as a permissive environment to maintain its role through the use of Active Measures prior to crisis onset. In turn, this domestic-level permissive condition enabled the escalation of Moscow’s tools and tactics to coercion after 21 February 2014, using covert military means. The implication is that the creation of robust mechanisms of social and economic inclusion of national minorities into the political ecosystem may be an effective conflict resolution, or prevention, strategy.
References

5 See Oksana Myshlovska, Derussification or Ukrainization?. Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, 2011.
8 Ibid., 21-24.
9 See Plokhy, 369-370.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., 369-383.
13 See Kazarin, 21-24.
14 Plokhy, 373.
17 Ibid., 2-7.
18 Ibid., 5.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Plokhy, 374.
23 Ibid., 376.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 375-376.
26 Ibid.
27 Kazarin, 22-23.
29 Ibid., 287-290.
30 Kazarin, 22.
31 Kazarin, 22-23.
33 see Kazarin, 22-23 for absence of a crystalized Ukrainian myth.
36 “Передача Крыма в Состав УССР (1954 Год) ['Handover of Crimea to the Ukrainian SSR (Year 1954)]”. История.РФ, histrf.ru/biblioteka/b/tsarskii-podarok-kak-krym-ukrainie-pierieda
38 Ibid.
https://sputniknews.com/russia/201506271023916532/.
40 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
53 “Senior Russian MP Warns against Dragging Ukraine and Others into NATO,” Interfax AVN, in Russian, 9 June 2006, BBC Monitoring Online.


Roslycky, 301-302.


The official name of the treaty is the Agreement between Ukraine and Russia on the Black Sea Fleet in Ukraine.


The original text of the poll states that “По результатам опроса социологической группы Рейтинг, которые озвучил в среду директор группы Алексей Антипович, до подписания данных соглашений выступали в поддержку пролонгации срока пребывания ЧФ РФ в Крыму 41% респондентов, были против 38%.” See Опрос: Ожидания украинцев от Харьковских соглашений не оправдались (["Poll: Ukrainians' Expectations from the Kharkiv Agreements Did Not Materialize"]). Telegraf.by. April 27, 2011. Accessed November 06, 2020.


See Sergey Bozhko, "Russia in Ukraine's Foreign Policy in 2010 as Seen in Political Discourse." Demokratizatsiya 19, no. 4 (2011) and Tomislava Penkova, "EU or Russia? Ukraine’s Recurrent (non) Integration Dilemma." Ispi analysis (2013).


Ibid.

80 The question from the USAID survey was articulated as follows: “Please tell me, which three of the following issues are the most important for Crimea?” See United States. USAID. Public Opinion Survey Residents of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea May 16 – 30, 2013. Washington, DC: International Republican Institute, 2013.


85 Based on the withdraw provision of the Agreement between Ukraine and the Russian Federation on the status and conditions of stay of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation in the territory of Ukraine, Article 25: “Party notifies the other Party in writing of the termination of the Agreement not later than one year before its expiration.”


89 Ibid.

90 As noted by Kuzio (1994), “Igor Yeroshkin, a member of President Meshkov’s, ‘it is now certain we have Yeltsin’s support and it is our duty to be clear that we demand reunion with Russia.” See Taras Kuzio, "The Crimea and European Security." European Security 3, no. 4 (1994): 734-774. This in fact had the opposite effect, straining relations with Moscow. Yeltsin was hesitant to support ethnic-based organized movements in Crimea, as Russia was dealing with militant separatism in Chechnya. Also See James Hughes and Gwendolyn Sasse, eds. Ethnicity and Territory in the Former Soviet Union: Regions in Conflict.


Everett, 5.


See Hughes and Sasse, 2002.


Ibid. 100

See Kuzio, 2010.


USAID 2013.

Article 10 of the Constitution of Ukraine states that the Ukrainian language would be the only language used for all spheres of like within the entire territory of Ukraine. See Besters-Dilger, 266.

Aasland, 58-59.
Tadeusz A. Olszański, "The Language Issue in Ukraine: An Attempt at a New Perspective."


See Olszański.


Molchanov, 85.

Putin claimed that: “The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea. This is also Sevastopol—a legendary city with an outstanding history, a fortress that serves as the birthplace of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet. Crimea is Balaklava and Kerch, Malakhov Kurgan and Sapun Ridge. Each one of these places is dear to our hearts, symbolizing Russian military glory and outstanding valour.”


See Carment et al. (2019), 196.


According to the RAND report, Appendix A: The Crimea-specific information campaigns by Russia had the following themes: 1) Land historically belonged to Russia. • The acquisition of Crimea by Ukraine in 1954 was a historical mistake; 2) KrymNash “Crimea Is Ours” [КрымНаш] campaign; 3) Ethnic Russian and all Russian-speaking populations of Crimea are under severe ultra-nationalist threat; 4) In no way was Russia
involved in events in Crimea; the referendum was initiated and carried out by the people of Crimea; 5) Crimean soldiers voluntarily gave up their weapons and pronounced their allegiance to Russia; 6) Bright images of oppressed “Russian population,” “Berkut” heroes, “polite green men.” See Michael Kofman et al. (2017).

Chapter 5  Russia’s Gray Zone Activities in Odesa: Assessing the Low Incentive and Opportunity for Coercion

5.1 Introduction

The case of Russia’s intervention in Odesa serves as a control case to test the validity of the Incentive-Opportunity Intervention (IOI) Model as Russia did not deploy coercion there following crisis onset in February 2014. Instead, Russia continued to use persuasion or Active Measures.

To operationalize its perceived protector role in Odesa, Russia focused on the Soviet Odesa narrative and the historic association of the city with the ‘Russian Speaking World.’ Specifically, Moscow focused on two challenge areas. First, education in the Russian language, which has been declining as a function of increasingly nationalizing Ukraine. Second, Moscow emphasized the need to prevent the ‘falsification’ of the narrative of the ‘Great Patriotic War.’ Language has been a defining characteristic linked to identity and has been used as a key part of Ukrainian national-building and marker of sovereignty in the post-Soviet period. On the other hand, the protection of the Russian language and the pro-Soviet memory of the Great Patriotic War (or Second World War) served as the ideological backdrop for political alignment with Moscow.

However, as highlighted in this chapter, these components of Russia’s perceived role were not bespoke to Odesa, but part of a broader policy priority to provide political support for aggrieved ‘compatriots’ in post-Soviet Ukraine. Preceding any involvement from Moscow, however, these grievances also emerged as political focal points which allowed the emergence of an irredentist movement in Odesa.

Using the IOI Model, this chapter examines Russia’s application of coercion in Odesa (DV) as a function of Russia’s role-power gap structure (IV1) and the characteristics
of the local ethnic-based movement (IV2). These variables serve as proxies for the system- and domestic-level cost-benefit analysis, respectively. This relationship is tested through hypothesis (C): *if role exceeds power by a small margin, and the local movement is irredentist, Russia will not utilize coercion.* As discussed in Chapter 2, this means Russia could continue the use of gray zone tools and tactics below the threshold of coercion. These include bribery, information manipulation, and other persuasion tactics, which do not pose an imminent physical threat to the target(s) of the operations.

Using content analysis of peer-reviewed academic research, speeches, surveys, and statements by Russian government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs), this chapter finds that the system-level incentive (IV) for Russia’s application of coercion in Odesa was low. However, standalone, this did not prevent Russia from applying coercive gray zone tools and tactics in Odesa. The local irredentist movement created costly conditions for intervention or, in other words, unfavorable domestic-level opportunity. In sum, sufficient conditions were not met for Russia to deploy coercion following the February 2014 crisis onset; however, persuasion (or Active Measures) below the threshold of coercion continued following the political escalation.

This chapter employs a hoop test to assess whether, and how, the two necessary conditions, system-level incentive, and domestic-level opportunity, facilitated Russia’s actions in Odesa following crisis onset. As a starting point, the chapter outlines the competing narratives associated with Odesa. The section also outlines the reasons why Moscow selected the Russian language and Soviet memory of the ‘Great Patriotic War’ narratives as the basis for its perceived protector role. The subsequent parts of the chapter are used to gather qualitative data for the assessment of the power-role gap – or the system-
level *incentive* (IV1) for the use of particular gray zone tools and tactics, as part of the IOI Model.

To this end, the chapter engages in content analysis of peer-reviewed sources, formal political statements, and news platforms to assess the degree of Russia’s role generality, scope, clarity, acceptance, and formality at three consequential events (or short periods): 1) the 2004 Presidential election and Orange Revolution, 2) the 2010 Ukrainian Presidential election, and 3) the civil unrest period preceding the onset of the 2014 crisis, which was triggered by the departure of President Yanukovych on 21 February. These consequential events were selected as the top occasions within the examined period (Jan 2000 to Feb. 2014), the outcome of which Russia needed to control and thus, maintain its perceived role and power in Odesa. Thus, Active Measures targeting local acceptance and formalization of its role are also assessed across the three consequential events (or short periods) to determine Russia’s power in Odesa.

Subsequently, content analysis of peer-reviewed and news sources is employed to examine the last two components of the model. The type of ethnic-based movement prior to crisis onset, the domestic-level *opportunity* variable (IV2), is examined as a proxy for the cost of Russia’s coercion in Odesa. The last part of the qualitative data section provides the facts of Russia’s Active Measures in Odesa following crisis onset (DV).

In the results and analysis section, the chapter converts the qualitative data associated with Russia’s perceived role and power in Odesa into quantitative metrics using the Coding Table in Appendix A. This step enables the evaluation of Russia’s role-power gap and the anticipated role decline following crisis onset. This establishes the degree of system-level *incentive* (IV1) to apply coercion in Odesa. Next, the section assesses the
costs, or the degree of domestic-level opportunity (DV) for coercion, imposed on Russia based on the local ethnic-based movement. Finally, the chapter explains why Russia’s chosen actions in Odesa, following the departure of President Yanukovych on February 21, 2014, were indeed a function of the two independent variables. In turn, the hoop test employed in this chapter supports hypothesis (C) and the validity of the IOI Model. The concluding section of the chapter provides recommendations for policymakers and conflict management practitioners based on the chapter’s findings.

5.2 Narratives and Russia’s Role Formation in Odesa

The purpose of this section is to outline the various narratives which defined the Odessite identity in the post-Soviet era. Two of the narratives discussed below became the ideological backdrop for Russia’s perceived protector role for the city’s ‘compatriots.’ Throughout its post-Soviet history, however, there were three identity narratives that became dominant in Odesa’s society: 1) an ‘imperial narrative,’ which focused on Odesa as a cultural and trade hub within the Russian Empire, 2) a ‘Soviet Odesa’ identity, which celebrated the victory of the ‘Great Patriotic War,’ and 3) Odesa as part of the ‘Russian Speaking World.’ As shown in the subsequent sections, with the onset of economic depression in the 1990s, a distinctly Ukrainian narrative has not formed in relation to Odesa. Moreover, a locally-rooted resistance to linguistic and cultural Ukrainization policies substantially prevented such narrative from crystalizing in local society. A summary and comparison of the Oddesite identity narratives discussed in the subsequent sections, as well as their treatment by Russia, are summarized in Table 5.1 below.
5.2.1 Imperial Odesa and the ‘Novorossiya’ Identity

The Imperial-era narrative has been an important cultural element in post-Soviet Odesa. Even though it has not been labelled as such until 2014, the Imperial narrative significantly overlapped with the ‘Novorossiya’ political concept. For example, few recalled nowadays that Odesa’s National University was once called Imperial Novorossiya University and in 2011 the Balta district council of the Odesa region planned to erect a monument in honor of the Russian Tsar Nicholas II.²

Founded by Catherine II in 1794 as a stronghold of the Russian Empire against the Ottomans, Odesa experienced one of the fastest growth rates in the world.³ In 1824, the city became the governors’ seat of Novorossiya and (Eastern) Bessarabia. It was also a cosmopolitan city, becoming the home of Greek, Italian, Polish, German, French, Bulgarian, Russian, and Ukrainian communities.⁴ Moreover, Odesa was considered traditionally as "the Jewish city" of the Russian Empire.⁵ However, the diverse city became part of Russia’s plan to organize local ethnic communities into a homogenous political body.

The ‘Novorossiya’ geopolitical narrative was infused into Odesa from Russia. Novorossiya (or ‘New Russia’) was an artificial administrative concept established in 1764 by the Tsar of Russia to Russify the territory of present-day Eastern and Southeastern Ukraine across the Northern Black Sea Region.⁶ It was an attempt to assimilate local and newly arrived peoples into the Russian culture, language, and identity.⁷

However, this was not the end in itself. The main goal for the Novorossiya project was to create a population loyal to the Romanov Dynasty. Some Oddesites still uphold the political identity associated with the Russian Empire by celebrating the Dynasty. For
example, every year thousands of Oddesites participate in the celebration of the Day of National Unity and in the procession which takes place alongside Primorsky Boulevard with its final destination being the monument to the Founders of Odesa, Catherine II. Even though nostalgia about an Imperial past became a key identity component for some Oddesites, the Novorossiya concept (in sum) has several challenges which prevented it from becoming dominant in the region.

This narrative was of particular interest to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), thus also incorporating a religious element. However, aside from being unappealing to secular peoples and non-Orthodox residents, there were other deterrents. For example, the precise definition of ‘Novorossiya’ remained conceptually ambiguous as various accounts prioritize different elements of the political identity. With little agreement around the concept, a solid identity narrative could not crystalize.

During the Imperial era, however, Odesa was not only important as a political hub to maintain control over the Eastern and Southern Black Sea regions. It was also important as a key trading port. Odesa was one of the main trading ports of Imperial Russia, with active trade routes leading to Turkey, Western European nations, and the Caucasus. In 1819 Odesa became a free port. This relaxed tax regime lasted until 1858. Following the end of the Crimean War, Odesa became the headquarters for the Russian Steam Navigation and Trading Company, which was established in 1856. By the early 1900s, the company was one of the largest steamship entities in the Russian Empire. However, with the arrival of the Soviet era, the city’s economic importance became relatively less pronounced within the Union.
5.2.2 The Soviet Odesa Narrative

After the incorporation of Odesa into the Soviet Union, it was soon eclipsed by other cities economically. It lost its unique importance as a port city hub on the Black Sea relative to other population and industrial centres. However, following the Great Patriotic War, the city once again emerged as a symbol of glory.

With stories of German and Romanian atrocities serving as an ideological backdrop, the mainstream accounts of the Second World War in Odesa dictate that the Soviet regime brought prosperity and freedom to the Oddessites. During the Second World War Odesa was occupied by the Romanians between October 1941 and April 1944. Even though the Romanian administration was less brutal than the German administration in other parts of occupied Ukraine, it was nonetheless responsible for the murder of nearly 200,000 Jews as well as Roma, Sinti, and Slavic peoples. Soviet and Russian leaders commemorated the contribution of the city to the victory against Nazi Germany, and its allies, by awarding medals to local veterans and Partisan’s Day celebrations take place on yearly basis. However, these narratives of ‘Soviet glory’ have been challenged.

The history of the Second World War applicable to Odesa has been the subject of competing interpretations. On one hand, the dominant local narrative has glorified the Soviet victory, in which Odesa played an important part. For example, in 2010 the City Council voted to incorporate a Five Point Star into the Odesa Coat of Arms to commemorate the “hero city” status granted by Moscow following the Second World War. This became an important component of the ‘Great Patriotic War’ heroic myth in the post-Soviet era.
On the other hand, a memory of Soviet atrocities remained. For example, elderly residents, either directly or based on stories from their parents, remember how Soviet airplanes conducted air raids in the city following the Red Army’s initial defeat and withdrawal from Odesa in October 1941. These bombardments were often conducted with disregard for civilians. Moreover, they resulted in the destruction of unique architectural landmarks, which were a part of the cultural foundation of the city. This anti-Soviet sentiment compelled many non-Jewish residents of Odesa to interpret life under the Romanians as better than under the Soviet regime. However, the cultural memory of Odesa within the Soviet Union is not entirely related to war experiences.

In the imagination of a number of generations, not only of Ukrainians, Odesa possessed an identity of a "holy fool" of the Soviet Union. Even though its uniqueness in terms of culture and literature crystalized during Imperial times, this heritage continued to define the city well into the Soviet era. However, in the post-Soviet era, this distinct cultural identity in Odesa was marginal in the political rift between the city and Kyiv. As discussed in the next section, the nationalizing Ukrainian state became increasingly intolerant of local popular desire to maintain Russian as the dominant language in education, communication, and government Affairs.

5.2.3 Odesa as Part of the ‘Russian Speaking World’

The language-centric identity of Odesa became especially potent in the post-Soviet era as the city experienced a relative decline in economic significance. Moreover, the several linguistic Ukrainization campaigns launched by the Kyiv government following the collapse of the Soviet Union facilitated the hardening of the Oddesites’ identity focused on the Russian language.
During the Imperial era, Russian was the language of inter-ethnic communication in a highly diverse city. Odesa was alleged to have a local language, a variant of Russian with a number of words and expressions taken from many other cultures, which facilitating a distinct local identity centered around linguistics.\textsuperscript{24} However, considering the diversity of ethnicities and religions, language was one of the only practical methods to unite a culturally diverse society. With the post-Second World War demographics shifted. 60 percent of locals identified themselves as Ukrainians and 30 percent as Russian;\textsuperscript{25} even with this demographic shift, however, the Russian language continued to define Odesa’s identity.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Odessites have been the subject of several linguistic ‘Ukrainization’ campaigns. According to a 2009 survey, the Russian language was spoken by 91 percent of Oddesites while 6 percent of the respondents spoke Ukrainian.\textsuperscript{26} As a response to Kyiv’s Ukrainianization policies, representatives of local cultural organizations and political elites established their own ‘Odessite myth’ which asserted the city’s distinctiveness from the rest of the Ukrainian nation.\textsuperscript{27} In fact, many focused on the city’s historic ties with Russia.\textsuperscript{28} As discussed in later sections, this language-based identity was symbiotic with Moscow’s perceived role as protector of the Russian language and compatriots in Odesa.

The table below summarizes the three identities associated with Odesa as well as post-Soviet Russia’s treatment of them.
Table. 5.1 Summary of Narratives Associated with Odesa and Treatment by Russia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Narrative Details</th>
<th>Imperial Odesa</th>
<th>Soviet Odesa</th>
<th>Part of a ‘Russian Speaking World’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Draws on elements of the ‘Novorossiya’ political concept; Romanov Dynasty as key symbolic entity. Stronghold of Russian Empire against other regional powers. Important economic hub for the Russian Empire. City with a unique culture and linguistic identity.</td>
<td>Competing interpretations of Soviet regime’s actions during the Second World War. Some competing interpretations of life under Romanian administration. City with a unique culture and linguistic identity. Heroism of the Soviet victory is celebrated. Perceived threat of ‘falsification’ of the memory of the Second World War.</td>
<td>Russian language unity in Odesa. Originated from Russian language as the language of inter-ethnic communication during the Imperial era. City with a unique culture and linguistic identity. Basis of preservation of unique identity as a response to linguistic Ukrainization campaigns from Kyiv in post-Soviet era.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia’s Position Toward Narrative</td>
<td>Superficially supported.</td>
<td>Supported by Russia.</td>
<td>Most Supported by Russia.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3 Consequential Period 1: 2004 Presidential Election and 2005 Orange Revolution

The purpose of the following sections is to qualitatively assess the components of Russia’s perceived role and power in Odesa around the 2004 Presidential election and 2005 Orange Revolution Period. This data later contributes to the quantitative assessment of the role-power gap, which constitutes Moscow’s system-level incentive (IV) to apply coercion.

Russia’s perceived role and power in Odesa around this consequential short period have several characteristics. First, the degree of Russia’s role specificity was moderate due to the presence of multiple identity narratives, with the Soviet Odesa and the ‘Russian speaking world’ appearing dominant in Moscow's articulated role. Second, the geographic
scope of Russia’s role in Odesa also remained moderate; its perceived need to protect the Russian language and the pro-Soviet memory of the Great Patriotic War applied to Odesa as a consequence of broader compatriots policy for Ukraine. Third, the level of acceptance of Russia’s perceived role by Oddesites was high. This is as a function of significant role-affirming social mobilization. This could be observed through local legislation and the high attendance rate at role-affirming events by local citizens, whose political preferences aligned with those of Russia. Fourth, there was a low level of cross-border commitment to Moscow’s perceived role due to the presence of cross-border links which never passed the threshold of informal ties among Russian and local pro-Moscow organizations in Odesa. The information regarding Russia’s perceived role specificity, scope, clarity, acceptance, and formalization provided in the subsequent sections for the 2004 Presidential Election and Orange Revolution is summarized in Table 5.2 below.

5.3.1 Russia’s Articulation of Role and Protector Responsibility

The 2004 Presidential election and the Orange Revolution period were key for the formation of Moscow’s vision and policy of engagement with compatriots in Odesa. Moscow’s promotion of the Russian language and the pro-Soviet history of the Great Patriotic War were the leading narratives that defined its perceived role in this city and region. However, these narratives were not bespoke to Odesa. Rather, they were a part of a much broader commitment by Russia to promote the Russian language and the pro-Soviet account of the Second World War where they were threatened. At the same time, however, Russia’s narrative also gave a superficial ‘nod’ to the imperial narrative, which was fuelled by a sense of injustice associated with a loss of territory (and its people); this narrative,
even though less potent than the former two, was geographically bespoke to the northern Black Sea region.

Putin has famously claimed that "the Russian nation became one of the biggest, if not the biggest, ethnic groups in the world to be divided by borders." The statement, made in 2014, was a consequence of the perception of historic injustice faced by Russia, to which the Kremlin has alluded for years prior. This sense of injustice was rooted in the country’s loss of much of its territory and a significant percentage of its perceived “countrymen and women.”

The ascendance of Vladimir Putin to power also corresponded with an emergence of a targeted policy toward the Northern Black Sea region. Russia became focused on its historic, Czarist-era, right to the lands surrounding the Sea, which were part of the Russian Empire along with its population.

The "Principal Directions of the Federation Toward Compatriots Living Abroad for 2002–2005” was a foundational Federal document that defined Russia’s broader policy toward its diaspora. The text outlined that Russia’s policy toward ‘compatriots’ living abroad focused on “1) adjustment in their adopted country, with 2) a deliberate conservation of their ethnocultural specificity, but also with a view to 3) the formation of mechanisms for their legal and controlled migration to Russia and the reaching of an optimal balance between both processes.”

At a 2005 conference on “The Russian Language on the Boundary of Millennia,” Putin’s wife Lyudmila declared in her speech: “The confirmation of the borders of the Russian world is also the assertion and strengthening of Russia’s national interests. The Russian language unifies the people of the Russian world—the aggregate of those who
speak and think in that language. The borders of the Russian world extend along the borders of Russian language usage.\textsuperscript{34} The need to maintain Russian language education across the post-Soviet space was also emphasized.\textsuperscript{35} Even though the identity of the ‘Russian compatriots’ was defined through the common use of the Russian language at the conference, a commonly-shared historic interpretation and experiences associated with Great Patriotic War were also evoked. However, these principles also become a part of the political discourse at a regional level in Russia.

During the early 2000s, Mayor of Moscow Yuri Luzhkov was among the active participants in Russia’s ‘protection’ of compatriots. For example, Luzhkov’s Administration established the International Council of Russian Compatriots and Muscovite House of Compatriots in 2004, designed to support Russian citizens and speakers across former Soviet republics. The organizations provided grants and scholarships to young compatriots living in the Baltic states and Ukraine to study in Russia, legal defence aid, and school material in the Russian language.\textsuperscript{36} Even though Russia’s perceived protector role

\textbf{5.3.2 Degree of Local Acceptance of Russia’s Role as Protector}

Local grievances in Odesa in relation to the national government in Kyiv were symbiotic with Moscow’s perceived role as a promoter of the Russian language and the pro-Soviet ‘universal’ memory of the events of the Second World War. Backing for the Party of Regions and the local Pro-Russia city administration can be used as a proxy for the local level of acceptance of Russia’s role. Local elected representatives of the Party of Regions held strong pro-Moscow positions and possessed extensive political linkages to
Moscow. Moreover, by voting for local representatives, such as mayor Rouslan Bodelan, people were also voting for a greater political orientation toward Moscow.

The platform for the Party of Regions in Odesa in the 2004 Presidential Election was substantially focused on better relations with Russia as well as challenges associated with language rights.\textsuperscript{37} For example, on 24 December 2004 demonstrations took place in Odesa at the local Privoz market, where pro-Yanukovych and pro-Moscow demonstrators crushed oranges as a symbol of resistance against Yushchenko and his ‘orange movement.’\textsuperscript{38}

The vote in Odesa was critical for the result of the 2004 Presidential election. During his visit to the market, Yanukovych stated that “[he] arrived in Odesa to [tell Odessites] that how Odesa votes, this will be the election result. [He is] sure that Odesa will vote correctly and [they] will win.”\textsuperscript{39} In turn, the Party of Regions received over 66 percent of the vote.\textsuperscript{40} However, this pro-Russia sentiment in Odesa could substantially be attributed to local resentment of linguistic and cultural Ukrainization policies from Kyiv.

The majority of the population in Odesa and Southern Ukraine blamed the government in Kyiv for their troubles, with discrimination against the Russian language ranked as the top issue. This sentiment among the local population, in turn, provided an ideal platform for Russia’s perceived protector role. A survey conducted in 2005 by Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) asked respondents to answer “who is specifically to blame for the various troubles?” Nearly 35 percent and 31 percent attached blame to Viktor Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko, respectively. Only 5.8 percent ranked Russia’s foreign policy as the top reason.\textsuperscript{41} Concurrently, 93 percent of the population in the South of Ukraine was in favor of giving the Russian language some
66 percent of respondents in Southern Ukraine believed that the Russian language must be taught to the same extent as the Ukrainian language. However, such support for the Russian language was not only confined to public opinion but directly translated into legislative action.

As a reaction to the linguistic Ukrainization policies emerging from Kyiv, the Odesa Regional Council passed a resolution to defend the local residents’ rights to use, and receive education in, Russian. The legislative ‘package’ consisted of the provisions "On the implementation in the territory of the Odesa region of constitutional norms and provisions of the laws of Ukraine" and “On the ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.” The legal frameworks did not directly define Moscow’s role in supporting the Russian language in Odesa. However, political statements associated with these legal frameworks by politicians indicated that the intended level of cooperation with Russia on language challenges was high.

The high level of acceptance of the platform of the Party of Regions in 2004, and by implication closer ties with Russia and recognition of its role, was advanced by popular pro-Moscow political figures in Odesa. For example, in 2004 the local office of the Party of Regions was headed by Rouslan Bodelan, who served as Head of the Odesa Regional State Administration from 1995 to 1998 and Mayor of Odesa from 1998 to 2005. Among other cases, Bodelan used his official role to run campaigns in favor of Yanukovych and the Party of Regions for several months before the first round of the 2004 election. Following Viktor Yushchenko’s victory, Boudelan fled to Russia as the new government in Kyiv accused him of using his office to aid the Yanukovych campaign. However, aside
from focusing on language-related challenges, local politicians in Odesa also evoked the Imperial narrative as a platform for closer relations with Russia.

The popular Odesa mayor Ruslan Bodelan has given a political ‘nod’ to the Imperial narrative associating the city and region with Russia. For example, when Yushchenko was emerging as the clear victor following the onset of the Orange Revolution in January 2005, Bodelan hinted at the “revival of the so-called ’Novorossiysk Krai’ in Southern Ukraine.”\(^{48}\) However, such statements celebrating the Russian Empire were rare among local Odesa authorities and were as superficial as Russia’s own perception of the narrative.\(^ {49}\) Aside from the Czarist narrative, however, such affirmation of Russia’s perceived protector role in Odesa was also evident through locals’ attendance at large commemorations of the Great Patriotic War.

To celebrate the Great Patriotic War, a monument to Stefan Dzhevetsky, a designer of submarines from Odesa, appeared in Victory Park in early 2004. The opening event was a “well attended” ceremony, drawing in thousands of guests from across the Odesa region.\(^ {50}\) In May 2004, Odessites celebrated the liberation of the city by the Red Army with an event that drew some of the largest crowds in its post-Soviet history.\(^ {51}\) This included several ceremonies and a parade involving War veterans.\(^ {52}\) Even though such role-affirming social mobilization was common in Odesa, the level of commitment to Russia’s perceived role in Odesa remained low around the 2004 Presidential Election and Orange Revolution.

**5.3.3 Formalization of Russia’s Perceived Role in Relation to Odesa**

The high level of acceptance of Moscow’s perceived role, as protector of the Russian language and cultural memory of the Second World War, was not reflected in any
meaningful and long-lasting agreements between Russia and Odesa. The low level of formalization of Russia’s role was defined by informal cross-border language and culture-based agreements by non-governmental organizations.

For example, the South Russian Writers Union, established in 2004 and centered in Odesa, promoted Russian language programs and literature between Russian cultural and linguistic societies with Odesa. The main goal of the Writers Union was the “actualization of the Russian-speaking literary process, popularization of the work of Russian-speaking writers.” Moreover, it promoted the involvement of local and international participants, largely from Russian cities.

Regarding the Soviet-era narrative, the local public organization United Odesa launched a campaign to commemorate and aid local veterans of the Great Patriotic War. This organization, in collaboration with the Moscow Government and the All-Ukrainian Coordination Council of Russian Compatriots Organizations (VKSORS), has launched such events on an annual basis since 2004. However, even such a low level of commitment to Russia’s role in Odesa was a function of Moscow’s persuasion measures in the city and region.

**5.3.4 Russia’s Active Measures Around the 2004 Presidential Election and 2005 Orange Revolution Period**

Language policy and cultural memory associated with the Soviet-era being key areas of a rift with Kyiv were key divisive issues in Ukrainian society during the 2004 Presidential election and the 2005 Orange Revolution period. For Russia, intervention in the 2004 election through persuasion and Active Measures was necessary to promote and legitimize its role as protector of the Russian language and Soviet cultural memory. Moscow’s aim in its coordinated information and public diplomacy campaigns was to
promote this protector role as well as support any efforts to formalize it in relation to local politicians in predominantly Russian-speaking regions.  

Russian state-run media was biased in presenting the information on the elections. Paniotto (2009) writes that Moscow squares were decorated with billboards carrying Yanukovych’s photo and the slogan “vote for President Yanukovych.” Putin's arrival in Ukraine one week prior to the election was also an attempt to mobilize pro-Russian factions in Ukraine. The President of Russia was directly persuading Ukrainian citizens through three national TV channels to vote for Yanukovych. In turn, Putin congratulated Yanukovych twice on his election as the President of Ukraine amid civil disobedience actions when final election results have yet to be declared by Ukraine’s Central Election Commission. However, in tandem with Active Measures targeting Ukraine’s information space more broadly during the Presidential election, there were also persuasion measures focused on Odesa.

As Yanukovych noted in his election campaign in the city, Odesa was instrumental in the outcome of the 2004 election. The corruption of local officials was a major tactic to influence ballot counts in Odesa. A victory for Yanukovych would have translated into the reduction of barriers for Russia to operationalize its perceived role and power in predominantly-Russian speaking regions such as Odesa. According to the Ukrainian Government, Mayor Rouslan Bodelan allegedly took an active part in election fraud in favor of Yanukovych during the 2004 presidential election. In defense of the Mayor, the Russian State Duma Committee on Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Affairs accused the government in Kyiv of a political coup, because an official criminal case against Bodelan was opened after Viktor Yushchenko came to power. After the official
initiation of the criminal case by Ukraine’s Prosecutor General’s office, Bodelan fled to
Saint-Petersburg, where he worked in the city administration and received Russian
citizenship.

5.4 Consequential Period 2: 2010 Ukrainian Presidential Election

The purpose of the following sections is to qualitatively assess the components of
Russia’s role and power in Odesa around the 2010 Presidential Election. This data later
contributes to the quantitative assessment of the role-power gap, which constitutes
Moscow’s system-level incentive (IV) to apply coercion. There were several characteristics
of Russia’s perceived protector role and power around the 2010 Presidential election. First,
the degree of specificity of Russia’s perceived role was moderate, with three narratives
associated with Odesa present on the political landscape. However, the Soviet and the
Russian-language narratives were the main ones, which were part of Russia’s perceived
protector role. Second, the geographic scope of Russia’s articulated role remained relevant
to Odesa largely as a consequence of a broader policy to protect Russian speakers and
promote the Soviet account of the Great Patriotic War across Ukraine. On the other hand,
the ‘imperial narrative’ was only superficially considered by Russia. Third, there were two
main challenge areas in Russia’s narrative focus: 1) resources and rights for Russian-
language education as well as 2) the perceived ‘falsification’ of Great Patriotic War
memory by national governments in the post-Soviet region. Fourth, the level of
formalization of Russia’s perceived role in Odesa remained low, as the level of
commitment to Moscow’s perceived protector role in Odesa was defined by weak cross-
border agreements among Russian and Oddesite organizations.
The greatest change to Russia’s perceived role and power in Odesa, relative to the previously examined period, was the degree of local acceptance of Moscow’s perceived role. The decline in local acceptance of Russia’s perceived role as a function of shifting preference toward the ‘Imperial narrative’ among Oddesites. Aside from the glorification of the Russian Empire, the importance of Odesa as a historic economic hub was also elevated in the public consciousness.

However, an increased misalignment between local public discourse and Moscow’s preferred narratives was among other indicators of decreased acceptance. For example, there were no role-affirming legislative efforts made by local officials in Odesa around the time of the 2010 Presidential election. Such a lack of active role-affirming social mobilization in support of Moscow’s perceived protector role may be attributed to a decline in perceived threat from Kyiv. As highlighted in the discussion below, much of the anticipated threat from Kyiv authorities perceived by the Russian diaspora to its linguistic rights across Eastern and Southern Ukraine did not materialize. The information regarding Russia’s perceived role specificity, scope, clarity, acceptance, and formalization provided in the subsequent sections for the 2010 Presidential election is summarized in Table 5.2 below.

5.4.1 Russia’s Articulation of Role and Protector Responsibility

Around the 2010 Ukraine Presidential Election, Russia’s articulated role encapsulated several elements. First, there was a strong emphasis on the promotion of the Russian language across the post-Soviet space. However, this narrative was applicable to Odesa as a consequence of a broader perceived role by Moscow in relation to regions with a high concentration of Russian-speaking diaspora. Based on the accounts of various
Russian Federal officials and Kremlin representatives in Odesa, the victory in the ‘Great Patriotic War’ was of immense importance for Russia. On the other hand, the imperial narrative was a superficial component articulated by Russian representatives in relation to Odesa.

The dominant narratives used to operationalize Moscow’s perceived protector role focused on two key challenge areas. The language narrative detailed the challenges with education in the Russian language, which has been increasingly suppressed by the Kyiv regime. The Soviet narrative focused on the attempt by post-Soviet national governments to ‘falsify’ the memory of the events of the Second World War.

Preceding the Presidential election, Moscow highlighted the supremacy of the Russian language by disenfranchising Ukrainian. However, this task was outsourced from central figures at the Kremlin to lower-tier politicians. Moreover, considering that Ukrainian was used by an increasing percentage of the country’s population, including in traditionally majority Russophone regions of Ukraine, Russia’s messages became increasingly unrepresentative of de-facto trends.

