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Great Power Identity And Status-Seeking: A Framework For Understanding Russian Interventions (2008-2022)

This study locates recognitive dynamics and status considerations as the overarching impetus in Russian decision-making in the interventions in Georgia (2008), Syria (2015), and Ukraine (2014, 2022). Problematizing status-seeking via military means in Russian foreign policy, the article aims to propose a framework to detail the necessary focal points of inquiry on the respective cases. The proposed framework indicates that understanding the Russian interventions in question necessitates focusing on the interplay between Russia's great power identity and the Russian perception of repeated misrecognition of this identity by its interlocutor, the US.

Keywords: Russian Interventionism, Great Power Identity, Status-Seeking, Military Intervention.

Büyük Güç Kimliği Ve Statü-Arama: Rusya'nın Müdahalelerini Anlamak İçin Bir Çerçeve (2008-2022)

Bu çalışma, Rusya'nın Gürcistan'a (2008), Suriye'ye (2015) ve Ukrayna'ya (2014, 2022) düzenlediği müdahalelerindeki karar alma süreçlerinin baskın iştiağı olarak tanınma dinamikleri ve statü hesaplamalarını tayin etmektedir. Rus dış politikasında askeri araçlarla statü arayışını sorunsallaştıran bu makale, bahsekonu vakalara ilişkin araştırmaların odaklanması gereken noktaları detaylandıran bir çerçeve ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Önerilen çerçeve, Rusya'nın büyük güç kimliği ile bu kimliğin muhatabı ABD tarafından defalarca reddedildiğine dair Rus algısının arasındaki etkileşime odaklanmanın söz konusu Rus müdahalelerini anlamının ön şartı olduğuna işaret etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rus Müdahaleciliği, Büyük Güç Kimliği, Statü Arama, Askeri Müdahale.

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"Intervention is in many ways an essential symbolic act, meant for a larger audience than the people of the country of intervention." (Brands, 1987)

1. Introduction

The use of military force has (re)emerged as a common practice in Russian foreign policy throughout the last three decades. Russia was military involved in the conflicts in Georgia (1991-93, 2008), Transnistria (1992), Tajikistan (1992-1997), Chechnya (1994-1996, 1999-2009), intervened in the Syrian civil war via invitation (2015), invaded Crimea in 2014 and initiated a full-scale invasion attempt of Ukraine in 2022, and has been present in the conflict in the Central African Republic, and Libya since 2018 via Wagner Group. The level of intervention, in other words, the number of troops and sources allocated, as well as the time span in these cases, undoubtedly differ. However, they all fit into Vertzberger's (1994) definition of intervention:

"coercive, state-organized and controlled, convention-breaking, goal-oriented activities in another sovereign state that are directed at its political authority structure and are intended to affect either the political structure (preservation or change), the domestic political process in that state, or certain of its foreign policies by usurping its autonomous decisionmaking authority through the use of extensive military force."

Of these interventions, earlier ones consisting of civil wars and independence movements immediately following the collapse of the USSR, such as Georgia (1991-93), Transnistria, Tajikistan, and Chechnya, may be grouped into somewhat more anticipated actions within Russian foreign policy. They might even be considered an extension of Soviet interventionism (e.g., Bennett, 1999). Most of the remaining cases, namely, Georgia (2008), Syria, and Ukraine, were assertive foreign policy moves targeting many international stakeholders and reaching partly beyond post-Soviet space, and they came as a surprise to the international audience. Thus, they were considered to point to an orientation shift in Russian foreign policy.

However, some of the characteristics of these cases hinder considering them a coherent set. Syrian intervention, for example, categorically departs from the other two as it is the single Russian official military intervention that takes place outside post-Soviet space. Incidentally, since the Russian involvement in the conflict that continues in the Central African Republic is through private military companies (e.g., Wagner Group) and so-called military advisors rather than Russian official armed forces at the time of writing, it cannot