For example, in May 2009, Kremlin adviser Anatoliy Vasserman, a native of Odesa, represented one of the political Moscow-based think tanks, which contributed to a radicalization of public discussions on Ukrainian national identity and language. In March 2009, Vasserman announced that Ukraine’s integration into Russia in the near future was inevitable; he argued that all those who oppose this process were directly financed by Washington. Vasserman went on to declare that the allegedly “uncompetitive” Ukrainian language was doomed to die out soon for the simple reason that it was “a dialect of
However, aside from such local Russian politicians, similar messaging could be observed by Russian Federal representatives in Odesa.

Statements made by the Russian Consulate were key to determine Moscow’s perceived role in Odesa. The Consulate’s narrative was akin to the one emanating from Russian national political figures such as Anatoliy Vasserman. This similarity between local officials and representatives of the Russian Federation indicates that Odesa was part of a larger vision by Moscow to promote its language and culture across Ukraine. For example, In April 2009, the Consul General of the Russian Federation Alexander Grachev stated that the Russian people and Odessites have “one faith, culture, one history.” Such narrative, common among Russian politicians, was an attempt to diminish any linguistic, cultural, or historic distinction between Odessites and Russians. However, such representatives were only one source where the Kremlin’s perspective on Odesa could be observed.

The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate was another convenient channel through which Russia’s government articulated its perceived protector role. Through its official Church representatives in Odesa, Russia signaled it would take an active role in the promotion of the Russian language in Odesa. For example, from 2009 to 2011 the Consulate General of the Russian Federation in Odesa and the Church presented more than a hundred books to the Sunday school of the Odesa Transfiguration Cathedral. In his response, Bishop Alexy of the Odesa diocese thanked Russian diplomats for their attention and assistance in creating an impressive Sunday school library in the cathedral. These Russian language books were also distributed to local secular educational institutions.
The Russian Consulate General in Odesa financially supported local Russian language youth and university programs. Moreover, Moscow-supported Russian language and literature conferences, such as the International Scientific Conference "Russistics and Modernity", dedicated to the 200th anniversary of the birth of Nikolai Vasilyevich Gogol, which was held in Odesa. However, these efforts to promote the Russian language were in tandem with campaigns to advance the pro-Moscow narrative of the Great Patriotic War.

In 2009 Russia’s leadership began paying special attention to the anti-heroic ‘Great Patriotic War’ narratives being disseminated by increasingly nationalizing governments across the post-Soviet space. The timing of this increased effort may be tied to the 2010 Presidential election in Ukraine as the incumbent Yushchenko government stepped up its nationalistic rhetoric during the campaign period. The ‘heroism’ of the Soviet victory in the ‘Great Patriotic War’ was increasingly challenged by national governments in the newly independent republics such as Ukraine. In fact, the Soviet narrative often served as a ‘strawman’ in election campaigns to mobilize popular support for a competing nationalist historic account, which could be used as an ideological platform for political power. Russia’s executive and legislative branches attempted to counter these trends.

For example, in April and May 2009, two bills were prepared for Russia’s State Duma (parliament), which criminalized “the rehabilitation of Nazism.” Concurrently, Russia’s President Dmitry Medvedev established a new commission with a cross-border mandate to “counteract attempts to falsify history to the detriment of the interests of Russia” as well as subject the two draft bills to the public and legislative discussion.
legislative frameworks proposed that the denial of the victory of the USSR in the Second World be made a criminal offence.69

Konstantin Zatulin, Deputy Chair of the Duma Committee on the Affairs of the Commonwealth of Independent States, guided the efforts on the preservation of the memory of the Second World War. “He claimed that special attention should be given [by Russia’s government] on how the falsification of the accounts of the Second World War are often interwoven with anti-Russian politics in the states of the former Soviet Union.”70 The purview of his draft proposed law in the Russian State Duma was to cover both ‘falsification attempts within Russia as well as its ‘near abroad.’71 The draft specifically mentioned Ukraine, Latvia, and Estonia.72 Zatulin’s commission achieved very little, but this multi-year legislative effort is an indicator of Russia’s perceived self-prescribed role as protector of the Great Patriotic War narrative.

Concurrently, however, the advancement of the ‘Great Patriotic War’ narrative received relatively little attention from the Russian Consulate in Odesa. For example, the Consulate decided not to invest in the Museum dedicated to Soviet Partisans of the Second World War opened by the local patriotic organization "Kolokol."73 However, even with such clear commitments by Russia to protect ‘compatriots’ across Ukraine, Oddesites were not entirely receptive to Moscow’s perceived role.

5.4.2 Degree of Local Acceptance of Russia’s Role

Relative to the previously examined period, the level of acceptance of Russia’s perceived protector role has declined. Around the 2010 Presidential Election, there was a high level of participation in role-affirming events; although some of the well-attended events did not align with Russia’s perceived protector role. Even though Moscow
continued to support the Russian language and Great Patriotic War narratives, Oddesite’s embrace of Russia began to incorporate an ‘Imperial’ component. Aside from broader support for Imperial Pan-Slavism, reminiscent of the narrative articulated by Dugin (1997), many locals also embraced Odesa’s historic economic significance for the Russian Empire.

Many Oddesites were receptive to the pro-Soviet Great Patriotic War narrative articulated by Moscow. For example, a rally took place on the occasion of the 65th anniversary of the "Attack of the Century" - the sinking of the German transport "Wilhelm Gustloff" by the Soviet submarine C-13 of the Baltic Fleet. The submarine commander was Oddesite Alexander Marinesko, who was made a local hero.

On another occasion, masses of Oddesites gathered to demonize Stepan Bandera, a symbol of anti-Soviet resistance in Ukraine. According to Anton Davidchenko, the leader of the Odesa youth public organization "Kolokol", thousands of residents gathered for ‘theatrical trials’ to express their views on the "accomplice of fascism." The event was attended by locals over several days. Moreover, attendees publicly condemn the decision of Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko to award Stepan Bandera the title of Hero of Ukraine.

Concurrently, there was a strong indication of local acceptance of Moscow’s perceived protector role through the promotion of Russian language use at a regional level. For example, upon his election, the mayor of Odesa Alexey Kostusev promised to defend the rights of the Russian language in the City. This message was delivered immediately following a meeting with a delegation from Moscow addressing interregional cooperation on culture, language, and economy. Even though many in Odesa accepted Moscow’s role
in the protection of Russian speakers and the memory of the Great Patriotic War, the Imperial narrative was becoming significant in the local consciousness.

On 4 November 2009, the Day of National Unity celebrated in Russia, pro-Russian movements of Odesa held their own "Russian March" in Odesa. The holiday commemorated the expulsion of the Polish-Lithuanian authorities from the Russian Empire. In Fact, the informal holiday adopted by Oddesites in 2009 was akin to the public holiday during the Czarist era called Day of Moscow’s Liberation. The highly-attended event in Odesa became known as the "March of Unity" drawing a cultural link directly with Russia’s commemoration. Attendees celebrated the Imperial Odesa with photographs and large Andreev flags, originally used as Naval insignia during the Romanov rule. However, such embrace of the imperial narrative also diffused to local legislative bodies.

There was a legislative effort to affirm Russia’s protector role in Odesa. The themes invoked by the Odesa Regional Council have an ‘Imperial’ undertone, which was a departure from Moscow’s preferred narrative. For example, on 29 May 2009 deputies of the Odesa Regional Council voted to adopt a declaration of the Third Council of Slavic Peoples of Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia, drafted on 25 April 2009. The 25 April declaration was adopted in Kyiv with the participation of the spiritual and political leaders of the three states. Following the event, Odesa Regional Councillor from the Natalia Vitrenko Bloc stated that the deputies of the Council decided to create a Center for Slavic Civilization with its base at the Odesa State University. Even though activities by local political figures indicated a significant level of support for Russia’s protector role, albeit, with a different focus, the level of formal commitment to Moscow’s protection was low.
5.4.3 Degree of Formality of Russia’s Role in Odesa

The degree of cross-border commitment to Moscow’s perceived protector role, either as a promoter of the Russian language or pro-Soviet memory of the Second World War, was low. This weak formalization of Russia’s perceived role was nonetheless maintained by cross-border cultural exchange, scholarly conferences, and Moscow-backed GONGO.s.

International literary conferences among universities, funded and supported by Russian institutions, were held on an annual basis in Odesa. For example, the XII International Scientific Conference "Russistics and Modernity" was dedicated to the 200th anniversary of the birth of Nikolai Gogol, a seminal Russian novelist, and playwright. The event was held in Odesa in collaboration with the Odesa I. I. Mechnikov University from 30 September to 4 October 2009. The organizers of the conference were the Department of the Russian Language of the Odesa National University (Ukraine), the Department of Intercultural Communication from the Russian State Pedagogical University in St. Petersburg, as well as the International and Ukrainian Association of Teachers of Russian Language and Literature.\(^{82}\) However, universities were only one of the channels for the formalization of cross-border linkages through which Moscow’s support for Odesa’s ‘competitors’ could be delivered.

In 2009, Russian GONGO Ruskiy Mir opened a Center of Russian Culture at the Humanities Department building of the Mechnikov Odesa National University. The Russian Consulate in Odesa took part in the opening of the Center. The Russkiy Mir foundation promoted the center as a hub for the advancement of the Russian language in education in Odesa.\(^{83}\) However, the maintenance of these cross-border ties in Odesa, in
support of Russia’s perceived protector role in the City and Region, were a function of Moscow’s successful public diplomacy and media campaigns.

5.4.4 Russia’s Active Measures in Odesa Around the 2010 Presidential Election

At the tactical level, Russia’s public diplomacy and persuasion operations around the 2010 Presidential Election had two goals: 1) shed light on the Russian language-related challenges posed to compatriots by the Yushchenko government, and 2) based these grievances, affect the outcome of the election in favor of Yanukovych through popular mobilization. In turn, Russia hoped the new President would incorporate Moscow as a partner in the solution of the language-based discrimination challenges. Through the election of Yanukovych, a more favorable environment could be created for Russia to deploy persuasion measures in Odesa and thus, operationalize its perceived protector role.

Around the 2010 election, Active Measures, as part of a broader operation covering Ukraine and tailored approaches to Odesa, were deployed to affect local acceptance and commitment to Moscow’s perceived role.

Relative to the Orange Revolution period of 2004-2005, Russia’s actions in the 2010 Presidential election were less intrusive. Such relative restraint may also be a reason for the decline in the acceptance of Russia’s protector role by the local population in Odesa. Unlike 2004 and 2005, when Russia’s top leadership has openly endorsed its favorite candidate Viktor Yanukovych, in 2009-2010 Russia’s politicians did not state a clear preference for any of the candidates until the second round of the election. Only in the second phase of the election campaign, Russia’s media and ranking members of the executive and legislative branches openly endorsed Viktor Yanukovych.
A key platform for the diffusion of Russia’s endorsement has been through its Federal television channels, which in 2010 were watched by the majority of the population in Eastern Ukraine. For example, Yanukovych emerged as the favorite candidate on the eve of the first round on the Rossiya 1 channel, where he was featured in eleven of the thirteen reports and shown speaking in ten of fifteen programs. Even though such broad campaigns were meant to affect all regions with large Russian diaspora populations, there were also tools and tactics which were bespoke to Odesa.

Russia’s operations in Odesa had the goal of solidifying public support for Yanukovych while marginalizing the adversaries to the Moscow-allied Party of Regions. Russia delivered funds to entities, which engaged in persuasion activities on behalf of Moscow. For example, Russian intelligence provided covert support to separatists and pro-Russian unionists in Odesa. These entities helped the Russian government illegally distribute passports to Oddesites who were allied with Moscow. However, Russia’s support was not only confined to key individuals.

The Rodina (Motherland) Party in Odesa, with whom the Party of Regions cooperated, was led by Igor Markov, a man with a criminal history that extended to the 1990s. Various journalistic and Ukrainian government sources alleged that Markov used corrupt business sources, organized crime, and covert Russian money to finance a network of anti-Ukrainian organizations throughout Odesa. Markov’s covert criminal activities in support of Moscow culminated in the murder of a 21-year-old Ukrainian nationalist student activist, Maksym Chaika, by an Antifa (Anti-Fascist) NGO affiliated with the Rodina Party.

As a consequence, several Russian diplomats were expelled from Ukraine in August 2009 after they were accused of undertaking activities “incompatible with their status,”
including espionage. The diplomats included the Consul General in Odesa, Aleksandr Grachev, and senior adviser to the Russian ambassador Vladimir Lysenko. The diplomats were accused of providing covert financial assistance to the Rodina Party and Markov. However, Russian intelligence operations extended beyond bribery.

One of the last occurrences, when the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) undertook operations against Russia under the Yushchenko government, was in late January 2010. Five Russian intelligence agents were identified and arrested on the Ukrainian-Russian border near Odesa. They were charged with espionage in favour of Moscow.

5.5 Consequential Period 3: Russia’s Regional Protector Role Before the February Crisis

The purpose of the following sections is to qualitatively assess the components of Russia’s perceived protector role and power in Odesa during the months preceding the February 2014 crisis. This data contributes to the quantitative assessment of the role-power gap, which constitutes Moscow’s system-level incentive (IV1) to apply coercion in the form of gray zone tools and tactics.

The sections below highlight that, compared to the previous consequential period, there are several continuing trends associated with Russia’s perceived role and power in Odesa. First, Moscow’s perceived role in Odesa was focused on the protection of the Russian language and the ‘accurate’ account of the ‘Great Patriotic War.’ Moreover, these narratives continued to lead over the ‘Imperial’ storyline. Second, the two narratives continued to apply to Odesa largely as an implication of a broader commitment by Moscow to protect ‘compatriots’ across Ukraine. Third, Russian political figures and GONGOs continued to emphasize Russian-language education and issues with the ‘falsification’ of the accounts of the Second World War as key challenge areas. Third, the level of social
mobilization in support of Russia’s perceived protector role declined compared to the previously examined period; however, the decline in active acceptance may be a misinterpretation of the real level of acceptance. Active acceptance may have transitioned into passive acceptance of Russia’s perceived protector role, as the ascendance of President Yanukovych to power in 2010 corresponded with a decline in cultural and linguistic Ukrainization policies.94 In turn, the level of perceived threat by the Russian diaspora declined and protection from Moscow was no longer essential. Fourth, the level of formality of Russia’s role in relation to Odesa was characterized by weak cross-border relations among local organizations and Moscow-funded GONGOs. The information regarding Russia’s perceived role specificity, scope, clarity, acceptance, and formalization provided in the subsequent sections for the pre-crisis onset period is summarized in Table 5.2 below.

5.5.1 Russia’s Articulation of Role and Protector Responsibility

In the months preceding the 21 February 2014 crisis onset, Russia’s perceived protector role in Odesa focused on Russian language education and the preservation of the ‘heroic’ image of the Soviet victory in the ‘Great Patriotic War.’ However, these narratives’ relevance to Odesa continued as a consequence of a broader emphasis on the protection of Russian-speaking ‘compatriots’ and policies to counter the ‘falsification’ of Soviet (or Russian) history in Ukraine. Concurrently, the ‘Imperial’ narrative was present in Russia’s perceived role but to a marginal degree relative to the two former narratives.

In Odesa, Russia desired stronger ties with local organizations. For example, on 25 May 2013, a meeting took place between the Southern District Coordination Council of organizations of Russian compatriots and the Russian GONGO Yuri Didenko, Head of the
Rossotrudnichestvo Representative Office in the Odesa Russian Cultural Center.95 Several challenge areas were considered: 1) the issue of legislation on the State Program of Voluntary Resettlement to the Russian Federation of ‘Compatriots’ Living Abroad, and 2) exchange of experience and interaction of public organizations between the regions of Russia and the Southern District of Ukraine in education and culture.96 However, other indicators of Moscow’s perceived role in the protection of Russian language education were in the agendas and programs developed by its GONGOs.

For example, on 3 September 2013, the “Investment in Russian Language Education” project was launched by the organizations Russkiy Mir and Rossotrudnichestvo in Odesa.97 The leader of the local pro-unity public organization "United Odesa" took part in the celebration. Valentin Chernov presented the model educational institution with Russian language fairy tale books published by the Russkiy Mir Foundation and Rossotrudnichestvo, specifically targeted at primary school children in Ukraine. As claimed by the two Russian organizations, the purpose of this campaign is to promote a “balance of Ukrainian and Russian classes.”98 However, in tandem with the promotion of the Russian language, Moscow also contributed resources to the advancement of the pro-Soviet narrative of the ‘Great Patriotic War.’

On 5 May 2013, in collaboration with Russia’s Consulate, local authorities and public activists prepared large-scale activities to celebrate Victory Day in Odesa. Activities included car races, commemorations, and ceremonies for veterans in every city district were. The multi-day events gathered tens of thousands of locals.99 Demonstrations also took place prior to the main 9 May celebration to discredit the ‘falsification of the memory of the Great Patriotic War.’100
Even though marginal, relative to the language-based and Great Patriotic War victory narratives, the ‘Imperial’ storyline became a component of Russia’s perceived protector role. For example, on 25 May 2013, the Russian Ambassador to Ukraine Zurabov took part in a joint meeting of the parliamentary groups of Russia and Ukraine in Odesa. The day of the event was selected as the 1025th anniversary of the baptism of Rus’ in Great Novgorod. The delegation of Russian deputies was headed by the First Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee for CIS Affairs and Relations with Compatriots Dmitry Sablin. At the event, Russian and Ukrainian representatives discussed cross-border ties on the basis of Odesa’s centuries-old historic ties with the Russian Empire. Even with such deep-rooted conviction by Russia of its protector role, the local level of acceptance of this perceived role in Odesa remained relatively modest.

5.5.2 Degree of Local Acceptance of Russia’s Role

Moscow’s protector narrative pertaining to Odesa emphasized the protection of Russian speakers and the ‘falsification of the memory’ of the Second World War; however local acceptance of such did not wholly align with Moscow’s expectations. Local elites and the public in Odesa generally agreed that the Russian language and the pro-Soviet narrative of the ‘Great Patriotic War’ are legitimate. However, there was no indication from local politicians or the public that Moscow should be directly involved in the protection of these narratives in Odesa preceding the February 2014 crisis. Moreover, although less emphasized by Moscow, the Imperial narrative, became increasingly influential in Odesa’s political environment.

For example, a minority of the local population in Odesa in late 2013 and early 2014 believed that Moscow had the right to intervene in support of Russian-speaking
‘compatriots.’ A 2014 KIIS survey indicated that only 30 percent believed such an intervention would be legitimate.\textsuperscript{102}

The arrival of Yanukovych created permissive conditions at the national level for the support of the Russian language at a local level. However, the arrival of Yanukovych did not affect local acceptance of Russia’s perceived protector role in Odesa as anticipated. Russian speakers in Odesa believed their native language required support following years of Ukrainianization under the Yushchenko government.\textsuperscript{103} Russia was willing to provide such support to the diaspora, but the local political establishment did not explicitly recognize Moscow’s participation in the efforts.

For example, one of the most significant local efforts to promote the Russian language in Odesa was the “Program for the Preservation and Development of the Russian Language of 2011-2015.” The Program was developed and approved by the Odesa City Council.\textsuperscript{104} However, unlike the case with “On the Implementation in the Territory of the Odesa Region of Constitutional Norms and Provisions of the Laws of Ukraine” in 2004, there was no indication that Moscow could be a party, or participant, in its implementation. This is despite the fact that the Russian Consulate was historically active in Odessite politics. Even though Moscow was excluded from the solution to local language challenges and the protection of the narrative of the Great Patriotic War, however, the Imperial narrative was gaining popular momentum in Odesa prior to the 2014 crisis onset.

The Odesa Clashes of November 2013-May 2014 were an indicator of strong local support for Russia’s perceived role applicable to Odesa. However, when examining the messages at highly-attended local pro-Russia events, there was evidence of strong local support for the ‘Imperial’ narrative. For example, on 4 November 2013, the traditional
Russian March (March of the Unity of the Russian World) was held in Odesa. The event drew in many thousands of more participants relative to the previous year. During the March, people chanted "Glory to Russia!", "Odesa is a Russian city!", "New Russia (Novorossiya)!" In turn, the march ended with a crowded meeting at the monument to Catherine II.105

In tandem with the growing unrest in Kyiv, on 16 January 2014, six days before crisis onset, Odessites began to strongly promote the unification of Russia and Ukraine. Activists collected signatures in support of the Customs Union proposal with Russia while waving Imperial flags.106 Subsequently, the Russian Unity Party, originally from Crimea, launched a campaign in support of a Customs Union with Russia.107 As noted by the organization, “a customs union is the choice of the Russian Unity party and of Oddesites.”108 Even though many members of the public mobilized in support of Russia, however, the formal level of commitment to Moscow’s perceived protector role was low.

5.5.3 Degree of Formality of Russia’s Role in Odesa

The degree of cross-border formalization of Moscow’s perceived role as protector of Russian speakers and heroic account of the Great Patriotic War was low. The commitment to Russia’s perceived role was largely defined by local-level cross-border ties among educational institutions, such as the Odesa National University and Kremlin-funded cultural organization Russkiy Mir. In recognition of the city’s importance to Russia and Ukraine, Odesa has also become a location for intergovernmental dialogue between Kyiv and Moscow. However, these negotiations were indirectly connected to any of the components of Russia’s perceived role applicable to Odesa.
For example, the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation General Vladimir Kolokoltsev, and the Head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine Vitaliy Zakharchenko, met in Odesa to discussed issues of ensuring security in the preparation and holding of mass sports, cultural, and entertainment events, as well as improving information exchange between departments.109

Concurrently, Moscow-backed GONGOs, such as the Russkiy Mir, continued to fund local ‘Russian Centers’ in Odesa, most notably in the Odesa National University. Such centers were not only focused on the study of the Russian language and the city’s Soviet heritage, but their curricula incorporated study abroad programs for Oddessite students in Moscow and other Russian cities.110

5.5.4 Russia’s Active Measures Leading Preceding Crisis Onset

The dissemination of Russia’s perspective of the causes of civil unrest across Ukraine in December and January 2014 prior to crisis onset, was an essential task for Moscow if it was to uphold its role and power across Eastern Ukraine. Through the implementation of an information campaign, Moscow desired to mobilize support for the embattled pro-Russian president Yanukovych.

In targeting the Eastern Ukrainian diaspora through Active Measures in the information domain, Moscow desired to demonstrate the malevolence of anti-Yanukovych factions. In turn, this persuasion would have also guaranteed the receptiveness of many Odessites to Russian protection. By mobilizing such public support for Moscow’s narrative, Russia could also protect local pro-Moscow political elites, who became a key channel through which Moscow-backed organizations formed their linkages with Russia.
The demonstrations on Maidan Square in Kyiv and other parts of Ukraine coincided with a structural reorganization of state-run media and news agencies in Russia. For example, on 9 December 2013, RIA Novosti, one of the Russian government’s most prominent news platforms was replaced with Russia Today (RT).111 This re-organization and centralization of its main news agencies, targeting audiences outside of Russia into a single media entity, enabled Moscow to coordinate information delivery more effectively across the post-Soviet region. However, there were also targeted Active Measures which were allegedly deployed by Russia in Odesa in February 2014, immediately prior to crisis onset.

Phone conversations wiretapped by the Ukrainian Security Services (SBU) indicated that Russian officials materially supported the Odesa clashes, which took place between Nov. 2013 and April 2014. In August 2016, the SBU submitted a report to the Obolonsky Court in Kyiv indicating that the First Deputy Chair of the State Duma Committee for CIS Affairs and Relations with Compatriots Konstantin Zatulin spoke with President Putin's aide Sergei Glazyev on 27 February 2014 about how they “financed Odesa.”112 However, such persuasion and Active Measures were not confined to the pre-crisis period. As a function of its incentive and opportunity to apply coercion, Moscow continued to deploy them following Yanukovych’s departure from Kyiv on 21 February 2014.

Table 2. below summarizes the characteristics of Russia’s perceived role and relative power across the examined consequential events.
### Table 5.2. Summary of Trends in Russia’s Perceived Role and Relative Power Across the Consequential Events (or Short Periods) in Odesa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Specificity</td>
<td><strong>Moderate and consistent</strong>: emphasized language-based narrative but interweaved Soviet-era Second World War narrative; Russia superficially supported the ‘imperial narrative.’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Scope</td>
<td><strong>Moderate and consistent</strong>: perceived protector role not geographically bespoke to Odesa; emphasis on the protection of language minority rights is attributed to a broader policy of protection of ‘compatriots.’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Clarity</td>
<td><strong>Moderate and consistent</strong>: Russian language rights in education threat by Ukrainian authorities, Soviet WWII memory falsification issue.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Acceptance</td>
<td><strong>A high</strong> degree of acceptance through role-affirming events and legislation.</td>
<td><strong>A decline in <em>active</em> acceptance; misalignment between Russian and local preferences.</strong></td>
<td><strong>A decline in <em>active</em> acceptance. Increased local preference for Imperial narrative; low desire for Russian protection.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Formality</td>
<td><strong>Low level of formality</strong>: cross-border ties largely reserved to local-level cultural organizations.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**5.6 Irredentism in Odesa: Permissive and Costly Conditions for Intervention (IV2)**

The purpose of this section is to define the characteristics of the ethnic-based movement in Odesa, which determined the domestic-level opportunity (IV) for Russia’s application of coercion in the City. The discussion below outlines how the irredentist movement in Odesa emerged largely as a response to an increasingly nationalizing Ukrainian state in the post-Soviet era. Moreover, the movement’s inception was largely independent of any Active Measures or persuasion from Moscow. Irredentism in Odesa could be traced to the early 1990s but it transformed into a mobilized and powerful social movement with political reach starting in the 2000s.
As Aasland (2002) noted, minority groups may be discontent with their existing conditions but are often more reactive to an abrupt increase in social and economic exclusion. The Russian-speaking diaspora in Odesa was especially agitated by the abrupt decline in Russian-language education rights. The Ukrainization of most of the schools has transformed a number of Russian schools into Ukrainian ones almost overnight. Teachers using the Russian language in their classrooms often had to convert their curricula into the Ukrainian language over the course of several weeks. For example, in 1998, there were 46 schools (or 32 percent of all schools) with Russian as the language of instruction in Odesa, while the Russian-speaking residents made up 73 percent of the city. By 2003, the situation has deteriorated. In 58 of Odesa’s schools, the enrollment of students in Russian classes was stopped, without prior notification of parents. Such forceful elimination of the Russian language through policies from the national government in Kyiv created a ripe environment for pro-Russia social mobilization.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, pro-unity with Moscow parties began to gain momentum in local elections. The ‘unionist’ Russian Bloc Party was founded in 2001. Its main agenda was to unite the city and region with Russia. Moreover, the Russian Bloc was allied with another ‘unionist’ party, Rodina, which won 11 of 120 seats on Odesa’s City Council in October 2010. The leader of Rodina, Igor Markov, openly declared his support for unity with Russia and appeared on Russian state-owned Channel 1 declaring that “Odesa is Russia.”

In 1995, residents of the Odesa Region (Oblast) elected the Pro-Russia Ruslan Bodelan as the Chair of the Odesa Regional Administration and for a second time in 1998, as the mayor of the city of Odesa. In his statement of support for Viktor Yushchenko, when
his presidential race victory was disputed in 2005, Bodelan declared his “support for the ‘Novorossiya’ storyline,” emphasizing the need for “unity with Russia.”119 This pro-unity political movement was indicative of local public opinion. For example, the desire by a significant percentage of local residents to unite with Russia was substantially reflected in opinion polls preceding crisis onset in February 2014.

Odesa polls indicated that irredentist sentiments were consistently significant among residents. For example, in an April 2005 KIIS poll, 35 percent of the population in Southern Ukraine, including Odesa, believed that Russia and Ukraine must unite into one state.120 Subsequently, in 2013, 22.8 percent of respondents in Odesa wanted Ukraine to integrate into Russia. Moreover, this number increased in the following year. A February 2014 KIIS survey, conducted immediately prior to crisis onset, indicated that 24 percent of respondents in Odesa wanted integration with Russia.121

In turn, such popular support for unity with Russia created a permissive environment for the application of gray zone tools and tactics in Odesa following the crisis onset in February 2014. However, as noted in the following section, Moscow’s actions in Odesa never passed the threshold of coercion.

5.7 Russia’s Active Measures in Odesa Following Crisis Onset (DV)

The purpose of this section is to determine the characteristics of Russia’s actions in Odesa following the crisis onset on 21 February 2014. Following the departure of Viktor Yanukovych, Russia continued to deploy gray zone tools and tactics in Odesa. However, these never passed the threshold of coercion; rather, they were Active Measures. The aim was to persuade the local population and elites to maintain allegiance to Moscow, thus enabling Russia to maintain its perceived regional protector role. Unlike tactics of coercion,
Active Measures rely on persuasion and public diplomacy, bribery, and targeted media operations. As discussed below, however, they do not incorporate any imminent physical threat to the targets of the operations. Moreover, as noted in Chapter 2, the level of commitment to these operations is low and they may be easily withdrawn. Figure 5.1 below compares the intensity of Russia’s gray zone tools and tactics in Odesa to the other cases examined in this research.

The clashes between local rebels and authorities began in November 2013 and continued until May 2014. During the irredentist uprising, Moscow supported the pre-existing pro-unity movement through methods such as bribery of local officials, who would engage in the persuasion of the local population on behalf of Russia.

For example, on 27 February 2014 local politics in Odesa moved to the public square. At the Kulikovo Field, a "people's assembly" was held, in which over 4,000 Odessites took part to voice various pro-Russia or pro-Maidan perspectives. There were even Russian St. Andrew flags flown, but local authorities did not disperse the demonstration.¹²² Even though the protesters appeared to mobilize on their own, in fact, Moscow provided them with material support.

On the same day as the aforementioned demonstrations, the Ukrainian SBU recorded a conversation between the First Deputy Chair of the Russian State Duma Committee for CIS Affairs and Relations with Compatriots Konstantin Zatulin and President Putin's aide Sergey Glazyev. The conversation participants indicated that Russia “financed Odesa.” As noted in the transcribed conversation, the two officials drew up cost estimates for bribery of local officials in Odesa as well as planned rallies in the City and Region.¹²³ However, unlike Crimea, the messaging or propaganda at the rallies did not
frame any existential threat to the Russian-speaking population from ‘far-right’ extremists or to their cultural association with Moscow.\textsuperscript{124}

Subsequently, on 1 March 2013, 7,000 people demonstrated in central Odesa, demanding federalization, the protection of Russian language rights, and better relations with Moscow. At the organized event, Novorossiya flags and slogans were flown by demonstrators, indicating a desire for political unity with Russia.\textsuperscript{125} A follow-up demonstration took place on 9 March 2014, where 10,000 Oddesites, flying Russian flags, assembled in Odesa’s Kulikovo Field and demanded integration with Russia.\textsuperscript{126}

Following the meetings, Ukrainian authorities allegedly identified Russian agents who instigated the protests. Two Russian nationals, Sakauov and Mefedov, were charged with efforts to politically destabilize Odesa. Ukrainian national authorities held the two men in custody for over two years. However, the prosecution failed to prove the two men’s involvement in the events following crisis onset in 2014 or their linkage to Russia’s security services. In 2017, a regional court in Odesa acquitted the men, however, one of them was re-arrested by Ukraine’s SBU immediately following the trial on analogous charges related to the protests of 2014.\textsuperscript{127}

\textbf{Figure 5.1.} Intensity of Coercion (DV) Chosen by Russia for Odesa Relative to Other Cases post-Crisis Onset

![Intensity of Coercion Chart]

None

\textbf{Odesa} \hspace{0.5cm} Kharkiv \hspace{0.5cm} Donbas \hspace{0.5cm} Crimea \hspace{0.5cm} Abkhazia

High
5.8 Results and Analysis

The purpose of the following section is to explain the trends associated with Russia’s perceived role and power in Odesa across the three consequential events, quantify the components of role and relative power, and assess whether the following hypothesis is supported or rejected: (C) if role exceeds power by a small margin, and the local movement is irredentist, Russia will not utilize coercion. This hypothesized interaction between the independent and dependent variables is visualized in Figure 5.3, box 3, below.

The hoop test employed through the application of the IOI Model to the case of Odesa supports the above hypothesis. The cost-benefit assessment yielded through the application of the IOI Model shows that Moscow had low system-level incentive (IV1), and low domestic-level opportunity (IV2), to employ coercion (DV) in Odesa following the crisis onset in February 2014. The combination of low incentive and opportunity caused Russia to continue its Active measures below the threshold of coercion.

When examining the characteristics of Russia’s actions in Odesa (DV), as a function of the system-level role-power gap (IV1) and the characteristics of the local ethnic-based movement (IV2), Moscow’s cost-benefit calculation in its foreign policy decision-making becomes understandable. In Odesa, the cost of coercion, based on the potential length and depth of commitment required to support the local irredentist movement, outweighed Russia’s perceived role preservation benefits. In other words, the domestic-level opportunity (IV2) and the system-level incentive (IV1) for Russia to apply coercion were low. However, because Moscow feared some loss of its perceived protector role in Odesa, even though the decline would have been small, it continued to deploy Active Measures to prevent this phenomenon.
As a first step of the hoop test to reject or confirm hypothesis (C), it is necessary to assess the power-role gap as the system-level incentive (IV1) to apply coercion. The quantification of the components of role and power across the three consequential events (or short periods), as highlighted in Table 5.3 below, is an effective method to assess the gap. This enables the assessment of the anticipated decline in Russia’s perceived role and relative power following crisis onset.

Looking at the narratives emanating from the leadership in Moscow, Russia’s official representatives in Odesa and GONGOs, it is apparent that Moscow’s perceived role is an amalgamation of various components. From the 2004 Presidential Election to the pre-crisis onset period in early 2014, Moscow supported two main identity narratives associated with Odesa: the ‘Soviet narrative’ and the protector of the ‘Russian-speaking compatriots.’ However, the ‘imperial narrative,’ which emphasized the Romanov Dynasty and historic economic ties to Russia, was relatively marginal in Moscow’s perceived protector role. Thus, in Table 5.3, the degree of specificity had a consistent score of 2, or ‘moderate role focus,’ across all three consequential events (or short periods), based on the Coding Table in Appendix A.

However, the two selected narratives of Russia’s perceived role in Odesa were not geographically bespoke to the city or surrounding Oblast. Rather, they were applicable to Odesa as a consequence of a broader agenda, and resulting policies, by Moscow, to protect ‘compatriots.’ This lack of geographic focus in its protector narrative was consistent across all three consequential events (or short periods) and thus received a score of 2 in Table 5.3, based on the Coding Table in Appendix A. Even though the ‘Russian language’ and ‘Soviet
heritage’ narratives were not tailored to Odesa, there were two main challenge areas therein that became the focus for Moscow.

The first one was Russian language education and the second, the perceived ‘falsification’ of the events of the ‘Great Patriotic War’ by the governments of increasingly ‘nationalizing’ post-Soviet republics. Considering the consistency of these components in Russia’s perceived role across the three consequential events (or short periods) prior to the February 2014 crisis onset, this role component received a score of 2 based on the Coding Table in Appendix A.

When assessing the degree of local acceptance, a key component of both role and power, there was a decline across the three consequential events (or short periods). Around the 2004 Presidential Election in Ukraine and the Orange Revolution period, the degree of local acceptance was very high. As noted in the foregoing discussion, a majority of the population supported Russia’s perceived role and there were local legislative resolutions meant to support the Russian language and cultural history. Moreover, local policymakers provided a pathway for Moscow to be incorporated into the implementation process, thereby directly recognizing its protector role. Thus a score of 5 was assigned to the degree of acceptance in this period, based on the Coding Table in Appendix A. However, this level of acceptance did not continue into the subsequent consequential event (or short period).

In the next period, around the 2010 Ukrainian Presidential Election, local acceptance of Russia’s perceived protector role in Odesa declined. Overall, role-affirming social mobilization decreased based on a number of key indicators, which translate into a score of 3 based on the Coding Table in Appendix A. As highlighted in the foregoing discussion, only a minority of the local population was accepting of Russia’s role, even
though there was high attendance at local role-affirming events such as parades and rallies. However, a key point to consider here is the potential decline in active acceptance by the local population. A decline in the level of perceived threat to minority language education and local cultural heritage from the Kyiv government may have been a reason for the de-escalation and demobilization of the population. In turn, this may have caused a decline in the critical need for third-party protection. Thus, the overall level of acceptance may have remained the same between 2004 and 2010; it may have simply become more passive.

Based on the Coding Table in Appendix A, the degree of local acceptance received a score of 3. This is also reflected in Table 5.3 below. This decline in local acceptance of Russia’s perceived protector role in Odesa, however, can also be attributed to an increased misalignment between Moscow’s and local priorities.

As highlighted in Table 5.2 above, the decline in local acceptance observed during the 2010 Presidential election period, and the months leading up to the February 2014 crisis, was also a function of increased emphasis on the Imperial narrative in local Odesa politics. In the meantime, Russia’s protector narrative continued to focus on the Great Patriotic War victory and language-based protector components. For example, as highlighted in the foregoing discussion, in 2010 the level of attendance at events commemorating the Romanov Dynasty and historic events associated with Imperial Russia (and their overall number) increased relative to 2004. In 2013 and early 2014, the number has increased even more substantially. In fact, it appears that Imperial-based events were often more popular than language-related or Second World War events supported through the Russian Consulate General in Odesa. In turn, this low alignment between Moscow’s focus and local social mobilization facilitated a further decline in the degree of acceptance.
score to 2 based leading up to the February 2014 crisis onset, based on the Coding Table in Appendix A. However, unlike the degree of acceptance, the degree of formalization of Russia’s perceived role remained consistent, albeit low, throughout all three consequential periods.

The degree of cross-border commitment to Russia’s role in Odesa remained low across all three consequential events (or short periods), thereby assigning it a score of 1 based on the Coding Table in Appendix A. As noted in Table 5.2 above, the low level of commitment to Russia’s perceived protector role is a function of loose local cross-border linkages among local organizations in Odesa and Russia. These included literary societies, universities, and Kremlin-funded GONGOs. However, these ties could be broken overnight by any of the parties.

Crisis onset in February 2014 exposed the gap between Moscow’s perceived protector role relative to its de-facto power in Odesa. The onset of the revolution, the removal of Yanukovych, and the arrival of a nationalistic government in Kyiv ushered in competing narratives that were incongruent with those advanced by Moscow. More importantly, the new government in Kyiv had the tools, and external backing from Western powers, to entirely displace Russia’s monopoly on narrative-building in cities like Odesa.

When assessing the level of power, following the introduction of competing narratives and actors onto a political arena, the number of supported narratives, geographic scope, and clarity became irrelevant. With an introduction of competing narratives, the articulation of Moscow’s perceptions would be insufficient to operationalize its perceived protector role. Rather, the levels of acceptance and the binding commitment to Russia by
local elites and the population in Odesa represented Moscow’s de-facto power in the region.

Based on the quantification of the data gathered in this chapter, as noted in Table 5.3 below, the degree of system-level incentive for Russia’s intervention in Odesa was low. The gap between the components constituting Russia’s role and power is small, at only 6 points across the three consequential events (or short periods) prior to the crisis onset in February 2014. Following crisis onset, after Russia’s power in Odesa became apparent, a potential decline in its perceived role would be small. Russia’s role-power gap in Odesa is also represented below in Figure 5.2, based on the power cycle theory discussed in Chapter 2. However, as noted in hypothesis (C), and visualized in Figure 5.3 below, system-level incentive is one of the explanatory variables necessary to fully assess Russia’s choices to apply particular gray zone tools and tactics in Odesa following crisis onset.

As a consequence of the irredentist movement in Odesa, Russia’s potential cost of application of coercion would have been high in terms of international reputation and backlash in the form of sanctions. When considering the application of coercion in support of an ethnic-based movement, the type of movement with which a potential intervener would have to engage represents a significant component of the cost calculation. As highlighted by Heraclides (1990) as well as Chazan and Horowitz (1990), compared to secessionist movements, irredentism is relatively costly to support in terms of depth of commitment and duration, international reputation, and potential consequences as the endeavor require the direct undermining of the territorial integrity of another state. Since support for irredentism ultimately requires the addition of a territory and its people to the ‘mother’ country, it becomes more difficult to assist the movement covertly. Protracted
support increases the chances of the exposure of aid operations and thus the intervener paying the domestic and international costs associated with the involvement.\textsuperscript{128}

As highlighted in this chapter, in post-Soviet Odesa local political leaders, such as Rouslan Bodelan, and local irredentist parties, like Rodina, pushed for integration with Russia. Moreover, as noted in section 5.7 above, following the start of the Maidan protests in November 2013, the local ethnic-based movement was poised to integrate with Russia. If Russia applied a higher intensity and more overt coercion in Odesa, it would have committed itself to support an irredentist movement. In turn, this open military intervention in support of the movement would inevitably have been perceived by the international community as support for the disintegration of Ukraine, attributable to Russia. Such actions would have carried correspondingly high costs and would have been high relative to any benefits gained by Moscow through the defense of its perceived protector role in Odesa following crisis onset. In sum, Russia’s gray zone tools and tactics in Odesa were proportionate to the need of preserving its perceived role and allowed Moscow to forego the high costs of support for the local irredentist movement.

In Odesa, Russia’s continued Active Measures following crisis onset on 21 February 2014 targeted local leaders and pro-Russia to persuade the local population to accept pro-Russia positions regarding its protector role. This was mostly achieved through bribery and targeted information campaigns to agitate the local Russian ethnic minority and its leaders. However, what was missing from Russia’s tools and tactics in Odesa was an attempt to rapidly mobilize the local population through a perceived existential threat to the security of the local population. As discussed in Chapter 2, this means that the gray zone tools and tactics used in Odesa never passed the threshold of coercion. The full sequence of Russia’s
decision-making regarding the application of coercion in Odesa, as a function of system-level *incentive* (IV1) and domestic-level *opportunity* (IV2), is illustrated in figure 5.4 below.

**Table 5.3. Quantitative Assessment of Incentive for Intervention in Odesa; Role-Power Gap (IV)**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Specificity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Role focus; quantity of narratives.</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree of Scope</td>
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<td>Geographic focus.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree of Clarity</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Role depth through specific challenge areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree of Acceptance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Role-affirming social mobilization.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Formality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cross-border commitments.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Gap Between Relative Power and Role Scores**

- 12 – 6 = 6
- 10 – 4 = 6
- 9 – 3 = 6

**Average Role-Power Gap**

6 Points

Note: Score for this component is out of 5.0, with 0.0 being the lowest extent of role and/or relative power and 5.0 being the highest for the specific component; blue: role components; red: power components. All of the scores associated with perceived role and power are based on the Coding Table in Appendix A.
**Figure 5.2.** Russia’s Role-Power Gap in Odesa (IV)

![Image of a graph showing Russia's Role-Power Gap in Odesa (IV)]

**Figure 5.3.** Relative Intensity of Coercion as a Function of the Role-Power Gap and Type of Ethnic Movement in Odesa

**IV: Role and Power Gap (Incentive)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement Type (Opportunity)</th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Large</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irredentism</td>
<td>Odesa (3) No Coercion (DV)</td>
<td>Crimea (2) High-Medium Intensity Of Coercion (DV)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kharkiv (4) Low Intensity Of Coercion (DV)</td>
<td>Abkhazia (1) High Intensity Of Involvement Coercion (DV)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5.4. Sequence of Russia’s Decision-Making in Application of Coercion in Odesa Following Crisis Onset

<p>| | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Crisis Onset</td>
<td>Revealed the gap between perceived role and power; threatened reduction of Russia’s role in Odesa due to competition with rival actors and their competing narratives.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Russia’s Perceived role overextends power in Odesa.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Necessary Condition (IV) #1 Low System-level Incentive for Coercion in Odesa. Low incentive for intervention. Gap between perceived role and relative power.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Necessary Condition (IV) #2 Low Domestic-level Opportunity for Coercion in Odesa. High cost of application of coercion involving an irredentist movement.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Sufficient conditions for coercion were not met. Russia employed Active Measures in Odesa below the threshold of coercion; largely bribery of non-state actors to persuade the local acceptance and formalization of protector role.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.9 Conclusion and Policy Implications

The foregoing chapter provides valuable insight into the system- and domestic-level cost-benefit calculations undertaken by Russia to determine its actions in Odesa following crisis onset in February 2014. Moreover, the above analysis highlights several focus areas which may be useful for conflict management practitioners.

Both system-level *incentive* (IV1) and domestic-level *opportunity* (IV2) were significant for Russia’s calculation to apply particular gray zone tools and tactics in Odesa. However, these tools and tactics never passed the threshold of coercion. In turn, this is a rejection of a common approach toward an analysis of Russian foreign policy, which focuses on *either* system- or domestic-level considerations. In Odesa, the presence of a receptive and welcoming local population, with a significant desire to join Russia, did not mean Moscow was willing to fully commit to their protection. In fact, the anticipated cost of full commitment, in terms of international repercussions and material involvement, by
Russia toward the local irredentism movement would have been greater than the benefits of role preservation. However, as shown in the foregoing chapter, the gray zone tools and tactics used by Russia following crisis onset enabled it to impact local acceptance and maintain a commitment to its perceived protector role.

The case of Russia’s gray zone engagement in Odesa shows that in the contemporary conflict environment, low system-level incentives and relatively high domestic-level costs do not necessarily mean a country will be prevented entirely from pursuing its strategic interests through intervention. Sophisticated gray zone tools and tactics enable resourceful states like Russia to pursue their interests using very low-intensity tools and tactics that are proportional to the system- and domestic-level calculation they face. This conclusion also draws implications for conflict management practitioners.

This chapter shows that even though support for irredentism may carry high costs, the presence of an ethnic-based movement, and mobilized non-state actors therein, provide a necessary condition for gray zone tools and tactics’ application. In terms of conflict resolution, this may be a place to start. It would be difficult to convince Russia to forego its perceived protector role in Odesa, as its views toward the city, Oblast, and its people crystallized over the course of centuries, spanning the Czarist, Soviet, and post-Cold War era. On the other hand, the domestic-level opportunity for the application of gray zone tools and tactics formed without Moscow’s involvement. As the chapter highlights, Russia’s opportunity formed as a function of a deteriorated relationship between a nationalizing central government in Kyiv and a population desiring to preserve its native language and heritage; such a population may readily seek outside support to alleviate its grievances. Thus, a focus on the de-escalation of tensions between local authorities in Odesa and the
national government in Kyiv appeared to be important in preventing the application of gray zone tools and tactics by Russia in pursuit of its own role-preservation goals. Specifically, the prevention of ethnic tensions in Odesa preceding crisis onset in February 2014, and thus mitigation of the opportunity for Russia’s intervention, was unlikely without a transfer of authority over regional socio-economic policy from Kyiv to local governing bodies.
References

4 Ibid., 14.
5 Polese and Wylegala, 801.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., 802.
8 http://rus-ua.info/news/2110.html
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., 126.
13 See Richardson, 12.
14 Ibid., 14.
17 Richardson, 23-24.
18 See Richardson 23. Such accounts were presented in the author’s interview with an elderly Odesite man: “At the end of the Defense of Odesa in October 1941, when Soviet troops were withdrawing, he heard explosions and came to see what happened. People staggered out of the market wounded, while others lay dead on the street. A woman yelled, "It was our planes that bombed us!" He used this story to illustrate the insidious nature of the Soviet administration and to inject ambiguity into the heroic Soviet narratives of war that still have widespread currency in Odesa.”
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
22 Polese and Wylegala, 800.
Ibid.
24 Ibid., 801.
26 These are the results of a sociological study conducted by specialists from the Gorschenin Kiev Institute of Management Problems.
27 Tanya Richardson, 14.
28 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 36.
35 Ibid.
39 See “Yanukovych wants to win elections thanks to Odesa and Privoz [Янукович хочет победить на выборах, благодаря Одессе и Привозу].” https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2004/12/18/4384084/
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid.


Paniotto, 23.

Ibid., 25.


See Anna Kirienko, "The Person Involved in the Tragedy in the Odesa House of Trade Unions Received a Post in the Administration of the Simferopol Region [Фигурант трагедии в одесском Доме профсоюзов получил должность в администрации Симферопольского района]," Komsomolskaya Pravda, October 17, 2020, accessed April 24, 2021, https://www.crimea.kp.ru/daily/217196.5/4305604/)


Ibid.

"Consul General of the Russia Alexander Grachev: "on the Example of Gogol, It Is Very Clear That We Have One Faith, Culture and History" [ГЕНКОНСУЛ РОССИИ


64 Ibid.

65 The Russian Consul General in Odesa Alexander Grachev was asked in April 2009 whether the Russian Consulate General “provide[s] any non-consular support to the local Russian-speaking population - Russian-speaking schools, the Russian diaspora? He answered: "We try to help as much as possible - we provide computers, computerized blackboards for schools, literature, first of all, literature for young children, school age, textbooks in Russian ... In general, we believe that great attention should be paid to the development of the Russian language. Yes, you can teach in the "sovereign language", but to give up such wealth as the Russian language, in my opinion, is unreasonable. See "Consul General of the Russia Alexander Grachev: "on the Example of Gogol, It Is Very Clear That We Have One Faith, Culture and History," April 14, 2009.


68 The mandate of the commission was to “summarize and analyse information about falsifications of historical facts and events that are intended to belittle the international prestige of the Russian Federation.” Its main objective was to preserve the sacred memory of Soviet victory in the War. Second World War — the Great Patriotic War, as the Soviet involvement in the War. See Pål Kolsto, "Dmitrii Medvedev’s Commission Against the Falsification of History: Why Was It Created and What Did It Achieve? A Reassessment." The Slavonic and East European Review 97, no. 4 (2019): 738-760.

69 Ibid., 741.

70 Ibid., 742.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.


98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.


107 Ibid.


In the phone conversation Zatulin claimed that “[they] financed Kharkov, financed Odesa.” He went on to explain that Cossack organizations were paid to provoke violence and that there were other individuals who still need to be paid. See Gerashchenko, Anton, Alexander Davidenko, and Alexander Sokolovskiy. "Removing Yanukovych Is the First Task": The Scandalous Wiretapping of Putin's Advisor Was "leaked" to the Network ["Януковича убрать – первая задача": в сеть "слили" скандальную прослушку советника Путина]." OBOZREVATEL PLUS. December 28, 2017. Accessed April 24, 2021. https://plus.obozrevatel.com/crime/yanukovicha-ubrat-pervaya-zadacha-v-set-slili-skandalnyu-proslushku-sovetnika-putina.htm.


Polese and Wylegala, 804.

Ibid.


"Thoughts and Views of the Population of Ukraine - April 2005 [ДУМКИ І ПОГЛЯДИ НАСЕЛЕННЯ УКРАЇНИ — КВІТЕНЬ 2005 Р.]." Kyiv International
129 Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada, John Baird, compared Russia’s actions in Crimea to Nazi Germany’s invasion of Sudetenland, where Hitler’s actions were guided by the desire to re-unify with ethnic kin. Max Boot has also compared Russia’s actions in Crimea to Nazi-Germany’s invasion of the Baltic states, where many locals welcomed the occupation. These examples are representative of a common domestic-level group of arguments which their authors claim represent Russia’s foreign policy decision-making. See “John Baird Compares Russia’s Actions in Ukraine to Nazi Invasion of Czechoslovakia.” The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). Toronto: CQ-Roll Call, Inc, 2014 and Max Boot, “Under Russia’s Shadow.” The weekly standard (New York, N.Y.) 21, no. 40 (2016): 24. On the other hand, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) enlargement, and a shift in a system-level balance of power in Eastern Europe, has been claimed by others to guide Russian foreign policy decision-making. See "Enlargement". 2021. NATO. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49212.htm and "Partnership For Peace Programme." 2021. NATO. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohtml/topics_50349.htm.
Chapter 6 Russia’s Gray Zone Engagement in Kharkiv: Assessing the Low Incentive and Opportunity for Coercion

6.1 Introduction

Russia’s application of coercion in Kharkiv is puzzling as a similar degree of system-level incentive (IV1) was present in Odesa, but the intensity of coercion (DV) was greater in the Kharkiv case. This chapter addresses the question of why did Russia apply low-intensity gray zone tools and tactics in Kharkiv following the crisis onset in February 2014?

Using the Incentive-Opportunity Intervention (IOI) Model, this chapter examines Russia’s intensity of coercion in Kharkiv as a function of Moscow’s role-power gap (IV1) and the characteristics of the local ethnic-based movement (IV2). These variables serve as proxies for the system-level and domestic-level cost-benefit analysis, respectively. The causal relationship between the independent and dependent variables is tested in this chapter through hypothesis (D): if the role exceeds power by a small margin, and the local movement is secessionist, Russia will utilize low intensity of coercion. As discussed in Chapter 2, low-intensity coercion implies the use of diaspora influence through local organizations and media and information operations, which mobilize people on the basis of perceived imminent physical threats.

Using content analysis of peer-reviewed material, government documents, speeches, surveys, and statements by Russian government-organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs), this chapter finds that the system-level incentive for Russia’s application of coercion in Kharkiv was low. However, local secessionism also established a low cost, or a favorable opportunity, for the application of coercion in support of the ethnic-based movement. In sum, favorable conditions were created for Russia to employ
low-intensity coercive gray zone tools and tactics following crisis onset on 21 February 2014.

This chapter employs a hoop test to assess whether the two necessary conditions, system-level incentive and domestic-level opportunity, impacted Russia’s choice to use specific gray zone tools and tactics in Kharkiv. This chapter is divided into several parts to assess the role-power gap (or incentive), the type of local ethnic-based movement (or opportunity) as well as examine whether the intensity of gray zone coercion is indeed a function of the conditions established by both independent variables.

As a starting point, the chapter outlines the competing narratives associated with Kharkiv and the reasons for Russia’s selection of the ‘language’ and the ‘Great Patriotic War’ narratives to operationalize its perceived protector role. Subsequent parts of the chapter present the qualitative data of the power-role gap as the system-level incentive for intervention. To this end, the chapter engages in content analysis of peer-reviewed sources, formal political statements, and media platforms to assess the degree of specificity, scope, clarity, acceptance, and formality of Russia’s perceived role and power for three consequential events (or short periods): 1) the 2004 Presidential election and Orange Revolution, 2) the 2010 Ukrainian Presidential election, and 3) the civil unrest period preceding the onset of the February 2014 crisis when Ukraine’s President Yanukovych departed Kyiv. These consequential events were selected because they represent the top three occasions within the examined period (January 2000 to February 2014), the outcome of which Russia needed to control to operationalize its perceived role and power in Kharkiv. Thus, Active Measures targeting the local acceptance and formalization of its role
are also assessed across the three consequential events (or short periods) as they contributed to Moscow’s regional power.

Subsequently, content analysis of peer-reviewed and news sources is employed to assesses the domestic-level opportunity (IV2) for Russia’s application of coercive gray zone tools and tactics. The characteristics of the ethnic-based movement prior to crisis onset, the second independent variable, are examined as a proxy for the cost and benefit of Russia’s application of coercion in Kharkiv. The last part of the qualitative data section provides the facts of Russia’s coercion following crisis onset (DV), including diaspora mobilization, and information campaigns.

In the results and analysis section, the chapter converts the qualitative data associated with Russia’s role and power in Kharkiv into quantitative metrics using the Coding Table in Appendix A. This quantification of the perceived role and power components allows the assessment of the size of the role-power gap and thus, the degree of system-level incentive for the application of coercive tools and tactics. Subsequently, the results and analysis section provides an assessment of the costs imposed on Russia’s application of coercion by the local secessionist movement in Kharkiv. In sum, the specific combination of the system- and domestic-level causal variables, and their impact on Russia’s decision-making, supports the validity of hypothesis \((D)\), as part of the IOI Model. The last section of the chapter provides a policy conclusion as well as recommendations for policymakers and conflict management practitioners. To begin the assessment of Russia’s system-level incentive to apply coercion in Kharkiv, however, it is first necessary to identify the narratives which served as the normative platform for Moscow’s perceived protector role.
6.2 Narratives and Russia’s Role Formation in Kharkiv

The purpose of the following section is to outline the main identity narratives present in the Kharkiv during the three selected consequential events. In turn, several of the narratives constituted the ideological backdrop for Moscow’s application of coercion following the crisis's onset in February 2014. Among the five narratives, which received various levels of support from the local population and Russia, the two most potent narratives in Moscow’s perception of Kharkiv were the ‘Russian language’ and ‘Soviet’ narrative associated with the Great Patriotic War. Table 6.1 below summarizes the narratives and Russia’s treatment of them, which are discussed in the subsequent sections.

6.2.1 Kharkiv in the ‘Russian-Speaking World’

The identity of Kharkiv as a part of the ‘Russian-Speaking World’ has been a defining narrative for many Russophone citizens in the city. Even though the narrative has seen wide support from Moscow, the advancement of this identity narrative was largely a reaction to an increasingly nationalizing Ukrainian state following the demise of the Soviet Union. In Kharkiv, between 65 and 70 percent of the local population identifies Russian as their first language.1 However, as in other parts of the country such as Odesa, the Donbas, and Crimea, authorities in Kyiv pushed for increased Ukrainian language use in official government process and education. For example, in 1991-1992, 72 percent of all local educational institutions were operated in Russian. By the year 2000, this number fell to 45 percent. By 2009-2010, only 25 percent of local education at all levels was conducted in Russian.2 Moreover, policymakers in Kyiv have consistently blocked local initiatives to give the Russian language equal status alongside Ukrainian in local government affairs.3
For example, in June 2006, the Kharkiv Regional Council passed a resolution titled "On the Implementation of Constitutional Guarantees for the Free Use of the Russian Language in the Kharkiv Region and Assistance in the Fulfillment of Ukraine's Obligations Regarding the Implementation of the Norms of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages." The Kyivskiy District Court of Kharkiv and the City’s Administrative Court of Appeal validated this decision to be compliant with existing Ukrainian minority language legislation on 2 February 2007 and 2 July 2008, respectively. However, in 2009, the Cabinet of Minister of Ukraine filed an appeal to the Supreme Administrative Court of Ukraine and won the case. In effect, this decision blocked Kharkiv’s ability to establish Russian as equal to the Ukrainian language on a regional level. However, Kharkiv as a part of the Russian Speaking World was not the only narrative formed as a resistance to an increasingly nationalizing Ukraine in the post-Soviet era.

6.2.2 Soviet Kharkiv: a ‘Heroic’ Nostalgia

The Soviet narrative, although not unique to Kharkiv, continued to define the identity of many Kharkiv residents in the post-Soviet era. Those nostalgic for the Soviet Union, especially any remaining Communists, Second World War veterans, and members of local pro-Moscow organizations, such as Oplot, glorified Kharkiv’s contributions to the Soviet Union. The Soviet Kharkiv narrative incorporates several key components. First, it celebrated the city and region’s contribution to Soviet industry and scientific development as well as Kharkiv’s status as the capital of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) from 1919 to 1934. Second, it glorified the Soviet military victory in the ‘Great Patriotic War’ over Nazi Germany. A key sub-component of this narrative was the perceived
requirement to maintain the ‘accurate’ memory of the War, which has allegedly been misrepresented across the post-Soviet region by the increasingly nationalizing former Republics of the Soviet Union. Finally, the Soviet narrative remained silent on the Holocaust, it rejected any pre-meditated actions by the Soviet government associated with the Holodomor and challenged all forms of Ukrainian nationalism. However, the Soviet narrative was not the only one to focus on the theme of ‘heroism’.

6.2.3. Kharkiv in the Russian Empire

Although relatively marginal compared to the other pro-Russia narratives, an imperial-era narrative appeared on the Kharkiv political landscape in the post-Soviet years. Its main focus was the epoch of the Kharkiv Slobod Cossacks. This identity however was largely favored by rural residents of Kharkiv Oblast. The indigenous militarized units of Sloboda Ukraine, drawn from the local Cossack population, became active during the Tsardom of Russia in the 1600s and were used in defence of the Western Imperial frontier until 1765. Following the legal formation of the Sloboda Ukraine Governorate by Catherine II, the regiments were largely incorporated into the Imperial Army. This history became an identity centerpiece for a minority of Kharkiv locals and was celebrated through small-scale commemorations.

For example, on 9 February 2009, in the village of Gorodny, near the town of Krasnokutsk in Kharkiv Oblast, celebrations were held to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the victory of the Russian Imperial Army, with support from Ukrainian Cossacks, over the Swedes. The event, attended by several dozen individuals, was funded by a group of elected members of the Kharkiv Regional Council. Such celebration of the
Russian empire, however, was antagonistic to the Ukrainian identity narrative, which crystallized in the city in the post-Soviet era.

6.2.4 Ukranian Kharkiv

Different components of the ‘indigenous Ukrainian narrative’ were adopted by civil-society organizations during the Glasnost era of the late 1980s and local elites following the collapse of the Soviet Union. This narrative was supported by local university faculty, student organizations as well city administration officials.\(^\text{12}\) The focus was on perceived injustices committed by the Russian Empire and Soviet regime. Proponents of this narrative pointed to campaigns such as the imposition of serfdom by the Russian Empire, the Russification Ukraine’s society, purges of the indigenous Ukrainian elites and intelligentsia, as well as Soviet-era collectivization\(^\text{13}\). Moreover, the identity narrative celebrates Ukrainian cultural and key local political actors of the late 19\(^{th}\) to early 20\(^{th}\) centuries as well as the Ukrainian cultural revival of Kharkiv in the early 1920s. However, considering local government programs, it is difficult to assess whether the emergence of this narrative was an ‘organic’ cultural development within society or a function of local policy.

When examining the list of local cultural programs created by the Kharkiv City Administration, it becomes apparent that ‘decommunization’ policies emerging from Kyiv were accepted by the local elites. For example, street names with Soviet affiliation were removed in large numbers. However, it was often claimed these were opportunistic policies to gain political concessions from Kyiv.\(^\text{14}\) The majority of the Kharkiv population did not support the ‘decommunization’ programs.\(^\text{15}\)
For example, a key marker of the local elites’ position on ‘decommunization’ is apparent in the Complex Program of Cultural Development in Kharkiv for the Years 2011–2016.” As noted in official documents, the aim of the program was “to develop patriotism for Ukraine and Kharkiv among Kharkivites.” On one hand, many locals have noted, the program was perceived by nationalist factions as a ‘green light’ to vandalize local monuments of Vladimir Lenin. On the other hand, the program recognized the cultural-ethnic diversity of the city and placed emphasis on the peaceful co-existence of all local minorities. However, even with the presence of polarizing Ukrainian and pro-Russia narratives within the local political ecosystem in Kharkiv, a powerful local narrative was solidified which attempted to appease both nationalist and Russophile factions.

6.2.5 ‘Sloboda’ Ukraine: A Hybrid Narrative

This ‘Sloboda’ narrative was embraced by many members of the ruling elite of the Kharkiv administration soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The emergence of the narrative corresponded with the renaming of the main regional newspaper Socialist Kharkiv Region (Sotsialistychna Kharkivshchyna) to Sloboda Land (Slobidskyy Kray). However, it was an ideological tool to achieve practical ends. Local elites manufactured the ‘Sloboda narrative’ as a normative backdrop to facilitate cross-border political, cultural, and economic cooperation between Kharkiv Oblast and the neighboring Belgorod Oblast in Russia. The narrative was built on historical cooperation in defense, empire-building, and regional economic and cultural development of Kharkiv involving Russia.

Most importantly, however, this narrative was meant to reconcile ethnic-based differences between those who identify as Russians and Ukrainians. For example, on one hand, the narrative reinforced that Ukrainian Cossacks in fact colonized the Muscovite
steppe. This is the appeasement of Ukrainian nationalists. On the other hand, Sloboda narrative celebrates the Ukrainian Cossacks in Kharkiv who successfully resisted Crimean Tatar raids with the help of the Russian Army;\textsuperscript{21} this is a political concession to the pro-Moscow portion of Kharkiv’s population. In turn, the ‘Sloboda identity’ became an inseparable part of the various iterations of the “Program of Cultural Development in Kharkiv.”\textsuperscript{22}

**Table 6.1. Comparison of Identity Narratives in Kharkiv and Treatment by Russia**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kharkiv Identity Narratives</th>
<th>Kharkiv in the Russian Empire</th>
<th>Russian Language Narrative</th>
<th>Soviet Kharkiv</th>
<th>Ukrainian Kharkiv</th>
<th>‘Sloboda’ Ukraine – The Hybrid Identity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative Details</strong></td>
<td>Cossack history in the context of the Russian Empire; ‘heroic’ war-based history against regional adversaries such as the Tatars and remote ones such as the Swedes.</td>
<td>Formed as a resistance movement to declining local language rights. The decline in minority language education is the key concern.</td>
<td>Nostalgia about the Soviet Union; celebrates Kharkiv as the capital of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) as well as an industrial and scientific center throughout the 20th century. The victory of the Soviet Union in the ‘Great Patriotic War.’</td>
<td>Initiated by local government programs and initiatives in the post-Soviet era. Promotes Ukrainian language and anti-Moscow interpretation of history. Formed by the local pro-Ukraine intelligentsia, nationalist factions, and partially accepted by local political elites.</td>
<td>A narrative created and bolstered by pragmatic political elites in the post-Soviet era. Attempts to appease Ukrainian nationalists and pro-Moscow factions. Harmonizes Ukrainian identity and state priorities as well as cross-border political and economic cooperation with Russia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Russia’s Position Toward Narrative</strong></td>
<td>Ignored by Russia.</td>
<td>Actively supported by Russia.</td>
<td>Actively supported by Russia.</td>
<td>Ignored by Russia.</td>
<td>Pro-Soviet and pro-Russia narrative components recognized.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.3 Consequential Period 1: 2004 Presidential Election and 2005 Orange Revolution

The purpose of the following sections is to assess the components of Russia’s role and power in Eastern Ukraine during the 2004 Presidential election and subsequent Orange Revolution period. This information contributes to the quantitative assessment of the role-power gap, which constitutes Moscow’s system-level incentive to apply coercive gray zone tools and tactics in Kharkiv following crisis onset in February 2014.

Moscow presented the 2004 Presidential election as a clash between the West and Russia over zones of influence in the post-Soviet region rather than a Ukrainian internal affair.\textsuperscript{23} Interpretations of Soviet-era history and divisions over language policy were the key contributors to social fracturing during this period.\textsuperscript{24} A victory for Yanukovych and his Party of Regions was perceived by some as maintenance of a Moscow-centric vision of history, and an improvement in minority language rights. On the other hand, a victory for Viktor Yushchenko was perceived by the majority of Kharkiv residents as a win for nationalistic factions who would uphold anti-Soviet (and therefore anti-Moscow) interpretation of history and suppress minority language rights across Ukraine. In turn, this entailed a deterioration in relations between Ukraine and Russia.\textsuperscript{25} Table 6.2 below provides a summary of the qualitative information regarding Russia’s perceived role and power associated with Consequential Period 1 discussed in the subsequent sections.

6.3.1 Russia’s Articulation of Role and Protector Responsibility

Around the 2004 Ukrainian Presidential election period, and subsequent civil unrest known as the Orange Revolution, Moscow indicated it would take an active role in support of Russian culture, historic memory, and Russian speakers in Ukraine. The role narrative articulated by Moscow placed a strong emphasis on 1) challenges with Russian-language
education and 2) the protection of the memory of the Great Patriotic War; many prominent Russian political figures claimed the accurate accounts of the War were systematically falsified across the post-Soviet region. Implicitly, however, these positions corresponded with many aspects of the ‘Sloboda narrative,’ which celebrated Kharkiv’s hybrid Russian-Ukrainian identity.

Moscow claimed it should establish organizations in regions with a high concentration of the Russian diaspora as a way to operationalize its protector role. However, this larger plan was not bespoke to Kharkiv; it also incorporated other regions in Ukraine with a high Russian diaspora concentration such as Odesa, Crimea, and the Donbas.

In 2003-2004 President Vladimir Putin formed a special department which, under the cover of inter-regional and cultural ties, was tasked with support for pro-Russian language and cultural organizations. These organizations promoted the Moscow-centric (or pro-Soviet) historical interpretation of the ‘Great Patriotic War’ and minimized competing narratives, which dominated the political landscapes in former Soviet republics. However, during this period, the ‘protection’ of the diaspora would not only be on the agenda of secretive Kremlin offices but became a cornerstone of Russia’s public diplomacy.

For example, at a 2005 conference on “The Russian Language on the Boundary of Millennia,” Putin’s wife Lyudmila declared in her speech: “the confirmation of the borders of the Russian world is also the assertion and strengthening of Russia’s national interests. The Russian language unifies the people of the Russian world—the aggregate of those who speak and think in that language. The borders of the Russian world extend along the borders
of Russian language usage.”  

Even though at the conference the identity of the ‘Russian compatriots’ was defined through the common use of Russian language and education, a commonly-shared historic interpretation and experiences associated with Second World War were also evoked in the speech. As noted in the subsequent section, these messages became broadly accepted in Kharkiv around that time.

**6.3.2 Degree of Local Acceptance of Russia’s Role as Protector**

Prior to the 2004 Presidential election, the perspective of the Kharkiv City Council was that the Ukrainian government was taking steps to oust the Russian language from official use. Council members labeled the efforts by the Kyiv authorities as “undemocratic” and a violation of “European standard.” For example, in 2002 the Kharkiv City Council conducted a referendum in an effort to elevate the Russian language to an equal status with Ukrainian. Even though 83 percent of the participants in the referendum voted in favor of the proposal, Ukraine’s Supreme court dismissed the outcome. In turn, this adversarial relationship between Kyiv and Kharkiv authorities facilitated a high level of social mobilization in Kharkiv in support of Russian protection.

For example, a key local supporter of political alignment with Russia in Kharkiv was Evgeny Kushnarev, the Head of the Kharkiv Regional Administration. In November 2004, along with a team of leading policymakers from the Administration, he participated in the “the First All-Ukrainian Congress of Deputies of All Levels in Severodonetsk,” where the defeated Presidential candidate Viktor Yanukovych gathered his loyalists. Dismissing election results, Conference organizers turned to support from President Vladimir Putin, thereby recognizing and legitimizing the Kremlin’s role as protector of the Eastern Ukrainian region. President Putin designated Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov, one
of the Kremlin’s top advocates for Russian language rights and the Great Patriotic War, to attend the conference. During a multilateral roundtable discussion with Luzhkov, Kushnarev emphasized his alignment with Moscow stating that “from Kharkiv to Kyiv 480 kilometers, and to the border with Russia – only 40km.” In response, Luzhkov committed to supporting the resistance to Yushchenko’s linguistic and cultural Ukrainization policies. However, the recognition of Russia’s role in Kharkiv was not only defined by the orientation of local political elites around that time.

Local commemorative events took place, and monuments were erected, in the Kharkiv Region to celebrate the Soviet victory in the ‘Great Patriotic War.’ In August 2003, a celebration titled "60th anniversary of the liberation of the Kharkiv region from the Nazi invaders" took place in Solonitsevka, Kharkiv Region at the Marshall of the Soviet Union Konev Height. A memorial complex, one of the largest in Ukraine, was constructed with the support of local officials and the Kuchma government in Kyiv. 15,000 local citizens joined the laying of flowers at the Glory Memorial in the Forest Park, and up to 25,000 at Marshal Konev's Height. Moreover, representatives from Russia and the Prime Minister of Ukraine at the time, Viktor Yanukovych, attended the ceremony. However, even with such a high degree of local acceptance of Russia’s perceived protector role in Kharkiv, the level of cross-border commitment to Moscow’s protection did not correspond.

6.3.3 Formalization of Russia’s Perceived Role in Relation to Kharkiv

The level of formalization of Russia’s perceived role as protector of Russian compatriots in Kharkiv was moderate around the 2004 Presidential Election and 2005 Orange Revolution periods. The commitment by Russia to provide support to Russian-
language education and commemoration of Soviet history was operationalized through local-level cross-border ties and informal agreements.

For example, in early 2002 negotiations began among local Russian and Ukrainian officials to establish cross-border economic cooperation between the Kharkiv Region and its neighboring jurisdictions in Russia. In November 2003, the cross-border cooperation framework titled “Euroregion Slobozhanshchina” was created to support socio-economic cooperation between Kharkiv and the Russian Belgorod regions. Even though its achievements were largely economic in character, the Euroregion initiative contributed to a favourable political climate for cross-border political cooperation in other domains as well.

In late 2002, the Government of Moscow passed a resolution titled “On the Comprehensive Target Medium-Term Program for Supporting Compatriots Abroad for 2003-2005,” under which Moscow and Kharkiv established channels of cultural cooperation. Moscow Mayor Luzhkov was one of the most active participants in Russia’s renewed effort to engage with compatriots in the post-Soviet space. As noted in its documents, the efforts of the Moscow Government focused on challenges posed to Russian speakers and education as well as support for the pro-Soviet memory of the Second World War. Specifically in Kharkiv, the Comprehensive Target Medium-Term Program relied on ties with local university administrations and rectors to promote Russian-language learning and the history of the Great Patriotic War. However, the success of these cross-border ties and the acceptance of Moscow’s protector role in Kharkiv was also a function of Russia’s strategic deployment of persuasion, or Active Measures.
6.3.4 Russia’s Active Measures around the 2004 Presidential Election and Orange Revolution Period

Prior to the 2004 Election, Russia’s Active Measures were largely focused on the information domain. At this time, Moscow’s ‘soft’ tools and tactics were used to persuade the local population in Kharkiv to support cross-border cooperation with Russia. However, these operations were less sophisticated and impactful relative to the periods examined in this chapter. Cross-border influence targeting Ukraine's individual regions was present but was largely undertaken by a few GONGOs such as the Moscow City Administration. Concurrently, however, a broader information campaign through Russian state-run media was deployed to influence the outcome of the 2004 Presidential election; this also had an impact at a local level across Eastern Ukraine.40

Russian state-run mass media became instrumental in the persuasion of Ukrainians to support Yanukovych. For example, Paniotto (2009) notes that billboards were even erected in Moscow with Yanukovych’s photo and the slogan “Vote for President Yanukovych.” Putin's arrival in Ukraine one week prior to the election was also an attempt to mobilize pro-Russian factions in Ukraine.41 The President of Russia was persuading Ukrainian citizens through three national TV channels to vote for Yanukovych.42 In fact, Putin congratulated Yanukovych twice on his election as the President of Ukraine amid civil disobedience actions, when final election results have yet to be declared by Ukraine’s Central Election Commission.43 However, as highlighted in the next part, Russia’s Active Measures to encourage the acceptance and cross-border commitment to its perceived protector role became more sophisticated leading up to the 2010 Presidential Election.
6.4 Consequential Period 2: 2010 Ukrainian Presidential Election

The purpose of the following sections is to outline the components of Russia’s perceived role and power in Kharkiv around the 2010 Ukrainian Presidential election period. This information contributes to the quantitative assessment of the role-power gap, which constitutes Moscow’s system-level incentive to apply coercive gray zone tools and tactics in Kharkiv following crisis onset in February 2014.

There are several trends in Russia’s role and power during this consequential event (or short period). First, the degree of specificity remained moderate as Moscow focused on challenges of Russian language use and the memory of the Great Patriotic War. However, these components, also significantly overlapped with the ‘Sloboda’ narrative. Second, the degree of role scope also remained moderate compared to the previously-examined period as the two leading narratives to help operationalize Moscow’s protector role in Kharkiv were also applicable to other regions. Third, the degree of role clarity remained moderate as the two main challenge areas for Russia were education rights and the issues of the ‘falsification’ of the memory of the ‘Great Patriotic War.’ Fourth, the level of acceptance of Russia’s role declined relative to the previously examined period, as the magnitude of local social mobilization in support of Russia’s perceived protector role decreased. Finally, the degree of formalization of Russia’s role in Kharkiv was characterized by loose cross-border agreements between Russian GONGOs and local organizations as well as memoranda with local legislative representatives from the region. Table 6.2 below provides a summary of the qualitative information regarding Russia’s perceived role and power associated with Consequential Period 2 discussed in the subsequent sections.
6.4.1 Russia’s Articulation of Role and Protector Responsibility

Even though not unique to the region, the two narratives used as a platform by Russia to operationalize its perceived protector role in Kharkiv are 1) the ‘Russian speaking world’ narrative, focusing on education and 2) the Soviet narrative with particular focus on the ‘falsification’ of the pro-Soviet account of wartime events. However, these narratives also significantly overlapped with the ‘Sloboda Ukraine’ hybrid identity, which attempted to appease both Russophile and Ukrainian nationalists. In the latter case, Russia’s narratives celebrated the Great Patriotic War victory and the importance of the Russian language while ignoring any of the pro-Ukrainian perspectives within the ‘Sloboda’ narrative.

For example, in April and May 2009, Russia’s State Duma prepared two bills that addressed what Moscow perceived as “the rehabilitation of Nazism” across the post-Soviet space. At the time, President Dmitry Medvedev also established a new commission to “counteract attempts to falsify history to the detriment of the interests of Russia.”

Powerful political figures such as Konstantin Zatulin, Deputy Chair of the Duma Committee on the Affairs of the Commonwealth of Independent States, guided the efforts. Zatulin claimed that special focus should be given to “how the falsification of the accounts of the Second World War is often interwoven with anti-Russian politics in former Soviet Republics.” The purview of his proposed draft law covered Russia’s ‘near abroad.’

However, aside from the Russian executive and legislative branches, Russian GONGOs also focused their attention on these issues.

In May 2009, a month following the introduction of the two bills in the Russian Duma, the Kremlin-backed Russkiy Mir Foundation ran an information campaign
highlighting the ‘systemic falsification’ of the events of the Great Patriotic War. Moreover, it was explained that Russia should counter this “worrisome trend.” Moreover, based on the news campaign Russkiy Mir, the issue of falsification also became a security concern. For example, the Ministry of Defence of Russia emerged as one of the government organs to spearhead Moscow’s active opposition to the anti-Soviet political sentiment crystalizing in Kyiv. However, the efforts to counteract the ‘falsification’ of the events of the ‘Great Patriotic War,’ were accompanied by localized efforts to support Russian-speaking ‘compatriots’ in Ukraine.

In Kharkiv, the Russkiy Mir Foundation actively supported the pro-Soviet narrative of the Second World War. For example, on 3 September 2009, the Foundation funded the “Second World War: Lessons and Significance for Ukraine” conference, which brought academics, political figures, and diplomatic representatives from Ukraine, Russia, and other post-Soviet states. The official purpose of the conference was to debate the events of the Second World War. In practice, however, it was a reaffirmation of their commitment to the Soviet-era narrative and heroism of the Red Army. Such conferences, however, were part of a broader policy developed by Moscow to protect its perceived ‘compatriots.’

Russia’s policy on ‘compatriots’ was tailored to target the Russian-speaking diaspora in post-Soviet states, where varying economic and political exclusion policies have been implemented by the national government. As noted in Chapter 2, ‘compatriots’ were identified by Russia as the Russian-speaking diaspora, comprised of individuals of Slavic as well as non-Slavic ethnicity. For these people, the Russian “homeland” is seen as a
concrete political agent, wherein Moscow’s adoption of supportive policies reinforces a sense of identity with Russia.\textsuperscript{51}

This policy priority to defend Russian-speaking ‘compatriots’ was operationalized through state-backed GONGOs, which actively supported the use of Russian language media at a local level. The Government of Russia invested in media projects in Kharkiv to highlight the broader challenges associated with Russian language use in Ukraine and Moscow’s commitment to supporting Kharkiv Russophones.\textsuperscript{52} For example, in June 2009, the Russkiy Mir Foundation funded the "Russian-Ukrainian Friendship: History and Modernity" television program, which focused on Russian language, literature as well as challenges to minority-language education and media following the Orange Revolution.\textsuperscript{53} In turn, Russia’s perceived protector role in Kharkiv became generally recognized in the city and region by the local population as well as some local politicians around the 2010 Presidential election.

\textbf{6.4.2 Degree of Local Acceptance of Russia’s Role}

During the 2010 Ukrainian Presidential Election period, the acceptance of Russia’s perceived role, with a focus on the Russian language and the Great Patriotic War narrative, declined relative to the previously examined period. The observed trend can be attributed to several phenomena: 1) absence of legislative efforts to incorporate Russia into any solutions associated with the marginalization of the Russian language or the pro-Soviet memory of the Second World War, 2) a small minority of the local population was supporting of Russia’s perceived regional protector role, and 3) the increased acceptance of the Imperial narrative, such as historic unity of Slavic people, which was misaligned with Russia’s prioritized narrative. However, attendance at role-affirming events, such as
commemorations of historic Russian ‘literary heroes’ and celebrations of the Great Patriotic War, remained high.

For example, the 200th birthday of the Russian-Ukrainian writer Nikolai Gogol was held on 1 April 2009 to recognize the importance of the Russian language in Kharkiv. The event was attended by hundreds of local residents from the city and Oblast (region). During the rallies, a member of the Regional Council Party of Regions faction read out a text as an appeal of the rally participants for support of the Russian language from deputies of the Russian State Duma. Even though language policy in Kharkiv became a major subject of discussion in local politics, sympathy for the Imperial narrative also began to emerge in the city and surrounding region.

The Cossack Community of Kharkiv was an inseparable part of the local identity for a segment of the local population, who were too young to remember the Tsarist era. However, they were infatuated with Russian Imperial ‘glory’ and heroic mythology. For example, on 21 February 2009, a ceremony was held to commemorate the heroism of fallen White soldiers of the Russian Civil War (1917-1922). The event, as noted by the Chuguev City Cossack Community, was dedicated to the “Orthodox Russian soldiers, who gave their lives for Faith, Tsar, and Fatherland.” – against the Communists.

6.4.3 Degree of Formality of Russia’s Role in Kharkiv

The degree of cross-border commitment to Russia’s perceived protector role in Kharkiv remained moderate around the Presidential election of 2010. It was based on loose cross-border inter-governmental cooperation as well as through local GONGO. Even though the Kharkiv Regional Council, in collaboration with the City Administration, passed resolutions that corresponded with Russia’s goals in Kharkiv, these legislative
efforts did not recognize Moscow’s protector role. These efforts established weak channels for bilateral cooperation on issues such as the preservation of the Russian language and shared history.

For example, on 16 April 2009, the Kharkiv Regional Council hosted a round table titled "Civilization of Ukraine: from a common heritage to a common future.” Event organizers invited scientists from Kharkiv, deputies from Ukraine’s Verkhovna Rada, deputies of the Kharkiv Regional Council, representatives of political and public organizations from Kyiv, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, and Dnepropetrovsk. Moreover, the Council invited the Consul General of Russia in Kharkiv, representatives of Russian public organizations for ‘compatriots’ issues, and several deputies of the Russian State Duma.57

These multilateral cooperation efforts also incorporated recognition of a common Imperial history and the necessity of its preservation. The conference organized by the Kharkiv Regional Council round table facilitated a discussion over the historical roots of the formation of the East Slavic (Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian) community of peoples, the civilizational values of the East Slavic (Russian) world, and nationalism.58 In this context, event participants also covered topics such as civilizational aspirations of the regions of Ukraine, their influence on the policy of the state, the prospects for East Slavic integration of Ukraine, and the preconditions for continued integration of “brotherly” peoples.59

On 10 June 2009, the Kharkiv Regional Council Chair Sergei Chernov announced a commitment to active cross-border cooperation on cultural initiatives between the region and the Russian government. Following the International Conference "The Russian Language in a Multicultural World," the Chair stated that “Kharkiv has retained the status
of the capital of Ukrainian-Russian cooperation and the capital of Russian culture in Ukraine.” This was a commitment to cooperate with Russia on solutions for minority language challenges at a regional level.

A week later, on 17 June 2009, the Russian GONGO Russkiy Mir established its largest Russian Centre at the Kharkiv Humanitarian University "People's Ukrainian Academy." The opening ceremony was led by representatives of the Kharkiv City and Regional administration, University representatives, the Consul General of Russia in Kharkiv, Vsevolod Philip, as well as several key leaders of Russkiy Mir. The mission of the Moscow-funded center was to promote Russian "Culture and Art", Science, Education, "Russian language, and Shared History." The latter component specifically emphasizes pro-Soviet patriotic education. However, the acceptance of Russia’s perceived protector role in Kharkiv and the degree of cross-border commitment to that role was considered a function of persuasion and Active Measures deployed by Moscow.

6.4.4 Russia’s Active Measures in Kharkiv Around the 2010 Presidential Election

Through the use of organized information campaigns, Russia’s goal around the 2010 Presidential election was to promoted its narratives and values as well as establish its alignment with Viktor Yanukovych’s platform for the election. By influencing the local acceptance and formalization of Russia’s narrative, Moscow believed it would persuade people to vote for the Party of Region and Yanukovych. In turn, the removal of Yushchenko meant the elimination of political barriers for Russia to exercise its perceived protector role. To this end, Moscow allocated significant resources for the promotion of local acceptance and formalization of its role by focusing on community challenges such
as the preservation of the Russian language and pro-Soviet account of the Second World War.

Russia’s intervention in Ukraine’s 2010 election was more subdued relative to the 2004 Election. This restraint may account for the decline in the acceptance of Russia’s protector role by the local population in Kharkiv. Unlike 2004 and 2005, when Russia’s Vladimir Putin openly endorsed his favorite candidate Viktor Yanukovych, in 2009-2010 Russia’s politicians did not articulate a clear preference for any of the candidates until the second round. Only in the second phase of the election, Russia’s media and ranking members of the executive and legislative branches endorsed Viktor Yanukovych.

Russian state-owned television channels became a key platform for the mobilization of popular support for Yanukovych. In 2010 such television channels were watched by the majority of the population in Russian-speaking regions across Eastern Ukraine. For example, Yanukovych emerged as the favorite candidate on the eve of the first round on the Rossiya 1 channel, where he was featured in eleven of the thirteen reports and shown, speaking in ten of fifteen programs. However such restraint by Russia relative to the Orange Revolution did not mean a complete withdraw. In fact, at the community level in Kharkiv, Russia actively engaged in public diplomacy to increase the acceptance of its narrative by the local population as well as to formalize it.

The Consul General of Russia and the Russkiy Mir Foundation were the main actors in Kharkiv which provided financial and political support for events promoting Moscow’s perceived protector role in the region. For example, the Russkiy Mir Foundation funded multiple Russian Centers in Kharkiv. These were located in local universities, libraries as well as separate buildings constructed exclusively by the Foundation and partner donors.
These events, which hosted local pro-Russia Kharkiv politicians as well as promoted and glorified the military victories of the Soviet Union in the Great Patriotic War. Moreover, the Centers hosted cultural events and educational programs for the promotion of the Russian language. However, the persuasion of the local population and formalization of Moscow’s perceived role as protector of Kharkiv was not solely within the purview of GONGOs.

A conference titled "Military History of the Native Land", designed for the participation of hundreds of youth in Kharkiv was held on an annual basis to bolster public support for the pro-Soviet account of the Second World War. The conference and workshops were wholly funded by the Consulate General of Russia in Kharkiv. However, the events were run in collaboration with the Department of Education and Science of the Kharkiv Region and the (municipal) Department of Education of Kharkiv.

For example, on 1 April 2009, the Russian Consulate co-organized a 200th-anniversary commemoration of the birth of the Russian-Ukrainian writer Gogol at the Poetry Square Monument in Kharkiv. Vsevolod Philip, Consul General of the Russian Consulate, attended the event calling for Gogol to be a symbol of the unity of Slavic peoples. The promotional event was also attended by influential regional policymakers such as the Head of the Department of Culture and Tourism of the Kharkiv Administration Nina Suprunenko. She echoed the message of the Consul General stating that “that one of the main values of Gogol's heritage is the unity of the Slavic peoples.”

6.5 Consequential Period 3: Russia’s Protector Role Preceding the February 2014 Crisis

The purpose of the following sections is to qualitatively assess the components of Russia’s role and power in Kharkiv preceding the onset of the crisis in February 2014. This
information contributes to the quantitative assessment of the role-power gap, which constitutes Moscow’s system-level incentive to apply coercive gray zone tools and tactics in Kharkiv following crisis onset in February 2014.

The Soviet narrative and Kharkiv as part of the ‘Russian-speaking world’ were the two narratives used to operationalize Moscow’s perceived protector role in Kharkiv prior to crisis onset in February 2014. Both of these narratives, however, were also an integral part of the unique ‘Sloboda’ identity narrative, which recognized Kharkiv’s historic and cultural association with both Ukraine and Russia. Moscow continued to emphasize Russian-language education challenges in Kharkiv as well as the ‘falsification’ of the events of the Second World War. However, these narratives, and corresponding challenges, were not bespoke to Kharkiv as they were applicable to other regions across Ukraine with a significant Russian diaspora population. At the same time, the degree of local social mobilization in support of Russia’s perceived protector role declined compared to 2010. However, the degree of cross-border commitment to Moscow’s perceived protector role remained moderate, as in the case of the 2010 Presidential election period. Weak ties between Kremlin-backed GONGOs and local Kharkiv were used to maintain Moscow’s protector role. Table 6.2 below provides a summary of the qualitative information regarding Russia’s perceived role and power for Consequential Period 3 discussed in the subsequent sections.

6.5.1 Russia’s Articulation of Role and Protector Responsibility

Even though in 2013-2014 the protection of Russian’s speaking ‘compatriots’ and the ‘accurate’ memory of the Great Patriotic War was not storylines exclusive to Kharkiv,
these themes were the foundation of Russia’s perceived role applicable to the city and region.

The Russkiy Mir and Rossotrudnichestvo GONGOs were the key platforms to advance Russia’s narrative in Kharkiv. These Kremlin-backed entities articulated Moscow’s role as protector of the marginalized local Russian-speaking compatriots as well as the ‘accurate’ memory of the Great Patriotic War. For example, on 23 August 2013, the Russkiy Mir Foundation, Rossotrudnichestvo, Consul General of the Russian Federation in Kharkiv, and Special Representative of the President of Russia Konstantin Kosachev, funded an event in support of the pro-Soviet narrative of the Second World War. The commemoration event titled “70th Anniversary of the Battle of Kursk” affirmed Russia’s continuous commitment to the maintenance of the “truth” regarding the victory and heroism of the Soviet Union in the defeat of Nazi Germany, as well as local Kharkiv veterans.73 In tandem with the memory of the War, Russian GONGOs were a key platform to operationalize Moscow’s perceived role as protector of the local Russian-speaking population.

Preceding the February 2014 crisis, Russia’s leadership believed that the protection and support of Russian speakers in regions such as Kharkiv was a paramount goal. By implication, Moscow was concerned about the decline in Russian language education in traditionally Russophone localities such as Kharkiv. The clear signal from the Kremlin was that Russia was responsible for reversing this trend. Kremlin-funded GONGOs, in collaboration with Kharkiv educational institutions and leaders at the highest levels of the government, funded programs to nurture the next generation of promoters of the Russian language.
For example, on 12 November 2013, the State Russian Language Institute, Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Government Olga Golodets, as well as the Russkiy Mir Foundation and Rossotrudnichestvo, launched an international program to promote Russian language ambassadors. The purpose of the program was “education in Russia as a channel for the spread of the Russian language in the world and the role of public organizations in the promotion of the Russian language.” In Moscow, students from various post-Soviet nations, including Ukraine (with 5 students from Kharkiv), gathered to begin their multi-year program in Russian universities. Even though Russia’s government was convinced of its legitimacy in protecting ‘compatriots,’ the vision of the local population in Kharkiv was substantially incongruent with Moscow’s perceived protector role.

6.5.2 Degree of Local Acceptance of Russia’s Role

Compared to the previously examined period in 2010, the local level of acceptance of Russia’s perceived role in Kharkiv declined. The observed decrease in the role-affirming social mobilization of the Kharkiv population can be confirmed through the following evidence: 1) local surveys as well as 2) the low alignment between community priorities and the protector role perceived by Moscow. However, the level of attendance at role-affirming events, reinforcing Russia’s language and Great Patriotic War, remained high. Surveys of the local population indicated that preceding crisis onset, a minority of Kharkiv residents believed that Moscow had the right to intervene in support of Russian-speaking compatriots. For example, a 2014 Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) survey indicated that only 36 percent believed such an intervention would be legitimate.
However, the low level of acceptance of Russia’s role was not only determined by local citizens’ sentiments. The social policies of the Kharkiv City Administration indicated a low level of alignment between local priorities and Russia’s perceived role applicable to Kharkiv. The cornerstone cultural development program in Kharkiv titled “the Complex Program of Cultural Development in Kharkiv from 2011–2016”, announced on December 29, 2010, provides a signal of this misalignment between local authorities and Moscow.

Unlike Moscow, which focused on its protector role of the Russian language and pro-Soviet storyline of the Second World War, the 2011-2016 Program emphasized the coexistence of Russian and Ukrainian cultural narratives. Instead of adopting either a pro-Moscow or Ukrainian nationalist narrative, local city elites in Kharkiv emphasized the ‘Sloboda’ Ukraine narrative. This was an attempt to appease both dominant cultural camps.

Several key provisions of the 2011-2016 Program indicated a commitment promote the hybrid Slobozhanshchyna identity, which harmonized Russophile and Ukrainian national identities in Kharkiv. First, Program documents highlight that the overarching goal was to “preserve and to increase Kharkiv’s position as a cultural centre of Slobozhanshchyna.” Second, in support of Ukrainian national identity, the program promoted “patriotic sentiments of Kharkivites toward their native country and to Kharkiv, [through] the organization of rest during holidays, supporting talented people by the organization of different cultural projects, and [national] festivals.” However, the program also noted a commitment to celebrate the victory of the “Great Patriotic War” – a term that legitimized Russia’s pro-Soviet narrative of the Second World War. Finally, without a
direct recognition of the Russian diaspora, the document established a commitment to support local minority language education and literacy. However, these provisions were far from a comprehensive recognition of Moscow’s role as protector of Russian-speaking compatriots or the pro-Soviet account of the Second World War. Rather, the most support Moscow received regarding its perceived protector role was from Kharkivites, who demonstrated their support through local events.

For example, two consecutive celebrations of the victory in the Great Patriotic War took place in Kharkiv in May and August 2013. The first, which took place on May 9 Victory Day, was a two-day celebration. The event, attended by thousands of people, was funded by the Consulate General of the Russian Federation in Kharkiv and the Head of the Kharkiv City Organization of Veterans of Ukraine. The Second Event, funded by the Russian GONGO Rossotrudnichestvo, and attended by President Yanukovych, took place on 23 August 2013 to commemorate the liberation of Kharkiv by the Red Army. The event incorporated diplomatic dialogue between Russian, Ukrainian, and local Kharkiv officials, the culmination of which was a commitment to reject the ‘falsification’ of the narrative of the Second World War. In turn, such acceptance of Russia’s role in Kharkiv enabled an extensive network of cross-border cooperation between Kremlin-backed GONGOs and local Kharkiv institutions, which reinforced Moscow’s perceived protector role.

6.5.3 Degree of Formality of Russia’s Role in Kharkiv

The level of commitment to Russia’s role as protector of ‘compatriots’ remained the same relative to the previously examined period in 2010. However Law no. 5029-VI "On the Principles of the State Language Policy,” drafted by the Yanukovych government
in 2012, improved minority language rights. In turn, this created a friendly political environment for the formalization of Moscow’s Russian language protector role.

Years of linguistic and cultural Ukrainization policies in Kyiv raised barriers for cross-border ties between Russia and Ukraine during the Yushchenko period. In the midst of such difficulties, however, Moscow continued to assert itself as a prominent political actor in Kharkiv. These barriers were largely removed following the election of Yanukovych, who created a favorable political climate for Russian and local organizations to formalize cross-border cultural ties. It did not result in greater cooperation, but existing formal networks, which reinforced Russia’s political participation in Kharkiv, were no longer strained. The Russian Consulate General and the Russkiy Mir Foundation continued to serve as the main cross-border civil society linkage between Russia and Kharkiv.

For example, on 24 August 2013, Regional policymakers affirmed their commitment to work with Russia during the multilateral meeting between Kharkiv policymakers and Russian State Duma representatives. The lawmakers gather to commemorate the Great Patriotic War. Chair of the Kharkiv Regional Administration, Mikhail Dobkin, noted that cooperation between the Russkiy Mir Foundation and the Region is essential to address challenges to the pro-Soviet narrative which unites people across borders. Moreover, Dobkin mentioned that a new branch of the organization Rossotrudnichestvo would give a “new impetus to the development of bilateral humanitarian and cultural projects”. Even though such cross-border informal ties indicated some commitment to Moscow’s narrative, this was largely dependent on Russia’s persuasion measures to bolster these relationships.
6.5.4 Russia’s Active Measures Preceding Crisis Onset

With increasing social unrest in Ukraine starting in December 2013, control of public discourse over the events at the Maidan square became an essential task for Moscow. Such control was essential to maintain its perceived protector role.

Moscow made a significant effort to persuade the local population against the anti-Yanukovych factions. In targeting the Russian-speaking diaspora in Kharkiv through information campaigns, Moscow wanted to demonstrate the malevolence of anti-Yanukovych factions. This was to guarantee the receptiveness of Russia’s narrative as the protector of the Russian ‘compatriots’ by Kharkivites. Although a smaller concern for Moscow relative to the Donbas and other locations, the mobilization of such public support for its narrative also enabled Russia to protect local pro-Russian elites. These individuals aided Russian GONGOs in forming links with local cultural organizations and government organs in Kharkiv.

Prior to the overthrow of the Yanukovych government in February 2014, most of Eastern Ukraine (including Kharkiv) watched Russian television, and, typical of the former Soviet region, much of the population received their news from televised sources. This media space was a key platform for Russia’s persuasion campaigns. For example, The Maidan protest movement, which began in November 2013, had energized Russia’s already-intense manipulation of information warning of the dangers of closer ties with the EU.

The demonstrations on Maidan Square in Kyiv and other parts of Ukraine also coincided with a structural reorganization of media and news agencies in Russia. For example, on 9 December 2013, RIA Novosti, one of the Russian government’s most
prominent news platforms was replaced with Russia Today (RT). This re-organization and centralization of its main news agencies targeting audiences outside of Russia in a single media entity enabled Moscow to coordinate information delivery more effectively. In tandem, Russian-backed GONGOs played a key role in the persuasion and formalization of Russia’s perceived role in Ukraine.

The Russkiy Mir Foundation was an essential platform used to disseminate Russia’s perceived role as protector of the Russian language and ‘accurate’ memory of the Great Patriotic War in Kharkiv. With the collaboration of the Russian Consulate General in Kharkiv and Moscow State University (MGU), the Organization funded university student exchange programs with the intent of raising the next generation of Moscow loyalists. The intent was for the students to become "ambassadors of the Russian World" upon their return to their university in Kharkiv.

Table 6.2 below summarizes the degree of specificity, geographic scope, clarity, acceptance and formality associated with Russia’s perceived protector role in Kharkiv across the three consequential periods.
Table 6.2. Summary of Trends in Russia’s Perceived Role and Relative Power Across the Consequential Events (or Short Periods) in Kharkiv

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<tr>
<td>Degree of Specificity</td>
<td>Moderate role focus across the three consequential events (or short periods); Russia focused on the Soviet and Russian-language narratives. However, these narratives significantly overlapped with Kharkiv’s hybrid ‘Sloboda’ identity.</td>
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<td>Degree of Scope</td>
<td>Moderate geographic focus across the three consequential periods; Russia’s perceived role as protector of Russian language and pro-Soviet memory of the Second World War (or Great Patriotic War) applicable to more than one region in Ukraine.</td>
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<td>Degree of Clarity</td>
<td>Moderate role details across all three consequential periods; Russia focused on two key challenge areas: 1) Russian-language education in Kharkiv and 2) efforts to falsify the pro-Soviet memory of the Second World War (or Great Patriotic War).</td>
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<td>Degree of Acceptance</td>
<td>High role-affirming social mobilization; local political establishment in Kharkiv Region sought Russian support; high attendance at role-affirming events.</td>
<td>Moderate-high role-affirming social mobilization; declined compared to previous period; no legislative effort to incorporate Russia into a solution of language discrimination or memory of the Great Patriotic War challenges; moderate misalignment with Russia’s priorities as ‘Imperial narrative’ became prominent.</td>
<td>Moderate role-affirming social mobilization. declined compared to previous period; surveys indicate minority accepted Russia’s role; misalignment with local priorities – (hybrid) ‘Slobozhashchyna’ narrative, which also supported Ukrainian nationalism, became a priority in Kharkiv government policy and population.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degree of Formality</td>
<td>Moderate commitment to Moscow’s role among Russian and Kharkiv authorities. Commitments to Russia’s perceived protector role were operationalized through loose agreements (or memoranda) between local educational and legislative organs in Kharkiv and Russian GONGOs.</td>
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### 6.6 Secessionism in Kharkiv

The purpose of the following section is to qualitatively assess the domestic-level opportunity (IV2) for Russia’s application of coercion in Kharkiv, based on the type of ethnic-based movement before the crisis onset on 21 February 2014. When considering intervention in an ethnic-based dispute, the type of movement with which an intervener would engage constitutes a cost for intervention. As discussed in Chapter 2, Chazan and Horowitz (1990), as well as Heraclides (1990), conclude that intervention in irredentist
movements is costlier relative to secessionism based on the depth of commitment and its duration, international reputation, and potential consequences as the endeavor requires the direct undermining of the territorial integrity of another state. Since support for irredentism ultimately requires the addition of a territory and its people to the ‘mother country,’ it becomes more difficult to assist the movement covertly. Committed and protracted support, inherent to intervention in the irredentist conflict, increases the chances of exposure of aid operations and thus, the intervener paying high domestic and international costs.\(^9\)3

The desire for greater autonomy from Kyiv emerged in Kharkiv as a reaction to an increasingly nationalizing Ukrainian state. In practice, unlike the case of Abkhazia examined in Chapter 3, secessionism in Kharkiv fits the incremental definition of the term. Rather than formally declaring independence from Kyiv, the local ethnic-based movement desired greater local autonomy and control over socio-linguistic policy.\(^9\)4 Social rifts, on the basis of language rights as well as cultural affiliation, were growing as successive governments in Kyiv eroded minority rights. However, the minority-related challenges in Kharkiv should not only be attributed to a standoff between the city (or oblast), as a monolithic entity, and Kyiv.

The societal fracturing which facilitated secessionism in Kharkiv was both internal to the city (and oblast) as well as in relation to Kyiv. Many residents and elected leaders in Kharkiv wanted to use the Russian language freely in everyday life, in official government business, and in education. These deep-rooted grievances, in turn, contributed to the ideological platform for secessionism. On the other hand, national authorities in Kyiv often supported rapid linguistic Ukrainization policies.\(^9\)5 In line with the national government’s vision, some residents of Kharkiv also supported the maintenance of Ukrainian as the only
This combination of external pressure from Kyiv, and significant local support for linguistic Ukrainization, facilitated resistance from the local, predominantly Russian-speaking, minority and in turn, secessionism.

The increasing linguistic Ukrainization policies emerging from Kyiv became a focal point in local politics beginning in the 1990s. For example, On 25 December 1996, the Kharkiv City Council voted to use the Russian language as a working language in official business. Shortly after the legislation passed by the Council, the Supreme Court of Ukraine declared this decision illegal. These events formed the basis for deep-rooted grievances, which continued into the twenty-first century.

Secessionism gained political momentum in November 2004, when leaders across Eastern Ukraine disputed the victory of Viktor Yushchenko during the Presidential election. In fact, a proposal was made by the defeated Yushchenko and his allies to form the autonomous Southeastern Republic. The coordinating council of this political project, the home of its executive directorate, and in turn, the capital of South-Eastern Ukrainian Autonomous Republic (YUVUAR) was planned to be in Kharkiv. However, due to poor coordination and sabotage by the Yushchenko government, the project collapsed. This fracturing of Kharkiv’s society across linguistic and socio-cultural lines was a consistent phenomenon preceding crisis onset in February 2014.

For example, on 1 December 2013, 4,000 people rallied in Kharkiv calling for revolution and support for Ukraine’s integration with Europe. In response, thousands of people rallied against the Euromaidan movement in support of closer ties with Moscow. The activities of these anti-Maidan activists however should not be interpreted as a desire
to join Russia. Rather, these slogans were used as an ideological backdrop to mobilize public support for greater autonomy.

Irredentism did not become a viable movement in Kharkiv, largely as a consequence of low levels of popular support. For example, according to a KIIS survey taken in early February 2014, only 15 percent of respondents in Kharkiv wanted to leave Ukraine and join Russia. This is an insignificant percentage compared to other cases such as Crimea, the Donbas, or Odesa, where 41 percent, 36 percent, and 24 percent of the population, respectively, wanted to join Russia.\(^{103}\) However, the existing socio-cultural rift within Kharkiv society, and vis-à-vis Kyiv over language policy and cultural affiliation with Russia, created an opportunity for Moscow to apply coercion in support of the local ethnic-based movement.

6.7 Russia’s Coercion in Kharkiv Following Crisis Onset

The deep-rooted ideological fracturing in Kharkiv created an opportunity for Russia’s application of coercive gray zone tools and tactics in the city and region. However, the intensity of these tactics was low, largely defined by local diaspora influence through organizations. Moreover, Russian media was used to mobilize public support against the anti-Yanukovych Maidan movement, which was framed as an existential threat to Russian ‘compatriots.’ The purpose of Russia’s coercion in Kharkiv was to displace the existing authorities with hardline pro-Moscow personnel who would declare a ‘people’s republic’ and become entirely reliant on, and accepting of, Russia’s authority.\(^{104}\) Table 6.3 below provides a summary of Russia’s coercive gray zone tools and tactics used in Kharkiv following the crisis onset in February 2014.
6.7.1 Diaspora Influence through Organizations

Russian GONGOs played an active role in the mobilization of local residents and activists from Russia to participate in anti-Maidan protests in Kharkiv. With Moscow’s aid, demonstrators in Kharkiv temporarily overpowered local authorities following the crisis onset and overtook government facilities.

‘Political tourists’ were bussed into Kharkiv and other Ukrainian cities from Russia. In Kharkiv, 40 buses from the city of Belgorod arrived in central Kharkiv on 1 March 2014. Harding (2014) writes that “they delivered hardcore Kremlin activists, with some dressed in military-style fatigues. They waved Russian flags and cried: ‘Russia, Russia.”’ These ‘tourists’ helped storm the main administrative building in Kharkiv and engaged in fighting with Ukrainian nationalists. These pro-Russian activists admitted that, before they helped storm the State Administration in Kharkiv, they “met with Russian intelligence agents working in Eastern Ukraine.” However, local residents were also mobilized from Moscow-backed organizations in Kharkiv to fight the anti-Maidan movement.

For example, the Oplot Fight Club in Kharkiv became a key source to mobilize participants for the pro-Russia protests in the city. Throughout its history, the Oplot Fight Club was a controversial landmark. The Centre was an incubator of pro-Russian attitudes and organized crime. Moreover, the Club’s illicit activities were concealed behind the building’s shopping centre, medical clinic, and sports club. Oplot members interviewed by the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) for the documentary “The Battle for Ukraine” admitted to receiving training and financial support from Russian intelligence and of carrying out attacks on pro-Maidan protesters starting in March 2014.
In late 2014, Kharkiv police intercepted a message from the Moscow-backed Triunite Rus NGO to a Russian official who planned to organize a rally involving 150 people near the Kharkiv factory Turboatom. These intercepted messages became known as the ‘Glazyev tapes,’ named after Russian Presidential Advisor Sergey Glazyev, who represented the Kremlin’s interests in the anticipated operation. Among other logistical elements of the rally, the conversation participants stated that the rally would cost $4,150, including bribes for local journalists, who would mobilize locals. However, bribery of local journalists through such Moscow-backed organizations was not the only media support which protest organizers in Kharkiv received from Moscow.

### 6.7.2 Russian Media’s Information Campaign in Kharkiv

Unlike the persuasion tactics employed by Russian media prior to crisis onset, Moscow’s campaign following the departure of Yanukovych from Kyiv on 21 February 2014 escalated to a campaign focused on an imminent physical threat to ‘compatriots’. Through such fear tactics, Russia’s aim was also to increase the receptiveness of the local population for its role as protector and support.

The sophisticated information campaign undertaken by Moscow and its allies in Kharkiv exacerbated social fracturing within the local population along ethno-linguistic lines. Sazonov and Müür (2016) note that Russia’s narrative following the onset of the crisis in February 2014 was defined by the following combination of characteristics: 1) fear and panic, 2) separatists as heroes, 3) glorification of the Great Patriotic War and 4) aggressive and emotional rhetoric. This campaign was positioned well to target the internal rift within Kharkiv society, between Russophiles and supporters of Ukrainization, as well as the challenging relationship with Kyiv authorities.
Considering that a majority of the population in cities like Kharkiv relied on Russian information sources, such as Komsomolskaya Pravda, I.A. Regnum, TV Zvezda on a daily basis, these sources became a key platform for the dissemination of fear among ‘compatriots.’ On the other hand, the ethnic Ukrainian population largely accepted the narrative presented by the opposition to Yanukovych. However, Russia’s central news platforms were only a part of the larger information campaign; local agents in Kharkiv were instrumental in the mobilization of pro-Russia support.

For example, leaked emails from Vladislav Surkov, a former Aide to the President of Russia, to his First Deputy Inal Ardzinba note specific journalists to be bribed in Kharkiv. These journalists were to “[1] create an illusion of widespread discontent with the post-Euromaidan government in Ukraine, [2] exacerbate tensions within a fatigued society as well as [3] promote popular support for maintaining ties with Russia.” In turn, the aim of all such operations was to coerce local people and elites to accept Russia’s protector narrative and compel them to seek formal aid from the Kremlin.

The table below provides a summary of Russia’s low-intensity coercive gray zone tools and tactics in Kharkiv.
### Table 6.3. Summary of Russia’s Gray Zone Engagement in Kharkiv Following Crisis Onset

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maximum Intensity of coercion</th>
<th>Intervention Format</th>
<th>Example(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low-Intensity</td>
<td>Diaspora influence through organization(s)</td>
<td>• Organizations facilitated the arrival of ‘political tourists’ from Russia to support the local revolt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The Oplot Fight Club in Kharkiv became a key platform of support for the pro-Russia protests; members were mobilized to aid the takeover of local government facilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• The Moscow-backed Triunite Rus NGO was receiving money from Russian officials, who planned to organize a rally involving 150 people near the Kharkiv factory Turboatom; also involved bribery of local journalists in Kharkiv.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media and information Operation(s)</td>
<td>• Russian media engaged in a campaign demonstrating an imminent physical threat to compatriots across Eastern Ukraine; local campaigners were mobilized in Kharkiv to assist with information dissemination.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figure below displays the intensity of Russia’s coercion in Kharkiv relative to other cases examined in this research.

**Figure 6.1. Intensity of Coercion Chosen by Russia (DV) for Kharkiv Relative to Other Cases post-Crisis Onset**

- None
- High

Odesa | Kharkiv | Donbas | Crimea | Abkhazia

### 6.8 Results and Analysis

The purpose of the following section is to analyze the trends of Russia’s perceived role and power across the three consequential events (or short periods) based on the foregoing discussion, quantify the components of role and relative power, and assess whether the following hypothesis is supported or rejected: *(D) if role exceeds power by a small margin, and the local movement is secessionist, Russia will utilize low intensity of*
coercion. The hypothesized interaction of the independent and dependent variables is visualized in figure 6.3, box 4 below.

The hoop test employed through the application of the IOI Model to the case of Kharkiv supports the above hypothesis. The cost-benefit assessment yielded through the application of the IOI Model demonstrates that Moscow had a low incentive (IV1), but a significant opportunity (IV2), to employ coercion (DV) in Kharkiv following crisis onset in February 2014. However, even with the presence of some domestic-level opportunity, the low system-level incentive compelled Russia to employ low-intensity coercive gray zone tools and tactics in the region.

The incentive for coercion application, as a function of the system-level role-power gap, can be estimated through the quantification of the perceived role and power components of all the consequential events (or short periods) using the Coding Table in Appendix A. This is the first part of the hoop test to determine whether hypothesis (D) is supported and thus, the validity of the IOI Model. The results are summarized in Table 6.4 below. Moreover, this exercise enables the assessment of Russia’s potential decline in role and relative power following crisis onset. This role-power gap is also visualized in Figure 6.2 below, based on the power cycle theory discussed in Chapter 2.

Looking at the narrative articulated by Russia regarding Kharkiv, it is evident that its role generality, clarity, and scope are moderate across all three consequential events (or short periods). This is summarized in Table 6.2 above. With regard to the degree of role specificity in Kharkiv, Moscow focused on the ‘Soviet’ and the ‘Russian language’ narratives. However, recognition of Soviet heritage and the importance of the Russian language in daily life were also key elements of the ‘Sloboda’ narrative. This unique
‘hybrid’ identity celebrated both Ukrainian and Russian heritage. Because Russia supported two narratives, and a third by implication, to operationalize its protector role, a score of 2 is allocated across all three consequential events, based on the Coding Table in Appendix A. This is reflected in Table 6.4 below.

In terms of geographic scope, however, Russia’s perceived role in the form of the ‘Soviet’ and Russian language narratives was not bespoke to Kharkiv. Rather, it was applicable to multiple jurisdictions across Ukraine with high Russian ‘compatriots’ concentrations, such as Odesa and the Donbas. Thus, the degree of geographic scope is also represented by a score of 2 across the three periods in Table 6.4, based on the Coding Table in Appendix A.

The degree of role clarity was also moderate across all three consequential events (or short periods). As the basis of protection, Moscow focused on challenges associated with Russian language education at a local level as well as attempts to ‘falsify’ the memory of the Great Patriotic War by an increasingly nationalizing Ukrainian state. Based on the Coding Table in Appendix A, the focus on two specific challenge areas is represented by a score of 2 across all three examined consequential events (or short periods) in Table 6.4 below. However, relative to the consistent role specificity, scope, and clarity, the degree of social mobilization in support of Russia’s perceived protector was more dynamic across the periods examined.

The level of local acceptance of Russia’s narrative declined from the 2004 Presidential election and Orange Revolution to the pre-crisis onset period in February 2014. The degree of role-affirming social mobilization declined based on a decrease in 1) local legislative action in support of Russia’s perceived role, even though 2) public support was
consistent for Russia’s role, and 3) decreased alignment between Moscow’s and local narrative priorities. A possible explanation for the decline in acceptance is a decrease in threat from Kyiv perceived by the local political leaders and population. In 2004-2005, Kharkiv’s political establishment and population looked to Russia for protection against a series of legislative changes to Ukraine’s cultural and linguistic Ukrainization policies, which were supported by President Viktor Yushchenko. In response, a majority of the population was receptive to Russia’s protection. Thus, for the 2004-2005 period, the local degree of acceptance is reflected in a score of 4, based on the Coding Table in Appendix A. However, by 2013, local surveys indicated that a small minority of the population desired any Russian intervention in their support. Moreover, local leaders in Kharkiv focused on the ‘Ukrainian national narrative’ in tandem with the pro-Russia (or -Soviet) narrative through the ‘Slobozhashchyna’ concept. Thus, the degree of local acceptance decreased to a score of 2 in Table 6.4 by the pre-crisis period.

Finally, the level of cross-border commitment to Russia’s perceived protector role remained moderate across all three consequential events (or short periods). Loose agreements between Kremlin-backed GONGOs, and local Russian municipal governments, with Kharkiv authorities and education institutions, established a moderate level of commitment to Moscow’s perceived protector role. This is reflected in a score of 2 in Table 6.4 below across all three consequential events (or short periods).

Through the conversion of the qualitative data into quantitative metrics using the Coding Table in Appendix A, the role-power gap appears to be small, at 6 points, across all consequential events (or short periods) examined. This is also reflected in Figure 6.2 below, which is based on the power cycle theory. In turn, this score indicates a low
incentive (IV1) to apply coercion following the departure of Yanukovych on 21 February 2014. Following crisis onset, and the introduction of various adversaries and their competing role narratives, a potential decline in Russia’s perceived role would be small. Even though Russia’s perceived role provided a small system-level incentive to apply coercion to preserve its perceived role, the low cost associated with intervention in secessionism compared to secessionism, encouraged Russia to apply coercion.

Concurrently, the societal fracturing along ethno-linguistic lines in Kharkiv, as well as the protracted political rift with Kyiv, established low-cost permissive conditions for Russia’s application of coercive gray zone tools and tactics. If an irredentist movement was present in Kharkiv, the cost of coercion application would have been higher. Even before crisis onset, Russia’s relatively shallow commitment to Khakiv’s secessionism was evident in the Kremlin’s sporadic support for the proposal of Kharkiv to become the capital of a new Ukrainian Autonomous Republic (YUVUAR) or the inconsistent support for Kharkiv’s autonomy by Moscow’s Mayor Luzhkov in the early 2000s.

In general, the qualitative data demonstrates that the secessionist movement in Kharkiv substantially formed as a response to rapid linguistic and cultural Ukrainization policies developed by Kyiv. Moreover, as highlighted in the foregoing discussion, these policies were partially supported by Kharkiv’s elected officials in their Cultural Development policies through the advancement of the ‘Slobozhashchyna’ narrative. In turn, these internal rifts in Kharkiv created the perfect environment for Russia to escalate its action from persuasion, or Active Measures, preceding crisis onset to low-intensity coercion after crisis onset in February 2014.
The February 2014 crisis exposed the gap between Moscow’s perceived protector role relative to its de-facto power in Kharkiv. The onset of the revolution, the removal of Yanukovych, and the arrival of a nationalistic government in Kyiv ushered in competing for nationally-charged narratives that were incongruent with those advanced by Moscow. More importantly, the new government in Kyiv had the tools, and external backing from Western powers, to entirely displace Russia’s monopoly on identity narrative-building in Kharkiv.

When assessing the level of power following the introduction of competing narratives and actors onto a political arena, the number of supported narratives, geographic scope, and clarity became irrelevant. With an introduction of competing narratives, the articulation of Moscow’s perceptions would be insufficient to operationalize its role. Rather, the levels of acceptance and the binding commitment to Russia by local elites and the population in Kharkiv represented Moscow’s real power in the region.

Russia’s low-intensity coercion following the departure of Yanukovych in February 2014 exploited the pre-existing social fracturing to advance its perceived protector role in Kharkiv. As discussed in Chapter 2, a key benefit of the intervention in secessionism is the ability of third parties to withdraw their support at will; this spontaneous decline in support could be observed in April-May, 2014. In its application of coercion, the Kremlin had two aims. First, it wanted to establish a perception of an imminent physical threat from nationalistic groups, thereby compelling locals to seek protection from Moscow. As noted previously, this was achieved through targeted information dissemination operations as well as corruption of local journalists. Second, Russia hoped to overthrow local leaders and establish a ‘people’s republic,’ which would
be fully committed to Russia’s protection. This was done through sporadic support for Kremlin-backed organizations, such as the Oplot Club, which mobilized personnel to join local revolts and overpower Kharkiv’s authorities. Figure 6.4 below provides a summary of the decision-making process by Russia to employ coercion following crisis onset, as a function of the system-level incentive (IV1) and domestic-level opportunity (IV2) variables.

Table 6.4. Quantitative Assessment of Incentive for Intervention in Kharkiv; Role-Power Gap (IV)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Specificity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Role focus; quantity of narratives.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Scope</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Geographic focus.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Clarity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Role depth through specific challenge areas.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Acceptance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Role-affirming social mobilization.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Formality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cross-border commitments.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gap Between Relative Power and Role Scores</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>12 – 6 = 6</strong> &amp; <strong>11 - 5 = 6</strong> &amp; <strong>10 – 4 = 6</strong></td>
<td><strong>12 – 6 = 6</strong> &amp; <strong>11 - 5 = 6</strong> &amp; <strong>10 – 4 = 6</strong></td>
<td><strong>12 – 6 = 6</strong> &amp; <strong>11 - 5 = 6</strong> &amp; <strong>10 – 4 = 6</strong></td>
<td><strong>12 – 6 = 6</strong> &amp; <strong>11 - 5 = 6</strong> &amp; <strong>10 – 4 = 6</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average Role-Power Gap</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>6 Points</strong></td>
<td><strong>6 Points</strong></td>
<td><strong>6 Points</strong></td>
<td><strong>6 Points</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The scores in this table are based on the Coding Table in Appendix A; all scores for role specificity, scope, clarity, acceptance and formality are of 5; Blue: role components; Red: power components.
**Figure 6.2.** Russia’s Role-Power Gap (IV) in Kharkiv Across the Consequential Events (or Short Periods)

The figure below summarizes the hypothesized relationship between incentive (IV), opportunity (IV), and intensity of applied coercion (DV).

**Figure 6.3.** The IOI Model: Relative Intensity of Coercion as a function of the Role-Power Gap and Type of Ethnic Movement in Kharkiv

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IV: Role and Power Gap <em>(Incentive)</em></th>
<th>Small</th>
<th>Large</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Irredentism</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV: Movement Type <em>(Opportunity)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irredentism</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Small</td>
<td>Large</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abkhazia (3)</td>
<td>High Intensity Of Coercion (DV)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crimea (2)</td>
<td>High-Medium Intensity Of Coercion (DV)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odesa (1)</td>
<td>No Coercion (DV)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kharkiv (4)</td>
<td>Low Intensity Of Coercion (DV)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.9 Conclusion and Policy Implications

The foregoing empirical evidence and analysis result in several theoretical conclusions and policy implications. First, regarding Russia’s cross-border application of coercion, the Kharkiv case supports that neither system-level incentive nor domestic-level opportunity is individually sufficient to understand Russia’s decisions to use particular coercive gray zone tools and tactics. As I noted in Chapter 1, it has become common in academic and policy circles to attribute Russia’s cross-border operations to either system-level balance of power disruption or protection of ‘compatriots.’ However, as this chapter has shown, Russia’s calculation to apply low-intensity coercive gray zone tools and tactics was based, on system-level incentive to preserve its regional protector role and the permissive conditions generated by local social fracturing along ethno-linguistic lines.

The domestic-level opportunity for Russia’s use of coercive gray zone tools and tactics was substantially a consequence of a political rift between Kharkiv and Kyiv, based
on minority language rights in local education and cultural memory associated with Russia. Without this rift, it is likely that Moscow would not have a permissive environment where it can apply gray zone tools and tactics in pursuit of its regional role-preservation goals. If genuine efforts were made to advance social and economic inclusion by the various Kyiv governments throughout the post-Soviet period, there would be insignificant motivation for a diaspora to mobilize in Kharkiv against Ukrainian national authorities. The Kharkiv case supports Aasland’s (2002) observation that minority groups are highly responsive to a rapid negative change in their socio-economic conditions. Thus, to mitigate the risk of social mobilization, akin to the phenomenon observed in Kharkiv, and potential intervention using gray zone tools and tactics by powerful external actors like Russia, it is necessary to provide adequate social inclusion mechanisms for ethnic and linguistic diaspora groups. In fact, national mechanisms for minority inclusion in Ukraine may reflect some of those adopted in Kharkiv.

The Kharkiv government attempted to legislatively mend local inter-ethnic friction through the ‘Slobozhashchyna’ Ukraine identity narrative and harmonize local attachments to both Ukrainian and Russian (or Soviet) identities. Although its success at eliminating local inter-ethnic friction was limited, largely due to a parallel deep-rooted rift with Kyiv, political projects akin to this can be considered by other city or regional governments in Odesa, the Donbas, or Abkhazia to mitigate ethnic-based disputes.
References

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6 Ibid., 41.
7 Stebelsky, 39.
8 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
12 Stebelsky. 41-43.
13 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
16 Ibid, 71-72.
17 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
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22 Kutsenko, 69-72.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
31 Margrethe B. Søvik, 127.
32 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
45 Ibid., 742.


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Ibid.
See "An Appeal to the Deputies of the State Duma and Verkhovna Rada was Adopted in Kharkov at a Rally Dedicated to the 200th Anniversary of the Birth of N. Gogol."
Ibid.
Ibid.
Ibid.
Kutsenko, 73.
Ibid.

See "The Festival Victory Was Held in Khakov” July 24, 2013.

Ibid.


Ibid.


Ibid.

See Kofman et al.

Ibid.


Ibid.


Secessionism may be defined through either its stricto sensu or ‘incremental’ definition. The ‘strict’ definition involves a formal declaration of independence by a group while the latter includes political activity toward full independence or autonomy within a larger state, without a formal declaration. See Alexis Heraclides, The Self-Determination of Minorities in International Politics. pp. 1-2. Routledge, 2012.


Ibid.

308


Carment et al., 15.
Alya Shandra and Robert Seely, 39.
118 Ibid, 40.
119 Ibid, 41.
120 See Taras Kuzio, "Russian Military Aggression or 'Civil War' in Ukraine?"
Chapter 7 Russia’s Restrained Gray Zone Coercion in the Donbas: a Function of Moderate Benefits and Uncertain Costs

7.1 Introduction

Following the crisis onset in February 2014, it was argued by many policymakers, academics, and pundits that Russia would use force in other parts of Ukraine akin to the intensity and format employed in Crimea. However, these predictions proved also to be false in the Donbas, as in the other cases in Ukraine analyzed in this research.

This chapter addresses the question of why did Russia choose its specific intensity of coercion in the Donbas? Through the application of the Incentive-Opportunity Intervention (IOI) Model, this chapter concludes that Russia’s moderate role-power gap in the Donbas between January 2000 and February 2014 established the system-level incentive to apply an intermediate level of coercion in the region. Concurrently, the secessionist and sporadic irredentist nature of the local ethnic-based movement, as the domestic-level opportunity, meant that an open military operation may have carried unacceptable costs relative to role preservation gains. To minimize the cost of coercion, Moscow relied on gray zone tools and tactics such as covert kinetic operations and material support for local non-state actors. In turn, the understanding of why certain gray zone tools and tactics are used by Russia is necessary for the creations of effective deterrence measures and the implementation of conflict management mechanisms before any violence occurs.

The Donbas chapter has unique value among the cases in validating the IOI Model. The relative positionality of the Donbas case compared to the Odesa, Kharkiv, Crimea, and Georgia in terms of system-level incentive (IV), domestic-level opportunity (IV), and in turn, gray zone coercion intensity (DV), speaks to the high validity and explanatory power.
of the IOI Model. Moreover, the chapter highlights that system-level *incentive* and domestic-level *opportunity* had different levels of impact on Russia’s decision to use gray zone tools and tactics in this region.

Even though the Donbas case does not fit neatly into any of the proposed hypotheses outlined in Chapter 2, or matrix in Figure 7.3 below, the causal relationships between the independent and dependent variables analyzed in this chapter speak to the validity of the IOI Model. This chapter finds that Russia’s role-power gap in the Donbas, prior to the February 2014 crisis onset, is greater than in Odesa and Kharkiv, but smaller than in Crimea and Abkhazia. Second, the local ethnic-based movement possessed characteristics of secessionism and periodic irredentism. The combination of these variables allows the exploration of whether system-level incentive or domestic-level opportunity had a greater impact on Russia’s decision-making. In turn, this chapter concludes that the role-power gap had a greater impact on Russia’s selection of gray zone tools and tactics in the Donbas compared to the opportunities created by the local ethnic-based movement.

Prior to crisis inset in February 2014, Russia’s perceived role associated with the Donbas was characterized by ‘hybridism’ as it interwove 1) support for the region’s distinct historical identity and 2) security for Russian-speaking ‘compatriots.’ However the parallel existence of the two narratives established ambiguity regarding who is included or excluded from Russia’s protection. In turn, this linking of competing narratives into its perceived protector role had a negative impact on Moscow’s role specificity.

Moreover, this chapter shows that a focus on the protection of Russian speakers created ambiguity regarding the narrative’s geographic scope. For example, in the Crimea
case, through reliance on warfare history, Russia articulated a security provider narrative that was bespoke to the peninsula. On the other hand, Russian speakers, even though regionally concentrated in Eastern Ukraine, did not only reside in the Donbas region. In turn, this lack of regional focus in its articulated protector role contributed to the dilution of Moscow’s perceived role as regional protector in the Donbas.

Finally, the degree of local acceptance of Moscow’s perceived protector role of Russian speakers in Eastern Ukraine was low and the level of formalization of this role in Donetsk and Luhansk was minimal prior to crisis onset. These may also serve as an indicator of the relatively low success rate of Russia’s persuasion and incentivization operations prior to February 2014.

This chapter employs a hoop test to assess whether the two necessary conditions, system-level incentive, and domestic-level opportunity, yielded the anticipated conditions for Russia’s use of specific gray zone tools and tactics in the Donbas. In other words, this chapter is divided into several parts to assess 1) the role-power gap (or incentive), 2) the type of local ethnic-based movement (or opportunity), and 3) whether the intensity of coercion in the region is indeed a function of the two causal variables.

As a starting point, the chapter outlines the competing identity narratives associated with the Donbas region and the reasons for Russia’s selection of the ‘Soviet Donbas’ and ‘language-based’ narratives as the basis of its protector role. The subsequent parts of the chapter are used to gather qualitative data for the assessment of the power-role gap as the incentive for the application of coercion based on the IOI Model. The chapter engages in content analysis of peer-reviewed material, formal political statements, and news sources to assess the degree of generality, scope, clarity, acceptance, and formality of Russia’s role.
for three consequential events (or short periods): 1) the 2004 Presidential election and Orange Revolution, 2) the 2010 Ukrainian Presidential Election, and 3) the civil unrest period preceding the onset of the February 2014 crisis. These consequential events were selected because they represent the top three occasions within the examined period (January 2000 to February 2014), the outcome of which Russia needed to control to maintain its role and relative power in the Donbas. Thus, Active Measures targeting local acceptance and formalization of its role are also examined across the three consequential events (or short periods) as a foundation to determine Russia’s regional power.

Subsequently, content analysis of peer-reviewed and news sources is employed to examine the last two components of the Model. The characteristics of the ethnic-based movement prior to crisis onset are examined as a proxy for the domestic-level cost of Russia’s intervention in the Donbas. The last part of the qualitative data section provides the facts of Russia’s gray zone tools and tactics deployed in the Donbas (DV).

In the results and analysis section, the chapter converts the qualitative data associated with Russia’s role and power in the Donbas into quantitative metrics, based on the Coding Table in Appendix A. This quantification of the perceived role and power components enables the assessment of the size of the role-power gap and thus, the degree of system-level incentive for the application of coercive gray zone tools and tactics. Next, the section examines the costs imposed on Russia’s application of coercion by the local ethnic-based movement. In turn, the specific combination of system- and domestic-level variables, and their impact on Russia’s decision-making, provides supports the validity of the IOI Model. The last section of the chapter provides a policy conclusion and recommendations for policymakers and conflict management practitioners.
7.2 Competing Narratives and Russia’s Role Formation

Throughout history, there have been several narratives which formed the cultural-political basis for the Donbas and influenced its relationship with Moscow. As this section highlights, the most potent of these narratives, which also dominated Russia’s perceived role in this region is based on the protection of Russian speakers – or ‘compatriots.’ However, from Moscow’s perspective, this narrative is interwoven with another Regional (Soviet Donbas) narrative. In turn, this competition between the identity narratives created challenges for Moscow’s articulation of its perceived protector role in relation to Eastern Ukraine. Table 7.1 below compares the identity narratives and Russia’s treatments of them.

7.2.1 The Distinct Region Narrative in the Donbas

One of the prominent narratives which remained within the political sphere of Russia as well as local Donbas political elites and residents is based on the region’s distinct identity within the former Soviet Union. As highlighted by Stebelsky (2018), the dominant Soviet Donbas narrative glorified the miners and industrial workers as the personification of the Soviet proletariat. Regional identity in the Donbas became strongly developed and distinctive. In fact, it is based on a sense of belonging to a community forged through the industrialization of the Donbas since the 1860s.²

The contemporary representation of the Donbas identity in Russian media is based on the storyline which emerged in the 1920s when the Donbas was the main coal mining and heavy industry base of the Soviet Union. This distinct Donbas identity was formed in the 1930s when official propaganda imagined the Donbas as a leading industrial-proletarian region. This narrative, however, was not only popular in Moscow, but also gained long-term support from the local population.
The Soviet-era narrative was supported by a significant portion of the local population in the Donbas following the independence of Ukraine. For example, in 1994 the Donbas had the second-highest response for identification with the former USSR (34 percent) and their region (25 percent) after Crimea. Moreover, in a 1996 survey, the majority of the population in Ukraine did not identify themselves “most of all” with their newly independent republic, but with their own region. This posed a challenge for the government in Kyiv, which desired to unify the country.

Stebelsky (2018) argues that that the prevalence of regional over national identity influenced how receptive the population was to the Kremlin’s affective geopolitical discourse. In other words, greater identification with a regional identity often meant a desire to also maintain ties with Moscow. However, based on examination of official Russian information sources, and results of local surveys in the following sections of this chapter, the Soviet Donbas, or regional distinctiveness narrative, was less politically influential compared to the Russian language narrative articulated by Moscow.

7.2.2 Russian Language Protector Narrative

The most consistent and potent narrative which emerged from Moscow regarding the Donbas region throughout the post-Soviet period is the protector of Russian speakers. Moreover, this was a key component of Moscow’s ‘compatriots’ policy which emerged in the late 1990s and was concretely defined in 2007 through the creation of the government-organized non-governmental organization (GONGO) Russkiy Mir Foundation. The storyline is based on the perception of unity among Russian speakers. Fournier (2002) argues the Russian post-Soviet narrative, which emerged on the basis of language, is said to protest not against an *ethnic* exclusion by the Ukrainian state, but against a perceived
linguistic exclusion as of an extended group (or diaspora). In other words, Moscow’s position against Kyiv tended to be directed at Ukrainian state language laws which do not recognize linguistic pluralism within the unitary Ukrainian state. Even though the Russian language narrative was intended to directly address the challenges of exclusion of regionally concentrated minorities, this was not the only narrative to include language as one of its main pillars.

7.2.3 The Imperial Narrative and ‘Novorossiya’ Concept

The Novorossiya geopolitical concept interwove the territorial, cultural, and ethno-linguistic identities of territories stretching from the Donbas region to Odesa. This narrative was of particular interest to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), thus also incorporating a religious element. Aside from being unappealing to secular peoples, there were other challenges. For example, the precise definition of ‘Novorossiya’ remains conceptually ambiguous as various accounts prioritize different components of this political construct. The ambiguity surrounding the Novorossiya concept was substantially the reason why Russia has marginalized the concept in its own narrative over Ukraine.

In its original form, the ‘Novorossiya’ geopolitical narrative was created by Russia’s Imperial rulers. According to Wilson (2016), Novorossiya (‘New Russia’) was an artificial administrative concept established in 1764 by the Tsar of Russia to Russify the territory of present-day Eastern and Southeastern Ukraine across the Northern Black Sea Region. It was an attempt to assimilate local and newly arrived peoples into the Russian culture, language, and identity. However, this was not the end in itself. Rather, it was about the creation of a group of people who would be loyal to the Romanov Dynasty.
The contemporary ‘Novorossiyə’ concept carries different meanings depending on the account. Berziņa (2014) and Stebelsky (2018) argue that Novorossiyə is a political brand based on a destination, or a regional identity model akin to the one developed by Konecnik, Ruzzier, and de Chernatony (2013). However, the narrative also proved to be problematic in the post-Cold War period as it remains difficult to geographically locate ‘Novorossiyə’ based on old Russian Imperial maps. As noted by Suslov (2017), the maps contain conflicting evidence to what was considered ‘Novorossiyə,’ as the territory was a standalone political jurisdiction for only a short period of time. Moreover, the territory of ‘Novorossiyə’ often incorporated and excluded vast territories and settlements throughout its history. In turn, the territorial outline of the region became especially vague and opaque following the administrative reform of 1802, which put an end to the formal term ‘Novorossiyə’ on Russian imperial maps. However, this focus on the territorial aspect of ‘Novorossiyə’ is only one of the perspectives on this complex political construct.

Alexandre Dugin (2015) believes that identity is more cultural and spiritual in nature. From his perspective, and others who maintain the ‘Conservative Revolution’ and the European New Right movements’ ideology, ‘Novorossiyə’ is a project with the far-reaching civilizational influence which can transform the whole of Russia and Eurasia. As explained by Suslov (2017), the process is synonymous with the revolutionary awakening of Russia’s ‘true self.’ However, from this perspective, Novorossiyə’ should not necessarily become a part of Russia. Rather it should co-exist alongside Russia in the context of a significantly larger Eurasian integration project.12

The ‘Novorossiyə narrative’ was mentioned in Putin’s “direct line” call-in in April 2014, but then quickly fell out of favor with Russia’s leadership as the ideology was
difficult to define consistently, credibly, and reliably, and thus became difficult to articulate to the public. As noted by Suslov (2015) and Stebelsky’s (2018), although the ideology found support in certain subgroups within the population of southeastern Ukraine, Novorossiya failed to attract many adherents or serve any meaningful long-term geopolitical purpose. In the context of the Ukraine crisis, it has largely been abandoned, but it remained a powerful discourse among pro-Putin *intelligentsia* outside of Ukraine as well as in the Donbas region. Even though the Novorossiya concept was not entrenched in Russia’s narrative, there was an even less attractive narrative from Moscow’s perspective.

### 7.2.4 Ukrainian Donbas Identity

The Ukrainian Donbas identity has generally been dismissed and downplayed by Moscow throughout the Soviet and post-independence periods. Originally, the narrative was inspired by local Ukrainian dissidents, developed by formerly suppressed scholars, and promoted by Ukrainian activists and some local teachers. Throughout history, the narrative had a rural support base and placed significant emphasis on the Ukrainian language.

The Ukrainian Donbas narrative also drew on the Zaporozhian Cossack heritage of its easternmost territory - the Kalmius Palanka. It raised grievances about Muscovite encroachment on Cossack lands and freedoms, Imperial Russian colonization, Russification, Soviet collectivization, the Holodomor, as well as purges and persecution of Ukrainian dissidents.
7.3 Moscow’s Hybrid Post-Soviet Narrative for the Donbas

Moscow’s post-Soviet narrative regarding Ukraine interwove a regionally-focused and a linguistic component, with the latter being dominant. Inherently, this narrative lacked regional specificity as Russian-speaking ‘compatriots,’ even though geographically concentrated, were not confined only to Eastern Ukraine.

Russia’s perceived role as a protector of the Russian language in the Donbas, which formed in the early part of the 2000s, did not develop on a unilateral basis. Rather, it was a function of a dynamic relationship between Moscow and Kyiv in the post-Soviet period. Before any overt or covert incursions into Ukraine using coercive gray zone tools and tactics, Russia envisioned itself as the protector of the Russian language and culture in Ukraine.

This protector philosophy was the backbone of Moscow’s political relationship with the Donbas region, where the Russian language was used by an overwhelming majority of residents. For example, in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, Ukrainians and Russians made up 55 percent and 41 percent of the urban population, respectively. On the other hand, ethnic Ukrainians and Russians represented 73 and 22 percent of the rural population, respectively. Across all ethnic groups, regardless of where they lived, 70 percent of respondents identified Russian as their first language. In turn, following the crisis onset in February 2014, Russia acted on a perceived obligation to protect these Russian-speaking ‘compatriots.’ However, the formation of this perceived protector role can be traced to an earlier period as a response to policies from Kyiv.

A key goal in Kyiv’s state language policy throughout the early 2000s has been to Ukrainianize the country’s society both culturally and linguistically. However, this attempt
to marginalize minority languages was done on a sporadic basis, with various national leaders adopting softer or hard-lined postures. The inconsistent policies from Kyiv created frequent periods of insecurity among the Russian-speaking diaspora in the Donbas region. In turn, this fear among perceived kin established a political backdrop for Moscow to implement its vision as the ‘savior’ of Russian-speaking ‘compatriots.’

Early marginalization of minority languages in Ukraine was achieved through the Language Law of 1989, passed in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, which made Ukrainian the only state language. Subsequently, Presidents Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma converged on cautious Ukrainian nation-building by identifying Russia and the Russian language as the “other” against whom citizens of Ukraine might define their own identity. However, Moscow was not a silent bystander to such policy processes.

Moscow positioned itself in opposition to the marginalization of the Russian language in Ukraine, with increasingly hostile rhetoric emerging from the Kremlin following the election of President Putin in 2000. In February 2000 the Ukrainian President’s Council for Language Policy Issues authorized a draft resolution titled ‘On Additional Measures to Expand the Use of Ukrainian as the State Language’. In response, Human Rights Commissioner of Russia Oleg Mironov stated that “linguistic de-Russification was incompatible with relations among ‘fraternal peoples.’ Through the use of categories such as ‘fraternal peoples’ and ‘Russian-speakers,’ it becomes clear that the official discourse from Russia envisioned Russians and Ukrainians as one nation.

Russia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs also condemned Ukraine’s “administrative deformation of its original cultural and linguistic environment.” In turn, Russia’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Igor Ivanov concluded that the original Language Law of 1989 in
Ukraine violates the rights of the local ‘Russian-speaking population.’ Table 7.1 below summarizes the various narratives pertaining to the Donbas region as well as Russia’s treatment of the narrative in the post-Soviet period.

Table 7.1. Comparison of Donbas Identity Narratives and Russia’s Treatment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Donbas (Grassroot) Narratives</th>
<th>Regional ‘Distinction’ Narrative</th>
<th>Russian Language Narrative</th>
<th>Novorossiya/Imperial Narrative</th>
<th>Ukrainian Narrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Details</td>
<td>Territorial-based. Soviet-era nostalgia. Great Patriotic War narrative. Forged through the industrialization of the Donbas from the 1860s into the post-Soviet era.</td>
<td>Emphasis on linguistic/cultural exclusion of the Donbas as an extended group of Russian speakers.</td>
<td>Hybrid of territorial and language/culture-based narrative. The artificial administrative concept was established in 1764 by the Tsar. The territory of Novorossiya is difficult to define. The territorial outline of the region became especially vague and opaque following the administrative reform of 1802, which put an end to the formal term ‘Novorossiya’ on Russian imperial maps.</td>
<td>Drew on the early Zaporozhian Cossack heritage of its easternmost territory. Raised grievances about Muscovite encroachment on Cossack lands and freedoms and imperial ambitions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia’s Position Toward Narrative</td>
<td>Supported, albeit superficially compared to language narrative.</td>
<td>Preferred narrative; supported; Created the ‘jumping board’ for the protector narrative by Russia.</td>
<td>Dormant narrative in the 1990s and 2000s. Moderately accepted by leadership and ROC in the early 2010s, then rejected by leadership; Accepted by the pro-Kremlin intelligentsia.</td>
<td>Rejected.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.4. Consequential Period 1: Russia’s Role and Power in the 2004 Election and 2005 Orange Revolution Period

The purpose of the following sections is to qualitatively assess the components of Russia’s role and power in Eastern Ukraine during the 2004 Presidential Election and subsequent Orange Revolution period. Later this information contributes to the quantitative assessment of the role-power gap, which constitutes Moscow’s system-level incentive to
apply coercion. The Ukrainian elections were often presented by Moscow not as an internal Ukrainian affair but as another clash between the West and Russia over zones of influence in the post-Soviet space. Interpretation of Imperial and Soviet-era history, giving rise to inter-ethnic conflict, and divisions over language policy were key factors contributing to social fracturing in Ukraine during the 2004 Presidential Election and Orange Revolution period. A victory for Yanukovych and his Party of Regions was perceived as synonymous with maintaining a Moscow-centric vision of history, and an improvement in minority language rights, especially for Russian speakers in Eastern Ukraine. Moreover, this meant support for Yanukovych as a protector of minority language rights, and due to expected improvement in relations with Moscow, the legitimation of Moscow’s role as the protector of Russian speakers. On the other hand, a victory for Viktor Yushchenko was perceived by the majority of Donbas residents as a win for nationalistic factions who would uphold anti-Soviet (and therefore anti-Moscow) interpretation of history and suppress minority language rights across Ukraine, and concurrently facilitate a deterioration in relations with Russia. The information regarding Russia’s perceived role specificity, scope, clarity, acceptance, and formalization provided in the subsequent sections for the 2004 Presidential Election and Orange Revolution is summarized in Table 7.2 below.

### 7.4.1 Russia’s Articulation of its Role as Protector

During the 2004 Ukrainian Election period and subsequent civil unrest, known as the Orange Revolution, Moscow signaled it would take an active role in supporting Russian culture, historic memory, and most importantly, Russian speakers in Ukraine. The narrative articulated placed a strong emphasis on the language component of Russia’s perceived role but also interweaved the Soviet Donbas narrative. Moscow claimed it should establish
organizations in regions with a high concentration of the Russian diaspora and speakers as a way to operationalize its perceived protector role. However, the plan did not have a clear regional focus for Eastern Ukraine.

As an initial step, President Putin created a presidential department that, under the cover of inter-regional and cultural ties, was intended to support pro-Russian language and cultural organizations. These organizations were tasked with the promotion of the pro-Soviet interpretation of the events of the Second World War and minimize alternative narratives. However, at the time, support from Russia would not only remain as a project of secretive offices but became a cornerstone of Russia’s public diplomacy and an early effort to promote the concept of the ‘Russian World,’ which is closely associated with the ‘Novorossiya’ political concept.

At a 2005 conference on “The Russian Language on the Boundary of Millennia,” President Putin’s wife Lyudmila declared in her speech: “The confirmation of the borders of the Russian world is also the assertion and strengthening of Russia’s national interests. The Russian language unifies the people of the Russian world—the aggregate of those who speak and think in that language. The borders of the Russian world extend along the borders of Russian language usage.” Even though at the conference the identity of the ‘Russian compatriots’ was defined through the common use of the Russian language, a shared historic interpretation and experiences associated with Second World War were also evoked. Furthermore, the theme of Russian language education was raised. However, Russia’s significant effort to articulate a specific and clear role as protector was matched with only a moderate level of acceptance of the narratives by the local population in the Donbas.
7.4.2 Degree of Local Acceptance of Russia’s Role as Protector

During the Presidential election of 2004 and subsequent civil unrest in 2005, the moderately high level of acceptance of Russia’s role in the Donbas can be attributed to a popular mobilization against a perceived threat from Kyiv. Regionally concentrated Russian-speaking populations and ethnic Russians reacted to the perceived threat to the Russian culture and language status which could result from the election of Yuschenko. Even though Yuschenko did not clearly indicate an intent to discriminate against minority languages, his platform of ‘linguistic nationalism’ was tantamount to affirmative action in favor of the Ukrainian language.

Especially in the Donbas, Viktor Yushchenko was perceived as a nationalist promoting the idea of compulsory imposition of the Ukrainian language on the Russian-speaking populations and destruction of Russian-language education and history.\textsuperscript{27} On the other hand, Yanukovych promised to grant the Russian language the status of the second state language in Ukraine and improve relations with Moscow. For this, the population of Eastern Ukraine strongly supported him.\textsuperscript{28} According to Matveeva (2015), Yushchenko’s presidency was perceived as a setback to the Russian language in the Donbas. In the decade between 2001 and 2011, the number of Russian language schools in Donetsk Oblast was reduced from 518 to 176, with the process accelerating from 2004.\textsuperscript{29} Yushchenko accelerated the use of Ukrainian in schools and concurrently took a stronger pro-Western stance on development, thus aggravating relations with Russia and strengthening opposition in the pro-Russia and Russian-speaking regions of Ukraine.\textsuperscript{30} However, this course was in turn reversed by Viktor Yanukovych after his election in 2010.
The election loss incurred by Viktor Yanukovych and the Party of Regions, the civil unrest in Kyiv and deteriorating minority rights aggravated many Russian speakers in Eastern Ukraine. Moreover, diminishing minority rights legitimized Russia’s perspective regarding its protector role.

For example, according to a USAID-funded survey in 2005, 26 percent of Ukrainians said that Ukraine was a democracy, compared to 50 percent who said that Ukraine was not a democracy. Among the participants in the Donetsk focus groups, there is evident dissatisfaction with the Kyiv government. Most focus-groups participants thoughts that the incumbent government was incapable of solving the socio-economic and political problems affecting the country. The opinion that the government is not qualified to manage the problems independently was primarily expressed in the Donetsk focus groups. Moreover, the survey statistics indicated that there has been a deterioration of confidence in national-level officials and institutions, while confidence shifted to regional-level governments.31 In the Donbas, this was a shift of loyalty was also towards regional organizations which advocated for closer relations and cooperation with Russia.32

In foreign policy, residents of the Eastern and Southern regions (70 percent each) were much more likely to say that they are dissatisfied with Ukrainian foreign policy than those in the Western region (37 percent).33 This is an indication that a majority of Eastern Ukrainians desired better relations with Russia.

When Yanukovych lost to Yushchenko in the tightly contested presidential elections of 2004, the Party of Regions met in Severodonetsk threatening separatism by invoking the briefly existing Donetsk-Kryvyi Rih Soviet Republic (February–March 1918).34 This dissatisfaction with the state of minority rights in Ukraine, in turn, pushed the local
population and the Party of Regions, with headquarters in Donetsk, into a closer ideological and political alignment with Moscow.

7.4.3 Degree of Formality of Russia’s Protector Role in the Donbas

Even with a heightened sense of danger, the degree of formalization of Moscow’s role as the protector of Russian ‘compatriots.’ remained low. The Party of Regions, with its headquarters and main support base in Eastern Ukraine, ultimately lost the election following the Orange Revolution. Subsequently, however, it signed a collaboration agreement in 2005 with United Russia – the ruling party in the Russian State Duma. This collaboration entailed the creation of an official channel of dialogue regarding cultural and linguistic policy challenges in Ukraine. Even though such an agreement established some cross-border collaboration between pro-Russian and Kremlin elites, this relationship was far short of any intergovernmental treaty or solid agreement which would entrench Russia’s protector role in the Donbas. However, even such low levels of acceptance and formalization of Russia’s perceived role in the Donbas were substantially a function of the Kremlin’s gray zone tools and tactics, which never passed the threshold of coercion.

7.4.4 Russia’s Active Measures During the Election and Orange Revolution Period

With language policy being the core issue, interference in the 2004 election through Active Measures was synonymous for Moscow with the promotion and legitimation of its protector role of the Russian language. The Kremlin’s aim in its coordinated information and public diplomacy campaign was to promote the acknowledgment and formalization of Russia’s role as the protector of Russian speakers. However, considering that the perceived role as protector pertained to many regions across Ukraine with a high diaspora concentration, this campaign was not confined to the Donbas.
For example, Russian state-run mass media was biased in presenting the information on the elections. Paniotto (2009) writes that even Moscow squares were decorated with billboards carrying Yanukovych’s photo and the slogan “Vote for President Yanukovych.” Putin’s arrival in Ukraine one week prior to the election was also an attempt to mobilize pro-Russia factions in Ukraine. Russia’s president was directly persuading Ukrainian citizens through three national TV channels to vote for Yanukovych. In turn, Putin congratulated Yanukovych twice on his election as the President of Ukraine amid civil disobedience actions when final election results have yet to be declared by Ukraine’s Central Election Commission. However, the unfavorable political environment for Russia’s protector narrative changed following the 2010 Ukrainian Presidential election.

7.5 Consequential Period 2: Assessment of Russia’s Role and Power around the 2010 Ukraine Presidential Election

The purpose of the following sections is to qualitatively assess the components of Russia’s perceived role and power in Eastern Ukraine during the 2010 Presidential election period. Later this information contributes to the quantitative assessment of the role-power gap, which constitutes Moscow’s system-level incentive to apply coercive gray zone tools and tactics. The 2010 Presidential Ukraine election was a chance for Russia to entrench its perceived role as the protector of ‘compatriots’ in regions with a high diaspora concentration. However the challenge for Russia’s perceived role articulation remained consistent relative to the previous consequential event (or short period): 1) hybridity of messaging incorporating both a Soviet-era distinct identity narrative alongside a language-based one, with the latter leading, 2) lack of coherent regional focus for its articulated role; the Donbas regional focus is largely the consequence of a broader priority by Russia to protect ‘compatriots’ in Ukraine, and 3) Russia’s narrative focused on protecting the
Russian World concept and language education rights. Russia’s use of Active Measures to influence election outcomes, through media campaigns to target compatriots, was meant to affect their level of acceptance of Russia’s protection. However, even with Active Measures promoting Russian language and culture in Eastern Ukraine through state-funded organizations and awards for local politicians, the level of formalization of the protector relationship remained low. The information regarding Russia’s perceived role specificity, scope, clarity, acceptance, and formalization provided in the subsequent sections for the 2010 Presidential election is summarized in Table 7.2 below.

7.5.1 Articulation of Russia’s Position as Protector of the Russian Language

Around the Presidential Election of 2010, Moscow escalated its campaign promoting its perceived role as the protector of Russian ‘compatriots’ in Ukraine. Moreover, the messaging also became more specific as language discrimination issues, and the corresponding role as the protector of Russian speakers emerged as the dominant narrative. Focus has relatively shifted away from the Second World War. Concurrently the geographic scope of Moscow’s perceived protector role became clearer relative to the Orange Revolution period by speaking of specific regions where minority language rights were infringed.

In April and May 2009, two bills were prepared for Russia’s legislature to address what Moscow perceived as “the rehabilitation of Nazism” across the post-Soviet region. At the time, President Dmitry Medvedev also established a new commission to “counteract attempts to falsify history to the detriment of the interests of Russia.” Powerful political figures such as Konstantin Zatulin, Deputy Chair of the Duma Committee on the Affairs of the Commonwealth of Independent States guided the efforts. Zatulin claimed that special
focus should be given to “how the falsification of the accounts of the Second World War is often interweaved with anti-Russian politics in the states of the former Soviet Union.”40

The purview of his proposed draft law covered Russia’s ‘near abroad.’ Zatulin was specifically concerned with Ukraine as well as the Baltic states. The commission ‘ended up on the road to nowhere,’41 but this multi-year legislative effort is an indicator of Russia’s perceived role as protector of the pro-Moscow (or Soviet) memory of the events of the Second World War. However, in the context of Eastern Ukraine, there was an indication that the Russian language protector narrative was becoming more potent.

Leading Russian politicians began to openly and repeatedly demand that Russian should become the second state language of Ukraine. In June 2010, Russian President Dmitriy Medvedev’s representative Mikhail Shvidkoy demanded at a roundtable in Yalta that state-funded programs should finally be worked out because Ukraine is characterized by the “richness of a bilingual culture.”42 This statement specifically articulated the challenges posed to Eastern Ukrainian compatriots suffering from diminished rights – such as education.43

The increased identification of the Russian language education issues within the context of Eastern Ukraine indicated that Moscow’s protector narrative of Russian speakers became more potent relative to the Soviet-based narrative of the Donbas as a distinct region. This, however, should not be an indicator that the overall perception of the protector of Russian speakers is exclusive to the Donbas, because it was part of a broader commitment to protect ‘compatriots’ across Ukraine. At the time, Moscow was deeply convinced of its perceived protector role regarding Russian language rights. However, in Luhansk and Donetsk, the Russian-speaking diaspora was more receptive to the Soviet
Donbas, which linked Moscow to the Donbas through the region’s identity as an industrial heartland of the USSR.

7.5.2 Degree of Local Acceptance of Russian Language Protector Narrative

By examining the political platform of the Party of Regions, some misalignment is evident between Russia’s preference for the role of protector of Russian-language speakers and the receptiveness of the local population in the Donbas. By tracing the campaign platform of the Party, it is possible to gain an understanding of the political priorities of the local population. The decline in active local acceptance of Russia’s role as protector of Russian language speakers can, at least partially, be attributed to the decline in national political crisis as the level of civil unrest remained low compared to the Orange Revolution period in 2005. In other words, the Russian-speaking diaspora was no longer mobilized as a response to an existential threat from Kyiv as during the Orange Revolution of 2005.

However, the second political issue remained within the Party platform. One of the key political issues in the Donbas was related to education in the Russian language. Although some Russian-speaking parents were willing to send their children to schools with the Ukrainian language of instruction in Eastern Ukraine, others were angered by this change. This made the Russian language a wedge issue during the Ukrainian presidential elections of 2010, especially in cities like Donetsk and Luhansk.44

Even though minority language issues were an important platform during the parliamentary campaigns ahead of the 2010 Presidential Election, the “Soviet Donbas” narrative, linking the region to Moscow, was selected by the Party of Regions as the prominent narrative platform for Eastern Ukraine.45 For example, the campaign presented by the Party employed motifs associated with its historic industrial identity and the Soviet
victory during the Second World War. As a consequence of the successful campaign, the Party was elected as the key representative of Eastern Ukrainian interests in Kyiv.46

7.5.3 Formalization of Russia’s Role as Protector of the Donbas

Even though the platform of the Party of regions in 2009 indicated a moderate misalignment between the local population’s political priorities and Moscow’s increasingly language-centric role as protector, the Party’s receptiveness toward working with Russia created several formal links with its Eastern neighbor. However, the cross-border links established between the Donbas and Russia only superficially entrenched Moscow’s role as the protector of Russian speakers in the Donbas.

The Mayor of Donetsk, Alexander Lukyanchenko, believed that the regional program for the development of the Russian language with support from Moscow.47 For his efforts to formalize cross-border cultural and language education relations with various regions in Russia, and for collaborating with Russia’s Ministry of Culture, he was awarded the prize "Person of the Year" in 2010 by the Russian Biographical Institute.48 However, cross-border channels for cultural and language education between the Donbas and various Russian institutions were also emerging at the time.

For example, the Donetsk National University established various cross-border exchange programs. All but one university exchange program was with Russian universities and all programs incorporated a cultural education component even if the education program was not in a humanities field.49 However, even the establishment of the above ties required a significant effort through public diplomacy on behalf of Moscow.
7.5.4 Russia’s Public Diplomacy and Active Measures in Eastern Ukraine

With language policy being a central issue in the 2010 Ukraine Presidential Election, the outcome was consequential for the exercise of Moscow’s role in Ukraine – especially in regions with majority Russian speakers. From Moscow’s perspective, the election of Yanukovych and his Party of Regions would guarantee a leadership receptive to its protector narrative. A victory for Yulia Tymoshenko likely meant a continued sidelining of Moscow’s interests and an inability to operationalize its vision as protector of ‘compatriots.’ However, as highlighted in earlier sections of this chapter, Russia also envisioned itself as the promoter of the ‘Soviet Donbas’ linking the Donbas to Moscow on the basis of common ‘heroic’ history. This created a duality of narratives. During the media campaign launched around the Presidential race in 2009-2010, Moscow placed more emphasis on the issues of minority language discrimination compared to the Soviet Donbas narrative.

At the tactical level, Russia’s public diplomacy around the 2010 Presidential Election had two goals: 1) shed light on language rights challenges posed to the Russian-speaking population by the incumbent Viktor Yushchenko government and 2) affect the outcome of the election in favor of Yanukovych on the basis of these grievances. In turn, Russia hoped the new President would incorporate Moscow as a partner in the solution of the language-based discrimination challenges. Through the creation of this favorable environment, Russia would be able to deploy Active Measures even more effectively to increase the acceptance of its role as the protector of Russian speakers as well as build stronger cross-border ties with the Donbas.
Paradoxically, however, relative to the Orange Revolution period of 2004-2005, Russia’s interference in Ukraine’s 2010 Presidential election was more subdued. This relative restraint may also be a reason for the decline in the acceptance of Russia’s protector role by the local population in Eastern Ukraine. Unlike 2004 and 2005, when Russia’s top leadership has openly endorsed its favorite candidate Viktor Yanukovych, in 2009-2010 Russia’s politicians did not articulate a clear preference for any of the candidates until the second round. Only in the second phase of the election campaign, Russia’s media and ranking members of the executive and legislative branches endorsed Viktor Yanukovych.

A key platform for the diffusion of Russia’s endorsement has been through its Federal television channels, which in 2010 were watched by the majority of the population in Eastern Ukraine. For example, Yanukovych emerged as the favorite candidate on the eve of the first round on the Rossiya 1 channel, where he was featured in eleven of the thirteen reports and shown speaking in ten of fifteen programs.

Prominent political figures in Moscow believed that Russia had the right to diplomatically intervene in Ukraine. For example, Sergey Markov, Deputy of the Russian State Duma, announced the following at a round table on “Ukraine – Russia: Results of Half a Year.” He claimed that “the language question is not a question of Ukrainian internal affairs, because behind the question of the status of the Russian language stands another problem, the problem of human rights, the equality of civil and political rights of the two largest communities of Ukraine—those of Russian and those of Ukrainian culture.” However, such sentiment was not confined to Russian policymakers. Similar views were expressed by Russian GONGOs.
Immediately following the Orange Revolution, a Kyiv branch of the official Russian Institute of the Commonwealth of Independent States was established as one of the key platforms for Russia’s Active Measures in Ukraine’s Capital. As a window into the ethos of the organizations, leading up to the election in 2010, Institute director Vladimir Kornilov claimed that to “guarantee ourselves from future Yushchenko's, Russia has been working to develop its 'soft' capabilities.” Concurrently with such campaigns, some of Russia’s pro-Kremlin intellectuals were mobilized to ‘showcase’ the Ukrainianization campaign being deployed from Kyiv targeting the local education spheres in cities like Donetsk and Luhansk.

In 2010, Innokentiy Andreev’s original (2006) concept of “a humanities scholarly structure in East Ukraine—a Russian Institute” in an article titled “The Russian language as a shield and a sword” has re-emerged in Russia’s print and online news. In his writing, Andreev described the National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy as “a project” dangerous to “Russian influence in the intellectual sphere” in Eastern Ukraine as an institution that offers education in Ukrainian and English, but not in Russian. Alerted by this development, he suggested the creation of a “Russian Institute” in Eastern Ukraine which would be able to compete with the Kyiv Mohyla Academy. The main aim of such a center would be to promote “the Russian language in Eastern Ukraine” and the “social factors of its functioning.”

7.6 Consequential Period 3: Russia’s Role and Power Leading up to the February 2014 Crisis Onset

The purpose of the following sections is to qualitatively assess the components of Russia’s perceived role and power in Eastern Ukraine leading up to the crisis in February 2014. Later this information contributes to the quantitative assessment of the role-power
gap, which constitutes Moscow’s system-level *incentive* to apply coercion. In the months leading to the February 2014 crisis, Russia continued to interweave its role as the protector of the Soviet Donbas narrative to Moscow and more importantly, Russian speakers. As in the case of the 2010 election period, Moscow’s Active Measures have largely targeted the acceptance and formalization of its role as protector of Russian ‘compatriots,’ while leaving the Soviet narrative relatively unattended; this was, at least partially, the reason for the decline of the local acceptance of Moscow’s overall role in the region by Eastern Ukrainian residents.

The 2012 Ukrainian law "On the Principles of the State Language Policy,” enabled a more favorable environment for the use of minority languages on a regional basis. Thus, the level of perceived existential threat from the Kyiv government by many Eastern Ukrainian residents may have declined. As a result, the level of *active* display of acceptance of the role by the Donbas population also decreased. During this period, the level of formalization of Moscow’s role as the protector of the Russian-speaking population remained consistent relative to the 2010 Presidential election examined previously. Even though Yanukovych’s Presidentship facilitated the removal of some structural and legal barriers imposed by the preceding Yushchenko government, the circumstance did not translate into any binding treaty to solidify Russia’s perceived protector role in the Donbas. The information regarding Russia’s perceived protector role specificity, scope, clarity, acceptance, and formalization provided in the subsequent sections prior to crisis onset in February 2014 is summarized in Table 7.2 below.
7.6.1 Russia’s Role as Protector of Russian-Speakers and ‘Compatriots’

In the months preceding the February 2014 crisis, Russia continued to maintain its main narrative as the protector of Russian speakers. However, with civil unrest not just affecting Eastern Ukraine, or other regions with the majority of residents being members of the ‘compatriots’ group, Russia’s protector narrative applied to the Donbas by implication. Akin to the previous periods examined in this chapter, Russia continued to articulate a narrative associated with the Donbas which relied on the duality of the ‘Soviet Donbas’ and language-based storyline, which placed Moscow at the center of local politics.

The narratives articulated by Russian GONGOs such as Russkiy Mir in late 2013 shed light on the Kremlin’s desire to maintain its role as the protector of the Russian language and culture in the Donbas region. The vision was for the role to be undertaken by local pro-Russia organizations alongside Russian Federal organs such as the Federal Agency for Youth Affairs, together with the Ministry of Sports, Tourism and Youth Policy of the Russian Federation, the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation, the Russian State Historical and Cultural Center under the Government of Russia, the Russian Academy of Sciences, as well as the Russian Committee of War and Military Service Veterans.

For example, on 22 October 2013, the Russkiy Mir Foundation published an article signaling Moscow’s support for the preservation of the Russian language and heritage through the funding of academic events. The XV International Dalev Readings were traditionally held every two years at the East Ukrainian National University in Luhansk. The event, supported by Russian and Eastern Ukrainian governmental and non-governmental entities, celebrates Russian linguist, writer, creator of the "Explanatory
Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language” Vladimir Dal. However, Russkiy Mir did not confine its narrative to the Russian language.

On 23 November 2013 Russkiy Mir reported that a presentation of the project "Our Common Victory" was delivered at an event hosted at the Russian Center of the Donetsk Regional Universal Scientific Library Krupskaya. The goal of the project was to form a Russian-language video archive of memories of veterans of the Great Patriotic War. Andrey Muravyov, Chief of the GONGO Rossotrudnichestvo Representative Office in Ukraine, spoke about the programs aimed at “beneficial interaction between Ukraine and Russia to reinforce such language-based cooperation.”

Furthermore, on 4 December 2013, under the same slogan of the project “Our Common Victory,” a series of meetings were held in Luhansk focusing on the role of the Donbas in the larger effort of the Soviet Union to defeating Nazi Germany. This event had a contrasting focus to all the language-related events held previously supported by Moscow-funded organizations. The project organizers considered the main purpose of this event to be the strengthening of “friendly ties with Russia around the shared experience of the Second World War.”

The event was attended by the project manager Tatiana Romanova from Moscow as well as the project coordinator in Luhansk, the chairman of DVM "Rus" Tikhon Goncharov. Veterans of the Great Patriotic War, representatives of patriotic organizations, and youth were also present at the events. The event was recorded into a movie and screened across the City.

However, even with such strong signaling from Kremlin-funded sources that Moscow is undertaking the role of the protector of Soviet heritage and Russian language
as well as literary heritage in Eastern Ukraine, local acceptance and receptiveness of this narrative in the Donbas region remained low.

7.6.2 Degree of Local Acceptance of Russia’s Narrative in Eastern Ukraine

Opinion polls conducted across the Luhansk and Donetsk Oblasts addressing language-based discrimination and perception of Russia’s role in this challenging area indicate that many in Eastern Ukraine did not actively support either Moscow’s Soviet Donbas or language-centric narrative. In fact, a Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) poll indicated that even in the midst of the emerging political crisis in late 2013, with the expectation of increased local pushback against Kyiv’s anti-minority language policies, the local population was not receptive to Russia’s narrative(s).

For example, one poll indicates that a minority of Russian speakers across Eastern Ukraine identify language policies in Ukraine as discriminatory. These are consequential statistics as the population would first have to be aggrieved to subsequently accept Russia as a protector. According to KIIS (2014), 40 percent of Russian speakers in Donetsk Oblast, 30 percent in Luhansk Oblast, and 25 percent in Kharkiv Oblast thought their language rights were constrained. This means even amid the crisis, there was no basis of grievance for Russia to seek widespread support from the local population for its perceived role as protector of Russian speakers.

Regarding any desire for intervention by Russia to protect language rights in Eastern Ukraine, a minority of respondents indicated that any actions by Moscow would be legitimate even when the perceived threat was elevated. When KIIS (2014) asked whether Ukrainians thought Russia rightfully protects the interests of Russian-speaking citizens of Eastern Ukraine, a minority of participants responded affirmatively: in Donetsk,
47 percent responded that Russia’s actions would be legitimate while 33 percent responded that Moscow’s protection would be illegitimate. In Luhansk, 44 percent claimed such actions would be legitimate while 32 percent responded negatively to such prospects.

At the height of the perceived threat to the Russian-speaking population from the new leadership in Kyiv, the majority of the local population in Eastern Ukraine did not want Russia to exercise its protector role. When KIIS asked locals if they would support the introduction of Russian troops into Ukraine, the majority of respondents in Eastern Ukraine replied “no.” In the event of an incursion of Russian troops into Eastern Ukraine, however, the largest segment of respondents (ranging from 36 to 55 percent) would stay at home and not interfere. A smaller share would put up armed resistance: from 11 percent in Luhansk and 12 percent in Donetsk. Only 13 percent in Donetsk and 12 percent in Luhansk would welcome Russian troops.66

Moreover, the Russian language protector role by Moscow, when interweaved with the ‘Novorossiya’ narrative, was even more poorly received by the local population in Eastern Ukraine. Residents of Southern and Eastern Ukraine saw ‘Novorossiya’ as an inauthentic Russian political narrative. A local Donbas survey indicates that in six of the eight oblasts of Eastern and Southeastern Ukraine, ethnic Ukrainians, whether Ukrainophone, Russophone, or bilingual, saw it as Russian political technology (54 to 59 percent) rather than self-expression for independence (7 to 19 percent). Ethnic Russians, however, were split more evenly, with a few more believing it was self-expression (32 percent) than Russian political technology (26 percent). Even fewer among ethnic Ukrainians (3 to 8 percent) and ethnic Russians (17 percent) considered it as a legitimate cause for separatism.67
The relatively low level of acceptance of Moscow’s role as the protector of Russian-speaking ‘compatriots’ corresponded to an even lower level of formalization of this perceived protector role in Eastern Ukraine.

7.6.3 Degree of Formalization of Russia’s Protector Role

Whether between local Donetsk or Luhansk entities and Moscow or among Donbas and Russian regional organizations, the level of formalization of Russia’s role as protector of ‘compatriots’ remained low. This was the case regarding both the Soviet Donbas or the language-centric role narrative. However, Law no. 5029-VI "On the Principles of the State Language Policy” drafted by the Yanukovych government in 2012 enabled the formalization of Moscow’s Russian language protector role as fewer barriers existed to minority language-focused ties.68

Following years of rising barriers to cross-border ties between Russia and Ukraine during the Yushchenko period, Moscow re-established itself as a prominent actor in the Eastern Ukraine political domain. The improvement in minority language rights created a favorable political climate for Russian and local Eastern Ukrainian organizations to formalize cross-border ties. A key platform through which cross-border civil society linkage between Russia and the Donbas was enhanced was the collaboration networks between Russian and Eastern Ukrainian educational institutions.

For example, in 2013 alone, the Russkiy Mir Foundation opened three offices with the largest one in the Horlivka State Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages in Horlivka, Donbas. Using Russian Federal funds, the Russian Center of the Russkiy Mir Foundation provides access to Russian-language education and cross-border exchange programs for students.69 In the same period, the Russian Center of the Donetsk Regional
Universal Scientific Library named after Krupskaya hosted several cross-border educational programs for graduate and undergraduate students of the Donetsk Institute of Social Education. However, the acceptance of Moscow’s perceived protector role of the Russian language in Eastern Ukraine and corresponding cross-border formalization of this role between educational institutions was a function of the Kremlin’s prolonged efforts.

**7.6.4 Active Measures by Russia in Eastern Ukraine prior to Crisis Onset**

The dissemination of Russia’s perspective of the causes of civil unrest in December and January 2014 prior to crisis onset, and thus control over discourse, was an essential task for Moscow if it was to uphold its role and power in Eastern Ukraine. This was also an effort to be mobilized local diaspora populations against the newly active anti-Yanukovych factions. In targeting the Eastern Ukrainian diaspora through Active Measures in the information domain, and demonstrating the malevolence of anti-Yanukovych factions, Moscow desired to guarantee the receptiveness of many Eastern Ukrainians to Russia’s protection. By mobilizing such public support for Moscow’s narrative, Russia would also protect the local pro-Russian Eastern political elites, who have become a key channel through which Moscow-backed organizations in the Donbas formed their links with Russia.

Prior to the overthrow of the Yanukovych government in February 2014, most of Eastern Ukraine watched Russian television, and, typical of the former Soviet space, most of the population received their news from televised sources. The Maidan protest movement, which began in November 2013, energized Russia’s already intense manipulation of information, warning of the dangers of closer ties with the EU.
The demonstrations on Maidan Square in Kyiv and other parts of Ukraine also coincided with a structural reorganization of media and news agencies in Russia. For example, on 9 December 2013, RIA Novosti, one of the Russian government’s most prominent news platforms, was replaced with Russia Today (RT). This re-organization and centralization of its main news agencies, targeting audiences outside of Russia in a single media entity, enabled Moscow to coordinate information delivery more effectively across the post-Soviet region.

Prior to the onset of crisis and conflict in late February 2014, Russian-language television solidified existing social networks within the Russian-speaking diaspora in Eastern Ukraine, thereby contributing to the region’s social cohesion. The country-wide unrest and increasing societal polarization in Ukraine were used as the perfect jumping board for Russia to expand its information campaign, as the Russian-speaking population became agitated and as a consequence more receptive to Russia’s narrative. Russian media identified the forces opposed to Yanukovych as fascists. For example, starting in January 2014 Russia’s Channel One news systematically attributed the unrest in Kyiv and other parts of Ukraine to what they called ‘far-right factions,’ who desire to gain control of the centers of power akin to fascists in Germany in the 1920s.

The table below summarizes Russia’s perceived role and power components in the Donbas across the three consequential events (or short periods), examined in the foregoing discussion.
Table 7.2. Qualitative Summary of Trends in Russia’s Role and Relative Power Across the Consequential Events (or Short Periods)

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<tr>
<td><strong>Degree of Specificity</strong></td>
<td>The degree of specificity was moderate considering two competing narratives: Russian language narrative and Soviet Donbas/distinct region narrative; language narrative overpowered the latter.</td>
<td>The degree of specificity increased because language narrative became increasingly dominant; Soviet narrative still present. Russian President Dmitry Medvedev’s representatives demanding a united Russia-Ukraine response to Russian language challenges in Ukraine; the emergence of the Russkiy Mir Foundation which articulated the language protection narrative.</td>
<td>The degree of specificity remained the same relative to the previous period; Russian language protector and pro-Moscow memory of the Second World War; the former was leading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Degree of Scope</strong></td>
<td>Moderate level of regional focus.</td>
<td>Remaining the same. Regional focus as reference to challenges in E. Ukraine became more common in public messaging by Russian officials; an implication of broader policy priority to protect ‘compatriots.’ Russian GONGOs articulated Russia’s role.</td>
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<td><strong>Degree of Clarity</strong></td>
<td>Moderate-high clarity due to specific reference to (and definition of) the 1) Russian World concept, specifically usage of Russian language in everyday life, 2) education challenges, 3) memory of the Second World War.</td>
<td>Declined compared to previous period. Second World War component became less emphasized in official speeches. Russian World and language as well as education emerged as focus in the Eastern Ukraine context.</td>
<td>Remaining consistent; same observations as in previous consequential event (or short period).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Degree of Acceptance</strong></td>
<td>High level of acceptance of Russia’s protector role. Anti-Yushchenko mobilization caused by perceived threat to language rights and cultural memory of the local Donbas population.</td>
<td>Decline in acceptance of Russia’s role; evidence of some misalignment with Russia’s role: local population accepted the ‘Soviet Donbas’ more than the language-based protector role preferred by Russia.</td>
<td>Degree of acceptance declined according to KIIS surveys.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Degree of Formality</strong></td>
<td>Low; Party of regions established a language/culture cooperation agreement with United Russia in 2005 following election loss.</td>
<td>Remained the same in aggregate. Party of Regions-United Russia cooperation was inactive but there was increased cross-border linkages between local E. Ukraine politicians and Russian organizations.</td>
<td>Remained the same. Presence of Russian GONGO offices in E. Ukraine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Active Measures by Russia Targeting Acceptance and Formality</strong></td>
<td>Russian state television ran campaigns in support of Yanukovych.</td>
<td>Russian-language television and media campaigns were run to shed light on issues associated with minority language rights.</td>
<td>Russian state television, online media, and GONGOs compared the Maidan protests to fascists.</td>
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</table>
The five components of generality, scope, clarity, acceptance, and formality, which represent Russia’s perceived role and power in the Donbas, are the system-level incentive (IV1) hypothesized to influence Russia’s specific intensity of coercion in Eastern Ukraine. However, as per the IOI Model, the second variable which affects Russia’s decision to use particular gray zone tools and tactics is the domestic-level opportunity (IV2), established by the local ethnic-based movement.

7.7 The Donbas Ethnic-Based Movement: Secessionism and Sporadic Irredentism

The purpose of this section is to determine the second domestic-level independent variable (IV2), which contributes to Russia’s decision to apply different gray zone tools and tactics. Prior to the onset of the February 2014 crisis, the Donbas region, with its mostly Russian-speaking population, and deep-rooted socio-economic and historic links to Moscow, perceived itself as a distinct region within Ukraine. As noted in Chapter 2, what matters for this analysis in terms of secessionism or irredentism is the presence or absence of an organized movement, which creates different anticipated costs of support for interveners.

In the post-Soviet era, the regional ethnic-based movement in Eastern Ukraine emerged from the rubble of the Soviet Union independently of Moscow’s actions. The unitary structure of the Ukrainian state, which provided the legal and legislative foundation for Kyiv to influence local cultural-linguistic policy in the regions, contributed to the mobilization of the local population toward secessionism. The local secessionist movement can largely be defined as incremental because its leaders desired greater autonomy and control over local socio-linguistic policy rather than full separation from Kyiv. On the other hand, as discussed later in this section, the various irredentist
mobilizations in the Donbas region also sporadically emerged out of the consistently present secessionist sentiment. This occurred when the threat from the central government in Kyiv was severely elevated. The threat was perceived to escalate by many Eastern Ukrainian as a result of abrupt marginalization of the Russian language by the Kyiv government or through active promotion of a narrative significantly different from those historically articulated by Moscow.\(^7\) However, the irredentist movement became dormant during the tenure of President Yanukovych, as favorable minority language-related laws were passed by the national legislature.

When considering intervention in an ethnic-based dispute, the type of movement with which an intervener would have to engage represents a significant component of the cost calculation. As highlighted by Heraclides (1990) as well as Chazan and Horowitz (1990), compared to secessionist movements, irredentism is relatively costly to support in terms of depth of commitment and duration, international reputation, and potential consequences as the endeavor require the direct undermining of the territorial integrity of another state. Since support for irredentism ultimately requires the addition of a territory and its people to the ‘mother’ country, it becomes more difficult to assist the movement covertly. Protracted support increases the chances of the exposure of aid operations and thus the intervener paying the domestic and international costs associated with the involvement.\(^8\) However, in a territory with a secessionist movement, and periodic irredentist movement, the cost calculation for an intervener becomes complex.\(^9\)

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the enactment of various policies which elevated the status of Ukrainian language and cultural focus, a significant portion of the Donbas population desired unity with Russia. For example, in 1993 the Movement for
the Rebirth of the Donbas demanded a restructuring of the Ukrainian state to federalism, the elevation of the Russian language to the status of the second state language, and closer integration for Ukraine into the newly established Commonwealth of Independent States. \(^8_2\)

Subsequently, a July 1994 poll indicated that 47 percent of respondents would have voted against the independence of Ukraine from Russia if a referendum was conducted in 1991. \(^8_3\) Only 24 percent would have voted for the independence of Kyiv from Moscow. \(^8_4\) Even though under a different banner, the irredentist movement emerged out of the secessionist movement again during the Orange Revolution.

Following the defeat of Viktor Yanukovych in 2005, an irredentist movement once again emerged in Eastern Ukraine out of fear of cultural-linguistic discrimination from Kyiv. For example, Denis Pushilin, a future leader of the Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR), established his Novorossiya NGO in Donetsk in 2005. \(^8_5\) The NGO propagated secessionism from Kyiv along with a narrative of stronger integration with Moscow. In a statement, the organization’s leader stated that “Donetsk is Russia.” \(^8_6\) This was symbiotic with Russia’s own vision that the “borders of the Russian world extend along the borders of Russian language usage” in places like the Donbas. \(^8_7\)

However, in the two months leading up to the onset of the February 2014 crisis, irredentism was an option considered by a small minority of the Donbas population. A December 2013 survey conducted by Razumkov Center, indicated that 10 percent of the residents in the East and 16 percent in the South of Ukraine, compared to 5 percent in Western Ukraine and 2 percent in the Center, backed “secession of their region from Ukraine to join another state.” \(^8_8\) However, secessionist sentiment became stronger
following the crisis onset and local irredentist factions also became active in the ethnic-based movement in the Donbas.  

As noted by Kudelia (2014), internal factors were responsible for the outbreak of the separatist movement in the Donbas. These include an ethnically fragmented state, coercive failure by the Kyiv government, and the perception of low government legitimacy. At their peak in February 2014, only 30 percent in Luhansk Oblast and 28 percent in Donetsk Oblast were clearly or somewhat in favor of secessionism or irredentism. These estimates were greater than in December 2013 with a low of only 10 percent responding favorably to the same question. However, different poll sources provide different assessments regarding local support for secessionism and irredentism. For example, the Donetsk-based Institute of Social Research and Policy Analysis provided even more detailed results for Donetsk Oblast in April 2014 compared to the KIIS. It confirmed that more than two-thirds of the Donetsk Oblast residents wanted to remain in Ukraine. Even though during the post-Soviet period ethnic-based mobilization in the Donbas corresponded with an increasingly nationalizing Ukrainian state, a parallel cause for the formation of secessionism in Eastern Ukraine, at least by the local elites, is based on business interests.

Kudelia (2014) notes that with the demise of the Communist Party, authoritarian discipline, and new opportunities for privatization, local business as well as political elites used corrupt methods to become enterprise owners and pursued self-interest by enflaming regionalism and, on occasion, threatening separatism. This was frequently under the guise of language-based discrimination from the central authorities in Kyiv as it provided a backdrop of grievances against which mobilizing popular support as possible. Placing the
territorial integrity of the country on the line was successful in extracting legal and legislative concessions from the Kyiv government. However, this occasional inflammation of separatism and irredentism by the local elites could only be realized with pre-existing support for these movements among local residents.94

7.8 Russia’s Gray Zone Tactics in the Donbas Following Crisis Onset: Assessing the Dependent Variable (DV)

The purpose of this section is to determine the dependent variable of the IOI Model - the intensity of Russia’s coercive gray zone tools and tactics following the crisis onset in February 2014. As highlighted in Figure 7.1 below, the intensity of Russia’s coercion, as a reaction to the crisis events in the Donbas region, was low relative to Crimea and Abkhazia but higher than in Kharkiv and Odesa. It became clear that following the crisis onset, a decline in the freedom of operation of Russian GONGOs and media organizations was likely.95 The crisis also meant the severance of ties between such organizations and local Donbas political and non-state entities.96 The implication would be a decline in Russia’s formal role as a protector of Russian ‘compatriots’ in the region and the loss of Russia’s ability to promote public acceptance of this role through persuasion.

Following crisis onset, the Kremlin understood that the maintenance of its role as the protector of the Russian ‘compatriots’ through public diplomacy tools and channels, such as NGOs and the media, alone would thus be unsuccessful. Even if Russia was to partially maintain its public relations efforts in the Donbas, the departure of Yanukovych from Kyiv in February 2014 meant that Russia’s narrative as the protector of the Russian-speaking population of the Donbas would likely be resisted by the new government and diluted by a renewed ‘Ukrainianization’ campaign.97 Furthermore, such new campaigns could also be supported by states and non-state entities from Western Europe and North
America. Thus, Russia would lose its relative monopoly on the articulation of a narrative for the Donbas, and its perceived role could become incongruent with the new political reality. To mitigate such losses, Russia chose to transform its tactics from Active Measures, or persuasion, to coercion. Support for entities such as the DNR and LNR would guarantee a permissive political landscape through which Russia could continue to maintain local acceptance for its protector narrative as well as decisively formalize this role in the Donbas.

Corresponding to the fast-shifting political climate, Moscow had to find a combination of optimal tactics to support the two political entities and thus prevent its protector role from disintegrating. As summarized in Table 7.3, Moscow did not undertake the type of security operations as in Crimea, instead of relying on 1) low-intensity covert security operations, 2) combat support for local non-state proxies, 3) material support for non-state militias, 4) supportive cyber operation(s), 5) diaspora influence through organization(s), and 6) targeted media and information campaigns.

7.8.1 Low-Intensity Covert Security Operations by Russia

According to U.S Department of Defense sources, the total number of Russian military or security personnel operating in Eastern Ukraine was estimated to be 9,000 by the end of February 2015. The troops were never acknowledged by Russia’s leadership, as in the case of Crimea, and were largely used as support for the LNR and DNR separatist fighters. However, on one key occasion, Russian operatives also took independent missions.

On 12 April 2014, Igor Girkin, an operative sponsored by Russia’s security services, led a group of militants on an assault to seize several administrative buildings, the local police department, and the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) headquarters in
Sloviansk, Donetsk Oblast.\textsuperscript{99} His team was largely composed of volunteer fighters from Eastern Ukraine, Crimea, and Kyiv.\textsuperscript{100} However, such autonomous combat actions taken by Russian operatives were rare.

By the beginning of summer 2015, the territory under separatist military control was relatively limited, consisting of approximately 15 to 20-kilometer zone of the uncontrolled border with Russia. However, according to an Atlantic Council Report (2015), during key offensives, Russian forces in Ukraine received cover from shelling from Russian territory.\textsuperscript{101} In the summer of 2014, the Ukrainian Border Service and the National Security and Defense Council reported more than 50 artillery attacks from Russia.\textsuperscript{102}

The Ukrainian army was forced into retreat. By 19 September, separatists controlled the entire stretch of territory along the Russian border in Eastern Ukraine to the coast of the Azov Sea. By this time there was an estimated 15,000 -20,000 separatist forces in Donbas with a sizeable number recruited from Russia along with Russia's regular forces.\textsuperscript{103} However, Russia did not only send military personnel to aid local militia fighters.

There were several examples of this heavy equipment movement noted by the U.S, NATO, and Ukrainian intelligence services starting in the summer of 2014. In August 2014 NATO satellite imaging showed self-propelled artillery which crossed into the Donbas from Russia. This artillery was never handed to separatists but used by Russian operatives in their support for the rebels in subsequent fighting.\textsuperscript{104} Furthermore, frequent sightings of the Russian-made ‘Dozor’ communication and reconnaissance armored vehicles were collected from supporters of the separatists and placed on social media by local residents. The sightings can be traced to the Luhansk region as well as two other sightings closer to the town of Krasnodon by the Russian border.\textsuperscript{105} Even though Russia did not provide its
most sophisticated to DNR and LNR fighters, Moscow supplied unused (or outdated) equipment to the separatists.

7.8.2 Material Support for Non-State Actors in Donetsk and Luhansk

Experts claim that the transfer of military hardware from Russia to the separatists in the Donbas allowed the DNR and LNR to maintain a significant and sophisticated arsenal of weapons. Considering that even prior to the conflict, 35 percent of the Ukrainian economy was operating outside official ledgers, the local environment was set up perfectly for covert supplying of underground and separatist groups.

For example, in August 2014, a T-72 main battle tank with unique characteristics was identified in the possession of DNR and LNR separatists in the Donbas. This tank has never been exported outside of Russia nor utilized by Ukrainian Armed Forces prior to the onset of conflict. This means only Russia could have exported the tank to the separatists.

With Russia’s material support, separatist forces had several successes on the battlefield against Ukrainian Armed Forces. The battle of Illovaysk, in August 2014 forced the Ukrainian Army into total retreat, giving control over the entire surrounding territory to the separatists. As a result, over the fall of 2014, and into the winter of 2015, the separatists improved their positions and captured several large cities previously held by Ukraine’s Armed Forces. Subsequently in Debatseve, Ukrainian Armed Forces and several volunteer battalions surrounded by separatists, and aided by Russian supplies, were yet again forced into retreat. Even though Russian support for the separatists often took the form of material aid, much of the help from Moscow also happened through cyberspace.

Less than two months following crisis onset, Crimean separatists, including Russian Cossack brigades, were mobilized in the Donbas region in April 2014. Support by
such entities enabled municipal and regional authorities with strong pro-Russian positions in the Donbas region to declared their own status referendum on 11 May 2014. However, support for DNR and LNR was not only undertaken by Russia through material support.

### 7.8.3 Disruptive Cyber Operations by Russia in the Donbas

As highlighted by Valery Gerasimov in his presentation at Moscow Conference on International Security (MCIS) in April 2019 and an end-of-the-year address to the Russian General Staff, low-intensity operations, for example through cyberspace, are a key component of the contemporary strategy of intervention across international borders.\(^{110}\) Cyber coercion may not have an immediate impact on fighting,\(^ {111}\) but it often proves valuable as means of conditioning the local environment prior to other forms of engagement.

To increase battlefield effectiveness by rebel forces, and its own fighters, Russia employed malware in the Donbas to collect battlefield intelligence, retrieved locational data from mobile network devices used by Ukrainian artillery troops, as well as hacking CCTV cameras behind the adversaries’ lines. As noted by Kostyuk and Zhukov (2017), pro-rebel cyber operations included attacks by pro-separatist or pro-Russian cyber actors and were often supported by Russian government entities. In the context of Eastern Ukraine, active entities who supported the LNR and DNR rebels include Cyber Riot Novorossiya, CyberBerkut (CB), and Green Dragon.\(^ {112}\) However, Russia’s efforts did not only focus on the adversaries but also on the mobilization of local political allies.

### 7.8.4 Diaspora Influence Through Secular and Religious Organizations

Following the crisis onset in February 2014, local pro-Russia organizations were used to mobilize popular support for the separatists as a response to the perceived threat
emanating from the new leadership in Kyiv. As noted by Lutsevych (2016), a significant percentage of the Donbas population has participated in events or was involved in Moscow-affiliated organizations. The tactics of GONGOs such as Russkiy Mir went from soft persuasion of the local population to the dissemination of fear and dissemination of an existential threat which would compel the local population to support the separatists and by, implication, comply with Moscow’s strategic and operational agenda.

Following crisis onset, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, which falls under the Moscow Patriarchate (MP), has been a key channel for the mobilization of ‘compatriots’ in Eastern Ukraine to support the DNR and LNR movements and fight on in defense of Moscow. This was largely done through direct dialogue with local political allies and combat-capable people. However, the MP’s support for the Novorossiya narrative was proven futile as the leadership in Moscow largely abandoned the concept by the end of 2015.

The cultural, historical, and religious project known as Novorossiya received strong support from the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), as it was seen “as an existential issue for entire Holy Russia.” There were Russian Orthodox priests affiliated with the MP in the Donbas who helped train local young people to join the Russian Orthodox Army (ROA). The ROA was one of several DNR Russian volunteer battalions. However, the effect of religious organizations on fighting was relatively limited, especially with the decline of the Novorossiya narrative in the official Kremlin lexicon. What proved to be more effective for local mobilization from Moscow’s perspective was the use of locally-entrenched secular organizations which rallied the local population around the ideas of existential threat to the Russian-speaking and the regionally distinct Soviet-era identity.
Russian GONGOs such as the Izborskiy Club were instrumental in the formation of the rebel government in the Donbas. Moreover, the Russian organization Saint Basil’s Foundation was continuously providing political and material support to the DNR under the guise of international humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, organizations such as the Russian Imperial Movement, Russian Volunteers, and Veterans and Cossacks have been instrumental in the recruitment of Eastern Ukrainian residents into the ranks of local fighters. However, the mobilization of popular support for the DNR was also conducted effectively through media campaigns independent of any GONGOs.

### 7.8.5 Donbas Diaspora Mobilization through Media Campaigns

Russia’s gray zone engagement in the Donbas in support of the DNR and LNR fundamentally relied on the popular mobilization of the local population in response to the overthrow of the Yanukovych government in February 2014. Disruptive cyber operations alone could not create the permissive environment necessary for Moscow’s covert operations as a ‘protector.’ What has shifted in Russia’s narrative following crisis onset, compared to periods when Moscow employed Active Measures information campaigns, is the degree of existentialism in the threat articulated to local Donbas residents.

In parallel to events in Crimea, the Donbas witnessed pro-Russian protests and massive rallies as the main focus of the conflict shifted to Eastern Ukraine in the summer of 2014. Framing the scenario as an existential threat, Russia maintained the narrative that the Russian-speaking people living in Eastern Ukraine were oppressed by the Kyiv government, supporting activists initially through diplomatic pronouncement followed by humanitarian assistance. By adopting this position, Russia effectively promoted the local uprisings.
The separatist leadership had become firmly established in Eastern Ukraine through other actors who were instrumental in influencing the uncertainty of the situation. For example, the successful collaboration between local oligarch Renat Akhmetov’s business group and Yanukovych’s Party of Regions had provided for mutual control over the Donbas for at least a decade prior. But pro-separatist rallies threatened Akhmetov’s business empire in the Donbas. As a result, Akhmetov adopted a relatively neutral position calling for a peaceful resolution through negotiation. Being the wealthiest and most influential oligarch in Ukraine, his relative inaction was a key factor in the eventual takeover of Donetsk and Luhansk by separatist forces.¹²³

The sophisticated information campaign undertaken by Russia and its local allies exacerbated the social fracturing of the Donbas population along ethno-linguistic lines, with a big portion of the Russian-speaking population of Eastern Ukraine becoming markedly sympathetic to Russia’s point of view. According to Sazonov and Müüür (2015), Russia’s information campaign following the onset of the crisis in February 2014 was defined by the following combination of characteristics 1) narratives of fear and panic, 2) narratives of separatists as heroes, 3) narratives of World War II victory against Fascists, and 4) aggressive and emotional rhetoric.

Considering that a majority of the population relied on Russian information sources on a daily basis, Komsomolskaya Pravda, I.A. Regnum, TV Zvezda, and various online social media were especially effective at disseminating the messages of existential threat to ‘compatriots’ in the Donbas.¹²⁴ Few remember that around a million residents from the Donbas instinctively fled the conflict to Russia instead of Ukraine. On the other hand, the
ethnic Ukrainian population in the rest of the country largely accepted the narrative presented by the opposition to Yanukovych.¹²⁵

The table below summarizes Russia’s gray zone engagement in the Donbas region.

**Table 7.3. Summary of Russia’s Gray Zone Engagement in the Donbas Following Crisis Onset**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maximum Intensity of Coercion</th>
<th>Intervention Format</th>
<th>Example(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medium-High</td>
<td>Covert Military/Security Operation(s)</td>
<td>Russian covert operatives such as Igor Girkin led an assault on Sloviansk. Russian units directly participated in the fighting in support of local LNR and DNR militias in North-Eastern Donbas; shelling from Russian territory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Material support for non-state militias</td>
<td>Supplying ‘unique’ T-72 tanks, small arms, and Russian gear to local Donbas fighters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cyber operation(s)</td>
<td>Disruption of Ukrainian military maneuvers; hacking into Ukrainian CCTV cameras; relying on non-state entities such as Cyber Riot Novorossiya, CyberBerkut (CB), and Green Dragon for cyber operations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Diaspora influence through organization(s)</td>
<td>The Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the MP and secular organizations such as Russkiy Mir disseminated the perception of an existential threat to the local Eastern Ukrainian population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Media and information Operation(s)</td>
<td>Dissemination of information framing an existential threat to ‘compatriots’ in the Donbas through Russian television and social media channels such as TV Zvezda etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 7.1.** Intensity of Coercion Scale Chosen for the Donbas Relative to Other Cases post-Crisis Onset (February 2014)
7.9 Results and Analysis

When examining Russia’s intensity of coercion in the Donbas following crisis onset, as a function of the role-power gap and local ethnic-based movement characteristics, the validity of the IOI Model is supported. The empirical data gathered through the application of the IOI Model to the Donbas case shows how the cost-benefit calculation from Moscow’s perspective corresponds to Russia’s intensity of coercion used in the Donbas. The foregoing discussion highlights that Moscow indeed had a system-level incentive (IV1) and domestic-level opportunity (IV2) to employ an intensity of gray zone coercion (DV) which was lower than in Crimea and Abkhazia but higher than in Kharkiv and Odesa. As a first step of the hoop test, this section assesses the level of incentive to apply gray zone tools and tactics.

The quantification of the perceived role and power components across the three consequential events (or short periods) allows the assessment of the gap between Russia’s perceived role and power in the Donbas region. In turn, this exercise reveals the magnitude of the potential decline in Russia’s perceived role following crisis onset, which the Kremlin perceived as unacceptable. This quantification is based on the Coding Table in Appendix A and summarized in Table 7.4 below.

Based on the earlier qualitative analysis, the ‘distinct Donbas region’ and ‘Russian language narratives’ served as the basis for Russia’s perceived protector narrative for the region. In fact, the two narratives were equally important for Russia’s perceived protector role around the 2004 Presidential Election and Orange Revolution. Based on the Coding Table in Appendix A, a score of 3 was allocated for this consequential period. This is reflected in Table 7.4 below. The two narratives may have some similarities, as they both
place Moscow as a key political actor in local Donbas politics, but the differences are more substantial.

The narrative associating the Donbas with the Soviet Union was a state-based kinship narrative, while the ‘protector of Russian speakers’ narrative was ethno-linguistic in character. This translated into an ambiguity regarding the level of exclusion or inclusion of different segments of the Donbas population. The Soviet-based narrative included all peoples living within the Donbas such as ethnic Ukrainians, Russians, and others, regardless of their native language. On the other hand, the language-based narrative included all ethnic groups but excluded the Ukrainian-speaking population, who are predominantly of Ukrainian ethnic background and constituted over 10 percent of the population. Starting with the second consequential period examined, however, Russia’s role specificity increased.

Starting from the 2010 Presidential election, Russia’s role specificity increased relative to the preceding 2004 Presidential election and Orange Revolution Period. As the foregoing discussion shows, after the Orange Revolution, the protection of the Russian language in the Donbas became a greater priority from Moscow’s perspective relative to the preservation of the ‘distinct region’ narrative. For example, Kremlin-backed GONGOs such as Russkiy Mir became preoccupied with the protection of Russian-speaking ‘compatriots.’ Based on the presence of two narratives, with one becoming more significant from Moscow’s perspective, Russia’s role specificity is allocated a score of 4 for the 2010 Presidential Election and pre-crisis onset periods. This is based on the Coding Table in Appendix A and is summarized in Table 7.4 below.
Russia’s role scope was characterized by vagueness regarding the specific geographic focus of its perceived protector role of Russian-speaking ‘compatriots.’ As noted in the foregoing discussion, Russian (or pro-Moscow) political entities overtly identified the Kremlin’s role as protector of Russian speakers in Ukraine. However, there was no commitment by Moscow which was tailored to the Donbas region. This applicability of Russia’s perceived protector role to more than a single region is represented in Table 7.4 through a consistent score of 2 across all consequential periods, based on the Coding Table in Appendix A.

Concurrently, Moscow’s role clarity was characterized by a focus on three role components in the first period examined, and two in the latter two periods. The heightened political instability associated with the 2004 Presidential election and perceived political threat during the Orange Revolution encouraged Russia to define specific parameters of its protector role applicable to Eastern Ukraine. For example, the chapter discusses how specific sub-components mentioned in official Russian government documents include the need to 1) protect the memory of the Second World War, 2) prevent the marginalization of the Russian language in Ukrainian education, and 3) the concept of the ‘Russian World.’ Based on the Coding Table in Appendix A, Moscow’s role clarity for the 2004 Presidential election and Orange Revolution is allocated a score of 3. This is also reflected in Table 7.4 below.

Although Dmitry Medvedev and his representatives spoke about bilingualism in Ukraine in 2010, the decline in clarity through the two subsequent consequential periods can be attributed to the increasingly rare focus on the ‘Great Patriotic War’ narrative. As noted in the foregoing discussion, newly-created GONGOs, such as Russkiy Mir, placed
emphasis on Moscow’s role in local Russian language education and the Donbas as part of the ‘Russian World.’ This is reflected in a role clarity score of 2 for the 2010 Presidential election and pre-crisis onset periods, based on the Coding Table in Appendix A. However this perceived protector role was not entirely accepted by the local population in Eastern Ukraine.

The degree of acceptance of Moscow’s role by the Donbas population declined over time. As highlighted in the chapter, around the 2004 Election and 2005 Orange revolution period, Russian speakers in Eastern Ukraine perceived a threat from Kyiv as a consequence of the nationalistic rhetoric from various powerful candidates. The greater acceptance of Moscow’s role in the protection of ‘compatriots’ is likely the result of mobilization against the perceived threat, for example to Russian-language education. Based on the Coding Table in Appendix A, this is reflected in a role acceptance score of 4 for the 2004 Presidential election and Orange Revolution period in Table 7.4 below.

Around the 2010 presidential election, and especially following several years of the Yanukovych government’s incumbency, polls indicated that the level of acceptance of Moscow’s perceived protector role declined. However, these results may be misleading. This decline in acceptance may not be attributed to an increasingly unfavorable perception of Moscow’s role, but rather overt support was unnecessary as the level of the perceived threat to Eastern Ukrainians’ language rights was declining and their attention turned to alternative everyday issues. However, as shown in the foregoing discussion, there was a misalignment between the perception of the local population and Moscow’s priorities around the 2010 Presidential election. The local population was receptive to the ‘distinct
region narrative’ of the Donbas, while Moscow preferred its ‘protector of Russian speakers’ role. This corresponds to a core of 3, based on the Coding Table in Appendix A.

In the pre-crisis onset period, the acceptance of Russia’s role declined even further. As noted in the foregoing discussion, KIIS surveys indicated that only 12-13 percent of the local population would be accepting of Russian intervention in the Donbas in support of Russian speakers. Even with high local attendance at role-affirming events, this overall misalignment with Russia’s convictions of its perceived protector role is reflected in a score of 2, based on the Coding Table in Appendix A.

The level of formalization of Russia’s perceived protector role in the Donbas remained low through three consequential events (or short periods) examined. This is due to an absence of any binding treaty which could commit Ukraine, or the leadership in the Donbas, to Moscow’s perceived protector role. For example, during the 2004 Presidential election and the 2005 Orange Revolution period, cross-border cooperation between the Party of Regions, centered in Donetsk and the United Russia party focused on support for the Russian language and heritage but the agreement remained at the level of a memorandum.

During the 2010 Presidential Election period, commitment to Moscow’s perceived role was operationalized as relationship-building between local Eastern Ukrainian politicians and Russian GONGOs. Finally, leading up crisis onset in February 2014, such GONGOs expanded their operations in Eastern Ukraine, for example in local educational institutions. However, the above agreements are incomparable to the level of formalization of Russia’s regional protector role through the 2010 Kharkiv Pact, which characterized Moscow as the main security provider for Crimea for decades. Thus, based on the Coding
Table in Appendix A, the level of formalization of Russia’s protector role received a score of 2 for all the periods examined. This is reflected in Table 7.4 below.

In sum, based on Table 7.4, the gap between Russia’s perceived role and power across the three examined consequential events or (short periods) is 8 points. This gap is also visually represented in Figure 7.2 below, based on the power cycle theory. As discussed in Chapter 2, the implication of this gap is that following crisis onset, this perceived role is anticipated to decline. As a consequence, Russia was incentivized to deploy coercive gray zone tools and tactics to preserve its perceived role. However, the above role-power gap only accounts for the system-level incentive for Moscow to use gray zone tools and tactics.

The non-state actors in Eastern Ukraine, which became organized into an ethnic-based movement, created the domestic-level opportunity for Russia’s gray zone tools and tactics following crisis onset in February 2014. However, the challenge for Moscow was to determine the domestic-level costs, based on the type of ethnic-based movement. As highlighted in the foregoing chapter, the secessionist movement in Eastern Ukraine periodically transform into irredentism when the level of perceived threat by the local population and elites was high. This was largely in response to elevated Ukrainianization policies by the government in Kyiv.

Chazan and Horowitz (1991) find that support for secessionism, as opposed to irredentism, is a much more effective and flexible tool of influence as it is substantially easier for a state to use its support selectively and reverse it when concessions are given. In the Donbas however, this calculation could not be made reliably. The use of gray zone tools and tactics in support of an ethnic-based movement, which may have transformed over a short period, can result in unintended commitments. As a consequence, Russia could
incur unexpectedly high and unacceptable costs. Such uncertainty encouraged caution and thus, a moderation in the intensity of the tools and tactics used relative to cases where the cost calculations could be clearer. Russia’s restraint in the Donbas appeared to respond to these uncertain costs of supporting the local ethnic-based movement, even with the presence of significant system-level incentive.

When assessing the maximum intensity of coercive gray zone tools and tactics used by Russia in the Donbas, evidence indicate that it was lower than in Crimea and Georgia, but significantly higher than in Kharkiv and Odesa. This is illustrated in Figure 7.1. above. Even though Russia employed covert operations in the Donbas region following crisis onset, Russia’s troops were never deployed openly in a campaign. Rather, they were mainly supporting and supplying local proxy fighters. The sequence of Russia’s decision-making to deploy gray zone tools and tactics based on the system-level incentive and uncertain domestic-level opportunity in the Donbas is visualized in Figure 7.4 below.

As demonstrated in Figure 7.3 below, the Donbas case may not be placed neatly into any of the compartments displaying the intensity of coercion, as a function of the system-level role-power gap and type of ethnic-based movement. Thus, it does not correspond directly to any of the following hypotheses:

- **Hypothesis (A):** *If role exceeds power by a large margin, and the local movement is secessionist, Russia will utilize high intensity of coercion.* This hypothesis is represented by box 1 in Figure 7.3 below.

- **Hypothesis (B):** *If role exceeds power by a large margin, and the local movement is irredentist, Russia will utilize high-medium intensity of coercion.* This hypothesis is represented by box 2 in Figure 7.3 below.
• **Hypothesis (C): If role exceeds power by a small margin, and the local movement is irredentist, Russia will not utilize coercion.** This hypothesis is represented by box 3 in Figure 7.3 below.

• **Hypothesis (D): If role exceeds power by a small margin, and the local movement is secessionist, Russia will utilize low intensity of coercion.** This hypothesis is represented by box 4 in Figure 7.3 below.

Even though the case of the Donbas can not be placed neatly into any of the above hypotheses, the case possesses unique merit for assessing the IOI Model’s validity. The pre-crisis onset gap between Russia’s role and power in the Donbas is greater than in Odesa and Kharkiv but smaller than in Crimea and Georgia across all three examined consequential events. Moreover, the type of ethnic-based movement, which at various times possessed either secessionist or irredentist characteristics, established intervention costs that were higher than in Kharkiv and Abkhazia, but lower than in Odesa and Crimea. However, the intensity of coercion used by Russia in the Donbas indicates that system-level *incentive* and domestic-level *opportunity* had different impacts on Moscow’s decision-making.

Even though in Figure 7.3 the case of the Donbas is situated in the middle of the matrix, system-level *incentive* appears to have had a greater impact on Russia’s choice to use medium-high intensity of coercion. The indicator of this is Moscow’s choice to use gray zone tools and tactics intensity which is lower than in Abkhazia and Crimea but greater than in Kharkiv and Odesa. If domestic-level considerations were of more significance than the role-power gap, we would expect an intensity of coercion which was greater than in Crimea and Odesa but lower than in Abkhazia and Kharkiv.
Table 7.4. Quantitative Assessment of the System-level Incentive for Intervention in the Donbas; Role-Power Gap (IV1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Specificity</td>
<td>Role focus; quantity of narratives.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Scope</td>
<td>Geographic focus.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Clarity</td>
<td>Role depth through specific challenge areas.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Acceptance</td>
<td>Role-affirming social mobilization.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of Formality</td>
<td>Cross-border commitments.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Gap Between Relative Power and Role Scores | 14 - 6 = 8  
13 – 5 = 8  
12 – 4 = 8                     | Average Role-Power Gap | 8 Points                                      |

Note: The scores in this table are based on the Coding Table in Appendix A; all scores for role specificity, scope, clarity, acceptance, and formality are of 5; Blue: role components; Red: power components.

Figure 7.2. Russia’s Role-Power Gap (IV1) in the Donbas Across Three Consequential Events (or Short Periods)
**Figure 7.3.** The Relative Position of the Donbas Case in the IOI Model

![IV: Role and Power Gap (Incentive)](image)

**Figure 7.4.** Sequence of Russia’s Decision-Making in Application of Coercion in the Donbas Following Crisis Onset

- **1** Crisis Onset 21 February, 2014
  Reveals the gap between perceived role and power. Threatens the reduction of Russia’s role in the Donbas due to competition with rival actors.

- **2** Russia’s Perceived role overextends power in Donbas

- **3** Necessary Condition (IV) #1 Moderate Strategic-level Incentive for Coercion in the Donbas
  Moderate gap between perceived role and relative power.

- **4** Necessary Condition (IV) #2 Uncertain Domestic-level Opportunity for Coercion in the Donbas
  Uncertain cost due to unpredictable type of local movement.

- **5** Conditions were met for moderate-intensity coercion. Russia employed coercive measures including covert security operations, support for non-state militias, cyber operations, and diaspora influence.
7.10 Conclusion and Policy Implications

Following the Annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2015, it was predicted that Moscow would use similar gray zone tools and tactics in the Donbas and elsewhere in Ukraine. However, Moscow’s intensity of coercive gray zone tools and tactics varied substantially following the crisis onset in February 2014. As shown in the foregoing chapter, Russia’s use of coercive gray zone tools and tactics was a function of a particular combination of system-level incentive and domestic-level opportunity structures formed for over a decade prior to the crisis. However, the unexpected finding in this chapter is that the role-power gap appears to have had a greater impact on Russia’s foreign policy choices in the Donbas relative to domestic-level considerations. This is supported by the evidence that Russia’s selected gray zone tools and tactics intensity was lower than in Abkhazia and Crimea, but lower than in Odesa and Kharkiv. Looking ahead, there are several policy conclusions that can be drawn from the analysis in this chapter to inform both civilian policymakers and security practitioners.

First, an accurate estimation of the relative role and power structures across different regions enables greater insight into the value Russia placed on various regions when a crisis erupts. Specifically, such analysis can provide information on the maximum efforts Russia would be willing to undertake, and how much cost it would be willing to absorb, to save its perceived role within a given territory.

Second, the uncertain domestic-level opportunity for the application of gray zone tools and tactics can act as a moderating factor in gray zone conflict engagements. In the Donbas, it was difficult for Russia to determine whether the local ethnic-based movement is secessionist or irredentist in nature and thus, estimate the potential costs of its support.
Even though moderate system-level incentive encouraged Russia to apply tools and tactics following crisis onset, this uncertainty facilitated risk-aversive behavior by Moscow. Aside from revealing how strategic calculations were made by Russia in gray zone conflict, this chapter also carries an important lesson for conflict management practitioners.

Even though foreign policy decision-making in gray zone conflict appears to be guided by both the system-level incentive and domestic-level opportunity components, it would be more effective to target the opportunity for the purpose of conflict management. Russia’s perceived protector role in the Donbas is based on a deep-rooted conviction and affinity. As highlighted in the foregoing discussion, after a century of rule over the territory, the Donbas region, and its people became a part of Russia’s own national identity. The risk of competing actors and narratives, for example binding the region exclusively to Ukraine or NATO, inevitably triggered a defensive response from Moscow. However, prospects of effective conflict management in the Donbas are not bleak. As in other cases examined in Ukraine, ethnic-based mobilization in the region before and after crisis onset was substantially a response to policies from Kyiv, which marginalized the local Russian minority and their cultural memory. Russia became involved in Eastern Ukraine using the on-the-ground opportunity presented to it through Active Measures prior to crisis onset, and coercion after February 23, 2014. The implication for the Donbas, therefore, is that more robust minority rights, as well as social and political inclusion mechanisms, must be developed if future interventions by powerful outside actors using gray zone tools and tactics are to be mitigated.
As noted, in Chapter 1, these views were held by some of the most influential politicians and academicians. For example, Canada’s Foreign Minister John Baird compared Russia’s actions in Crimea to those of Nazi Germany in 1938; the implication of this analogy is that Moscow would invade the rest of Ukraine as Germany did Czechoslovakia. On another occasion, focusing on the Russian diaspora factor, historian Max Boot looked at Moscow’s actions in Ukraine as analogous to the 1941 German occupation of the Baltic region, where many considered the Nazis as liberators. See “John Baird Compares Russia’s Actions in Ukraine to Nazi Invasion of Czechoslovakia.” The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). Toronto: CQ-Roll Call, Inc, 2014 and Max Boot, “Under Russia’s Shadow.” The Weekly Standard (New York, N.Y.) 21, no. 40 (2016).


Suslov, 204.

Ibid.

Suslov, 207-217 and Stebelsky, 28-50.

Stebelsky, 30.

Ibid.


The mandate of the commission was to “summarize and analyse information about falsifications of historical facts and events that are intended to belittle the international prestige of the Russian Federation.” Its main objective was to preserve the sacred memory of Soviet victory in the Second World War — the Great Patriotic War, as the Soviet involvement in the War. See Pål Kolstø, "Dmitrii Medvedev's Commission Against the Falsification of History: Why Was It Created and What Did It Achieve? A Reassessment." *The Slavonic and East European Review* 97, no. 4 (2019): 738-760.

The Party of Regions formed a ‘National Unity’ alliance along with the Socialist Party and the Communist Party in August 2006. These parties campaigned on Soviet-era nostalgia. It believed this alliance will also help the Party of Regions break political deadlocks and the short-lived governments which plagued Ukrainian politics since the Orange Revolution until 2010. However, considering that the major electoral base of the Party of Regions is in Eastern Ukraine, the values of these allied parties also had to be symbiotic with Eastern Ukrainian values. See Nathaniel Copsey, “The Ukrainian Parliamentary Elections of 2007.” *The journal of communist studies and transition politics* 24, no. 2 (2008): 297–309.


See Moser, 163.


Moser, 146.
Ibid.
Ibid., 146-147.
The law recognized the use of minority languages in schools, courts, and public institutions within regions where the minority compromises 10 percent or more of the population. This was an important step that appealed not only to the Russian minority but also the Hungarian (and other) regionally concentrated minority(s).
See Carment et al., 135.

Secessionism may be defined through either its *stricto sensu* or ‘incremental’ definition. The ‘strict’ definition involves a formal declaration of independence by a group while the latter includes political activity toward full independence or autonomy within a larger state, without a formal declaration. See Alexis Heraclides, *The Self-Determination of Minorities in International Politics*. pp. 1-2. Routledge, 2012.


Ivan Katchanovski, East or West? Regional Political Divisions in Ukraine since the “Orange Revolution” and the “Euromaidan”. 2014. MS, School of Political Studies University of Ottawa, Ottawa, ON.

Ibid.


Ibid.

See Kudelia, 15.


Ibid.


Ibid.

In a Briefing Paper for the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), Sutyagin (2015) claims that during the February 2015, Russian troops were spotted fighting alongside, or in support of, separatists. For example, “8th Guards and 18th Guards Motor-Rifle brigades, 25th Spetsnaz Regiment, and elements of the 232nd MRL brigade – was involved in combat near Debaltseve.” “The 20th Guards Motor-Rifle Brigade’s tactical group had to be reformed into a combined formation with 18th Guards Motor-Rifle Brigade elements after 13 February; the 20th Guards elements were a substitute for the elements of the 8th Guards Motor-Rifle Brigade due to the latter’s substantial losses.” See Igor Sutyagin, "Russian Forces in Ukraine." RUSI Briefing paper 9 (2015).


Ibid.

Ibid.

Mulford, 89–107.


As noted by Franke (2015), information warfare is about achieving goals, e.g. annexing another country, by replacing military force and bloodshed with cleverly crafted and credibly supported messages to win over the minds. See Ulrik Franke (2015), “War by Non-Military Means: Understanding Russian Information Warfare.” Avdelningen för Försvarsanalys. Stockholm: Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut.

Ibid.


Carment et al., 15.


Chapter 8 Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

One of the greatest challenges in the analysis of Russia’s foreign policy has been the isolation of causal explanations from various levels of analysis. As discussed in Chapter 1, explanations for Russia’s engagement in gray zone conflict across its ‘near abroad’ have generally focused on domestic-level considerations, such as protection of ‘compatriots,’ or balance of power shift in favour of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) at the system level. Considering that ‘compatriots’ and the threat from NATO are distributed somewhat equally around Russia, these relatively parsimonious arguments have failed to account for the substantial variation in Moscow’s gray zone tools and tactics across different regions. The purpose of this thesis has been to create a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of Russia’s foreign policy behaviour in gray zone conflict through the synthesis of the necessary system- and domestic-level explanatory variables. Moreover, this study responds to increasing demand by the academic and policy communities for a more comprehensive understanding of foreign policy decision-making of great powers like Russia. To this end, this study has focused on the question of why does Russia use various intensities of coercive tools and tactics across its near abroad?

The purpose of the following chapter is to compare the findings across the case studies examined in this research, provide implications for theory and policy, as well as establish avenues for future research. The Incentive-Opportunity Intervention (IOI) Model, which combines domestic-level opportunity and system-level incentive considerations, enables an accuracy of understanding of Russia’s choices in gray zone conflicts, which is unattainable by the more parsimonious causal explanations discussed above.
This research shows that Moscow’s choice to use particular gray zone tools and tactics was a function of the system- and domestic-level explanatory variables. First, in all the case studies, Moscow anticipated an unacceptable risk of protector role decline as a result of crisis onset, which introduced adversarial actors and their competing role narratives. Second, local ethnic-based movements provided an opportunity for the application of gray zone tools and tactics, but also carried different costs of support based on the anticipated commitment length, depth, and international reputation. Therein, gray zone tools and tactics enabled Russia to forego the costs of conventional military operations.

The IOI Model shows that an anticipated large role decline, following crisis onset, incentivizes the use of high-intensity gray zone tools tactics such as targeted or covert security operations and employment of armed groups to preserve this role. High-intensity tools and tactics may carry high costs, for example by increasing the likelihood of exposure, but they are also more likely to deliver the desired outcome. In other words, the anticipated payoff of role preservation justifies the potentially large costs of high-intensity coercive tools and tactics. On the other hand, the anticipation of small role decline provides a low incentive for the use of high-intensity tools and tactics, thus encouraging moderation in their intensity.

At the domestic level, the presence of an irredentist movement, which carried a higher cost of support relative to secessionism, acted as a moderating factor on Russia’s intensity of coercion across the examined cases. Irredentist movements, as in the cases of Crimea, Odesa, and more sporadically in the Donbas, were likely to commit Russia to a level of material support that is higher than for secessionist movements. Moreover, exposure of Moscow’s support for the irredentist movements by the international community inherently
would have made Moscow culpable, as the main goal of the movements was to join Russia. These potential costs compelled Russia to use low-intensity gray zone tools and tactics, such as media campaigns and diaspora mobilization through organizations, which were more difficult to expose or counter. On the other hand, by supporting secessionist movements, where the goal of the local groups was to create more autonomy from Kyiv, such as in Abkhazia and Kharkiv, Moscow was able to engage in gray zone activities but also maintain political distance from local events, and thus plausible deniability. The secessionist movements allowed the use of higher intensity gray zone tools and tactics as the mobilized groups did not declare a desire to join Moscow. Thus, any exposure of external support for them could be met with denial by the Kremlin and a greater likelihood of avoidance of international political costs.

In turn, this comprehensive understanding of Moscow’s foreign policy choice in gray zone conflict has implications for the field of conflict analysis as well as conflict management policy and practice. These are assessed in the subsequent section. Even though the multi-level analysis conducted in this research is necessary to establish a more complete and accurate understanding of Russian foreign policy decisions in gray zone conflict, there are several methodological questions that persist.

This research raises several important considerations of small- and large-N analysis and implications for internal and external validity of the IOI Model. In other words, this study touches on the decades-long and ongoing debate regarding the ability to make broad causal claims based on a small number of cases examined in depth. On one hand, Bueno De Mesquita (1985) endorses the superiority of large-N analysis in supporting broad causal inferences. He claims it is “not possible to account for previously unexplained and new
facts using only one case study, and very difficult using only a small number of cases.” On the other hand, Krasner (1985) challenges this idea stating that single case studies can expand empirical content and causal explanations by suggesting novel facts.\textsuperscript{5} Krasner also notes that unlike large-N comparisons of cases, which often rely on a single observation per case, small-N analyses enable in-depth examinations of complex processes across time, as they focus on several data points per case.\textsuperscript{6} This argument is relevant to this research, which examines Russia’s decision-making following crisis onset as a function of the system- and domestic-level conditions which formed over decades prior.

A focus on a small number of cases, however, may also occur out of necessity. As noted by Collier (1993), even though the practice of focusing on a few cases has achieved great legitimacy in qualitative research, this decision to analyze only a few cases has often been attributed to relatively few instances of the phenomenon being studied. For example, even though the IOI Model identifies four distinct categories of gray zone coercion intensity, there are few instances of such behavior based on the relevant dyads, temporal, and crisis-induced behavior case selection criteria discussed in Chapter 2, section 9.2.

A potential implication of this is a tradeoff between external and internal validity. The theoretical linkages examined in-depth within the IOI Model indicate that the anticipated role decline and on-the-ground opportunity directly affect the choice of gray zone tools and tactics. The cases examined in this research are \textit{representative} of the variation of possible coercive gray tools and tactics available to powerful states like Russia. The Abkhazia, Crimea, Odesa, Kharkiv, and Donbas cases explored in this research appear to support hypotheses (A), (B), (C), and (D), indicating that the theoretical linkages established by the IOI Model can withstand empirical testing. However, a small number of
test cases poses a challenge to broad generalizability or external validity. As discussed in section 8.5 below, increasing the number of testable cases and the application of the IOI Model to other great powers’ engagement in gray zone conflict is a priority for future research.

8.2 Case Study Findings

The examination of Russia’s gray zone conflict engagement across the five cases reveals several important findings. As discussed in Chapter 1, the analytical approach taken in this research is contrary to the common methods of assessing Russia’s foreign policy based on either domestic-level considerations, such as the defence of ‘compatriots,’ or system-level factors such as the regional balance of power in relations to NATO. The analytical approach taken in this research shows that Russia’s decisions to use a particular set of gray zone tools and tactics are indeed a function of both the system-level incentive and domestic-level opportunity variables.

The findings in the case chapters suggest that the four hypotheses established in Chapter 2 through the Incentive Opportunity Intervention (IOI) Model are supported. In the case of Abkhazia (Chapter 3), which supports hypothesis (A), Russia used a high intensity of coercion due to an anticipated large decline in its perceived protector role following crisis onset combined with low-cost of support for the local secessionist movement. Moreover, Russia’s kinetic and unconventional operations in Abkhazia were an indicator of the hardening of Russia’s position regarding the protection of its perceived role and ‘compatriots’ across its ‘near abroad.’ This posture continued into the conflict in Ukraine.
In the case of Crimea (Chapter 4), which supports hypothesis (B), Russia’s anticipated role decline was of a similar magnitude to Abkhazia. In fact, as noted in Table 8.1 below, the decline in perceived protector role following crisis onset was expected to be even greater than in Abkhazia. However, even with an anticipated significant decline in its perceived role following crisis onset, a high cost of support for the local irredentist movement moderated the intensity of coercion applied on the peninsula. In Crimea, the use of the ‘little green men,’ local organization for public mobilization, and targeted information campaigns, indeed lowered the potentially high cost of support for the local irredentist movement as they established plausible deniability by Russia, at least temporarily.

In the cases of Odesa (Chapter 5) and Kharkiv (Chapter 6), which support hypotheses (C) and (D) respectively, Russia anticipated a small decline in its perceived protector role following crisis onset in February 2014. As indicated in Table 8.1 below, the role-power gap is 6 points in both cases. However, the difference in the type of ethnic-based movement established the variation in Russia’s application of gray zone tools and tactics. Kharkiv’s secessionist movement enabled Moscow to provide local non-state actors material and information support to dislodge the local authority following crisis onset, thereby preventing the proliferation of adversaries’ narratives and policies onto the local political landscape. In turn, this enabled Moscow to preserve its perceived protector role in the City.

In Odesa, the irredentist movement also enabled Russia to support non-state actors, who could help preserve Moscow’s perceived protector role over the City and its population, if these groups were successful in overthrowing the local authorities. However, the local ethnic-based movement clearly indicated its desire to integrate Odesa with Russia,
which could make Moscow culpable before the international community. Moreover, it could draw Russia into a lengthy material commitment in support of the local non-state pro-Russia factions. In other words, the cost of support for the movement would outweigh the potential benefits of Russia’s role preservation in the City. However, to lower the costs of support for the local irredentist movement, to match potential benefits, Russia used gray zone tools and tactics which never passed the threshold of coercion.

The Donbas case, which does not correspond neatly to any of the four hypotheses, also presents several significant findings. First, the analysis in Chapter 7 indicates that the impact of system-level incentive on Russia’s choice of specific gray zone tools and tactics in the Donbas following the February 2014 crisis may have been greater than domestic-level opportunity considerations. Even though the role-power gap value is between the ‘large’ and ‘small’ categories, and the local ethnic-based movement possesses both secessionist and irredentist characteristics, Russia’s choices were guided by system-level considerations. The indicator of this is Russia’s choice to use gray zone tactics intensity which is lower than in Abkhazia and Crimea but greater than in Kharkiv and Odesa. If domestic-level considerations were of more significance than the role-power gap for its choice of gray zone tools and tactics, we would expect an intensity of coercion that is greater than in Crimea and Odesa but lower than in Abkhazia and Kharkiv. In turn, these case-specific observations also result in several overarching findings.

First, Russia’s decision-making to use coercive gray zone tools and tactics appears to have been reactive across all the cases examined. Prior to crisis onset, Russia was not compelled to remedy the role-power gap using any coercive gray zone tools and tactics. Rather, when threatened by political adversaries, and their external supporters such as
NATO, with competing political narratives and agendas, Russia reacted *pre-emptively*. In contrast, *preventive* foreign policy is focused on plans to counter undesirable political developments with a *long-term* strategy.\(^9\) This also supports Belo’s (2020) finding that Moscow’s foreign policy decision-making in gray zone conflict has been guided by the Endowment Effect, which specifies that individuals (or states) place a higher value on assets they already own compared to possessions they may own in the future.\(^{10}\) When the assets which are already owned are under threat, the reaction from their owner is anticipated to be swift and severe.\(^{11}\) In sum, this finding supports the validity of causal linkages within the IOI Model, which stipulates that Russia employed gray zone tools and tactics to mitigate regional role decline following crisis onset, which introduced adversaries and their competing protector narratives.

A second key finding of this research is that gray zone tools and tactics enabled Russia to pursue its interests regardless of the cost-benefit calculation set by the system- and domestic-level considerations. In the case of Odesa, where the domestic-level cost outweighed the system-level benefits of preserving its role, Moscow resorted to gray zone tools and tactics below the threshold of coercion. In other words, regardless of the costs associated with support for the ethnic-based movement, the non-state actors therein established the permissive conditions for Russia to use gray zone tools and tactics. Moreover, these domestic-level conditions were created without Russia’s participation.

In all the cases examined, domestic-level *opportunity* for the application of either coercive or non-coercive gray zone tools and tactics appears to have been a function of a deteriorated relationship between a nationalizing central government and an aggrieved ethno-linguistic minority. In Ukraine, successive post-Soviet governments introduced
various linguistic and cultural policies to form a state which was decisively independent of Moscow. To this end, Kyiv’s elected officials instituted policies to reduce the number of local minority language schools in favor of Ukrainian and block regional legislation which recognized minority language rights. The 2012 “Law On the Principles of the State Language Policy” reversed some of the Ukrainization policies, but it was far short of a comprehensive solution to establish socio-economic inclusion for all citizens.

A similar strenuous relationship formed between the Abkhaz minority and the Soviet, and post-Cold War Georgian governments. The Abkhaz national movement toward independence emerged long before the August 2008 conflict. Protests to this end occurred in 1957, 1967, 1978, and 1989, but were repressed by the various central governments at the time. Thus, it becomes apparent that the challenge of national minority rights, and the emergence of ethnic-based movements, in Ukraine and Georgia was not a function of low state capacity. Challenges of enforcement of social and economic inclusion appear to be secondary to the lack of legislative efforts to protect national ethno-linguistic minorities. These findings in turn carry implications for conflict management policymaking and practice.

The table below summarized the findings of the case chapters. It identified Russia’s decision to use a particular intensity of gray zone tools and tactics (DV) corresponding to the system-level role-power gap (IV1) and the type of local ethnic-based movement (IV2).
Table 8.1. Comparison of Cases Based on System-level Incentive, Domestic-level opportunity and Gray Zone Tools and Tactics Used by Russia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Role-Power Gap Type (IV1)</th>
<th>Type of Local Ethnic-based Movement (IV2)</th>
<th>Coercive Gray Zone Tools and Tactics Intensity (DV)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abkhazia</td>
<td>Large (10 points)</td>
<td>Secessionism</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crimea</td>
<td>Large (15 points)</td>
<td>Irredentism</td>
<td>High-Medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Odesa</td>
<td>Small (6 points)</td>
<td>Irredentism</td>
<td>None (below coercion threshold)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kharkiv</td>
<td>Small (6 points)</td>
<td>Secessionism</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donbas</td>
<td>Medium (8 points)</td>
<td>Secessionism and Irredentism</td>
<td>Medium-High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.3 Implications for Policy

To counter gray zone tools and tactics, the IOI Model highlights that it is possible to target the unconventional strategies themselves, or the enabling system-level incentive and domestic-level opportunity variables. The inherent question becomes where, among the three areas, can conflict management efforts be the most effective? This research indicates that domestic-level factors, which create permissive conditions for external actors to use gray zone tools and tactics, should be the focus for conflict management policymakers and practitioners. The examined cases of Abkhazia, Crimea, Kharkiv, Odesa, and the Donbas, suggest that system-level considerations, such as role perception of a region, would be difficult to diminish. This means countering pre-emptive actions by Russia, which are based on the previously-discussed Endowment Effect, would be difficult. The empirical evidence across all the cases shows that Russia’s protector role perception over the various locations and its ‘compatriots’ population have formed over centuries. In fact, they have become a core part of Russia’s national identity and consciousness.
On the other hand, it is possible to continue the conventional approach employed by various international actors to deter adversaries in gray zone conflict by targeting their tools and tactics of opponents. Deterrence against Russia has taken the form of military buildups, such as in the Baltic region, or the development of sophisticated cyber-space tools and technologies. However, both of these conventional approaches are problematic. First, engaging in cyber warfare and manipulation of information on media platforms to counter the tools and tactics used in gray zone conflict is expensive in terms of monetary resources and their universal effectiveness has yet to be confirmed. Second, any military-oriented deterrence actions, including through the enlargement of NATO, are susceptible to miscalculation. This may result in an unwanted escalation and a direct confrontation with devastating material and human costs. Thus, it appears to be more pragmatic to target the conditions which enable the use of gray zone tools and tactics rather than the operations themselves.

Even though it falls outside the conventional definition of deterrence, the findings in this research suggest that the protections of local minority rights may be a pragmatic way to minimize Russia’s use of various gray zone tools and tactics across its ‘near abroad.’ Even though support for various ethnic-based movements can impose different costs, gray zone tools and tactics have enabled Russia to lower them and thus, employ such movements for its own strategic purpose. The proposed focus on minority protection by national governments and the international community would target an underlying permissive condition for the use of gray zone tools and tactics, rather than provide an ad hoc remedy once a conflict ensues.
The international community can offer national governments the necessary tools and strategies for the protection of local minority rights. Moreover, the individual government can leverage human rights protection legislation across international borders. For example, countries like Canada have historic cultural and political linkages to Kyiv, mainly through the large diaspora population and its organizations.\textsuperscript{15} Moreover, Ottawa has a long-standing commitment to defending human rights internationally.\textsuperscript{16} Kordan (2018) notes that Canada has employed its diaspora’s ties to Kyiv, to encourage Ukraine’s adoption of anti-corruption and human rights legislation.\textsuperscript{17} Even though the success of such efforts remains uncertain, the Government of Canada can continue to leverage its ethnic-based ties to address minority rights challenges in Ukraine.

In the context of Ukraine and Georgia, NATO may also be used as a platform for multilateral coordination of human rights policy. To become an effective platform, NATO must work closely with, and provide support to, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s (OSCE) High Commission on National Minorities (HCNM) and the European Union (EU). Both the EU and the HCNM have a mandate to evaluate and advise on minority rights situations and were instrumental in removing minority rights roadblocks among current NATO members, such as the Baltic states, Hungary, Romania, Czechia, and Slovakia.\textsuperscript{18}

This incorporation of non-military strategies for conflict prevention, or resolution, is an opportunity for NATO to implement its Comprehensive Approach, which emerged out of the 2008 Bucharest Summit. The Approach was developed in response to a realization by Organization members that solutions to contemporary international conflicts and deterrence may not lie entirely within the military domain. Rather, challenges that were
previously considered to be of a security nature, may require solutions that are ‘civilian’ in character. However, all such multilateral formats of human rights promotion are contingent upon receptive national governments, which are committed to domestic policy adjustments in favour of socio-economic inclusion.

This study highlights that short-term considerations, such as maintenance or preservation of political power should not be achieved at the expense of long-term inter-ethnic peace. In the short run, ethnic-based social and economic exclusion may facilitate a ‘rally around the flag’ effect, which may enable the consolidation of power by individual leaders or national factions. For example, such consolidation of power by Viktor Yushchenko, centered on the promotion of Ukrainian ethno-linguistic identity, was evident around the 2004 Presidential Election and subsequent Orange Revolution. His opponent, Viktor Yanukovych, used a similar strategy to mobilize Russian speakers. In the long-run, however, such political decisions resulted in the agitation and organization of the Russian ethno-linguistic minorities in Crimea, Kharkiv, Odesa, and the Donbas either through the Russophile Party of Regions at the national level, or local political factions. In turn, their grievances established a political backdrop for Russia’s use of gray zone tools and tactics in pursuit of its own interests. Aside from these policy considerations, however, this research also carries implications for the field of conflict analysis.

8.4 Implications for Conflict Analysis Theory and International Relations Field

This study shows that synthesis across levels of analysis is necessary to comprehensively assess states’ foreign policy in contemporary gray zone conflicts. This poses a challenge to international relations formats of research supported by neorealists and rationalists. On one hand, neorealist or structural realist scholars, such as Waltz (1979
and 2010) and Powell (1991), primarily focus on state-level explanations for foreign policy behaviour, enabled by an anarchic international system.\textsuperscript{20} On the other hand, rationalists such as Krasner (1982), Rittberger and Peter Mayer (1993), and Zangl (2014) examine a more diverse set of explanatory variables, such as societal characteristics and regime types.\textsuperscript{21} Nonetheless, they also focus on a single level of analysis, from which they extract variables and causal inferences. Singer (1961) summarizes this rationalist research philosophy well in the following statement: scholars may “choose between the flowers or the garden, the rocks or the quarry, the trees or the forest, the houses or the neighborhood” and other variables of the same level of analysis to suit their hypothesis-testing procedures.\textsuperscript{22} However, using the IOI Model, this research shows that a focus on a single level of analysis is likely to result in a skewed assessment and foreshadowing of Russia’s foreign policy choices in gray zone conflict.

Gray zone conflicts are inherently multi-level and whole-of-society phenomena, in which an analysis of participants’ choices requires a corresponding multi-level research design and methodology. Aside from broader critiques regarding schools of thought and research paradigms in international relations, however, the IOI Model also contributes a nuanced approach to understanding variation in foreign policy choice as a function of system-level considerations.

Singer (1961) inaccurately concludes that relative to the nation-state level, research reliant on macro-level variables is less effective at demonstrating causal inference.\textsuperscript{23} This study reveals that system-level variables, when rigorously defined, unpacked into their individual components, and operationalized into measurable metrics, can be effective at explaining participant’s choices in complex conflict environments. Therein, this study
highlights that an integration of the power cycle theory, role theory, and crisis literature is an effective way to assess the magnitude of the impact of system-level considerations on foreign policy choice in gray zone conflicts.

Finally, role theory is shown to be effective at operationalizing the power cycle theory. The coding of the perceived role and power metrics enables the calculation of the difference between role perception, or expectations, and de-facto capabilities which are exposed as a consequence of crisis onset. In turn, as a result of this integration of bodies of literature, Russia’s foreign policy in gray zone conflict can be better understood. Even though the IOI Model provides contributions to both conflict management policy and theory, subsequent research must address the challenges of external validity noted in the foregoing discussion.

8.5 Future Research Avenues

Looking ahead, the fundamentals of the IOI Model, the system- and domestic-level incentive and opportunity components, may be applied to assess the choice of other great powers to use specific gray zone tools and tactics. For example, in terms of system-level incentive, it is feasible to examine China’s gray zone tools and tactics applied in relation to Taiwan. Beijing does not identify Taiwan as a separate state, indicating that China has a protector role perception regarding the island. In another case, China made claims to vast territories in the South China Sea, where it engaged in various gray zone activities to achieve its desired strategic ends. However, its de-facto power to fully deliver on these territorial claims in both cases has been limited. The impact of such a system-level role-power gap on the variation in China’s choice of gray zone tools and tactics in Taiwan and the South China Sea may be compared in future research. However, as highlighted in the IOI Model, such system-level analysis must be conducted in tandem with an assessment of
domestic-level opportunity to comprehensively understand the choices to use specific gray zone tools and tactics.

As noted in Chapter 2, even though the domestic-level considerations in Russia’s case is the type of ethnic-based movement, this is part of a broader evolution in international conflicts. Non-state actors have become increasingly impactful in international conflicts, in terms of kinetic fighting, implementation of complex unconventional tools and tactics, and in some cases, triggering international crises. Moreover, non-state groups have been key to the resolution of complex regional conflicts. For example, the representatives of the separatist Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics became were equal partners in the signing of the Minsk Agreements of February 2015. In turn, this proposed application of the IOI Model to China’s use of unconventional operations along its Southern border may remedy the aforementioned challenges to the Model’s generalizability.
References

1 This has been common in the academic and policy communities. Max Boot looked at Moscow’s actions in Ukraine as analogous to the 1941 German occupation of the Baltic region, where many considered the Nazis as liberators. Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada John Baird compared Moscow’s actions to Germany’s Invasion of the Sudetenland in 1938. For domestic-level arguments, see Max Boot, “Under Russia’s Shadow.” The Weekly Standard (New York, N.Y.) 21, no. 40 (2016): 24 and “John Baird Compares Russia’s Actions in Ukraine to Nazi Invasion of Czechoslovakia.” The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). Toronto: CQ-Roll Call, Inc, 2014. For a summary of the system-level explanations for Russia’s gray zone conflict engagement, see balance of power shift fear by Russia in relation to NATO argument in Kimberly Marten. Reducing Tensions Between Russia and NATO. Vol. 79. Council on Foreign Relations, 2017: 11-12.

2 Russian compatriots have been defined by Russian Federal Law of May 24, 1999 No. 99-FZ, “On the state policy of the Russian Federation in relation to compatriots abroad.” Article 1. According to the law “compatriots include persons and their descendants, who live outside the territory of the Russian Federation and relevant as a rule to the peoples historically living on its territory, as well as the ones made their free choice in favor of spiritual, cultural and legal connection with the Russian people whose relatives in a direct upline previously resided in the territory of the Russian Federation. These include: 1) persons of the nationality of the Soviet Union living in the states that were part of it gained the citizenship of these states or became stateless persons and 2) natives (immigrants) from the Russian state, the Russian republic, the RSFSR, the USSR and the Russian Federation had the appropriate nationality and became citizens of a foreign state or stateless persons

See President of Russia website, http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/13875. On the other hand, equal distribution of threat from NATO across Russia’s ‘near abroad’ is related to former Soviet Republics which are not NATO members. In terms of balance of power in relation to the Organization, Moscow has a similar incentive to prevent the accession of Ukraine and Georgia. This is based on the perceived encirclement of Russia by NATO, which has been articulated by Kremlin officials since the late 1990s. See Charles A. Kupchan, "NATO's Final Frontier: Why Russia Should Join the Atlantic Alliance." Foreign Affairs 89, no. 3 (2010): 12.

3 As discussed in Chapter 2, irredentism generally involves a greater duration and depth of commitment by external interveners relative to support for secessionist movements. This means support for secessionist generally carries lower material costs. Moreover, plausible deniability is more difficult to achieve in irredentism if external support is exposed as the movement declares its desire to join the third-party state. Thus international reputation costs are also anticipated to be higher in support for irredentism. See Chazan and Horowitz, 1990 and Heraclides, 1989.


Ibid., 141.
7 See Bruce Bueno De Mesquita, 123-124. Also see disclaimer regarding subjectivity of some methodological components and case study criteria, discussed in Chapter 1 footnotes.
8 Chapter 2 outlines several causal linkages between system-level incentive (IV1), domestic-level opportunity (IV2) and the choice to use gray zone tools and tactics of particular intensities (DV). These relationships are operationalized through four hypotheses. Hypothesis (A): if role exceeds power by a large margin, and the local movement is secessionist, Russia will utilize high intensity of coercion. Hypothesis (B): if role exceeds power by a large margin, and the local movement is irredentist, Russia will utilize high-medium intensity of coercion. Hypothesis (C): if role exceeds power by a small margin, and the local movement is irredentist, Russia will not utilize coercion. Hypothesis (D): if role exceeds power by a small margin, and the local movement is secessionist, Russia will utilize low intensity of coercion.
9 Pre-emption and prevention has commonly been examined in the context of wars. The difference between the concepts have generally been distinguished by the degree of imminence, or temporal distance, of the threat, which would warrant military actions to counter the threat. Pre-emptive actions are responsive to threats which are perceived to be imminent. On the other hand, preventive actions are those which target threats which are temporally distant. See Neta C. Crawford “The Slippery Slope to Preventive War.” Ethics & international affairs 17, no. 1 (2003): 30–36; James J. Wirtz and James A. Russell. "US Policy on Preventive War and Preemption." The Nonproliferation Review 10, no. 1 (2003): 113-123; and Roger Coate, "The UN and the Legal Status of Preemptive and Preventive War." In Striking First, pp. 167-174. Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2004.
11 Ibid., 75.
12 See Carment and Belo, 2018.
17 Kordan, 6-7 and 15.
https://www.cgai.ca/protecting_minority_rights_to_undermine_russias_compatriots_strategy.


23 Ibid., 89.


### Appendix A: Coding Table of Perceived Role and Power Components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role and Power Components</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>P</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Degree of Role Specificity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No role focus</td>
<td>No narrative articulated</td>
<td>No geographic focus</td>
<td>Low role focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple narratives; no leading narrative</td>
<td>Low geographic focus</td>
<td>Applicable to one state</td>
<td>Moderate role focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two narratives; two leading narratives</td>
<td>Moderate geographic focus</td>
<td>Applicable to defined sub-state jurisdiction(s) as a consequence of a broader policy</td>
<td>Moderate-high role focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two narratives; one leading</td>
<td>High geographic focus</td>
<td>Applicable to a single sub-state jurisdiction</td>
<td>High role focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single dominant narrative</td>
<td>Very high geographic focus</td>
<td>Applicable to a specific location and/or city within a specific sub-state jurisdiction</td>
<td>Very high role focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Degree of Role Scope</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No role detail</td>
<td>No challenge areas associated with role</td>
<td>Low role detail</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on (1) specific challenge areas associated with role</td>
<td>Moderate role detail</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on (2) specific challenge areas associated with role</td>
<td>Moderate-high role detail</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on (3) specific challenge areas associated with role</td>
<td>High role detail</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on (4) specific challenge areas associated with role</td>
<td>Very high role detail</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Degree of Role Clarity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No role- affirming social mobilization</td>
<td>No Evidence of local acceptance</td>
<td>Low role-affirming social mobilization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority of local population acceptance of role</td>
<td>Low attendance at role-affirming events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low alignment between local priorities and potential applicant of coercion</td>
<td>Moderate role-affirming social mobilization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority of local population acceptance of role</td>
<td>High attendance at role-affirming events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Low alignment between local priorities and potential applicant of coercion</td>
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<tr>
<td>High alignment between local priorities and potential applicant of coercion</td>
<td>High commitment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Some role legislative effort in local government</td>
<td>Very high commitment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Degree of Local Acceptance</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>No commitment</td>
<td>Local-level cross-border ties among local organizations</td>
<td>Moderate commitment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local inter-governmental and /or political organization(s) ties; MOUs and other verbal agreements</td>
<td>Moderate-high commitment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Binding, short term, treaty. Any withdraw regime</td>
<td>High commitment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Binding, long term treaty, unilateral withdraw allowed</td>
<td>Very high commitment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Degree of Role Formality</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>No commitment</td>
<td>No cross-border relations involving region</td>
<td>Low commitment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local-level cross-border ties among local organizations</td>
<td>Moderate commitment</td>
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<td>Local inter-governmental and /or political organization(s) ties; MOUs and other verbal agreements</td>
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*R = Role  
P = Power*
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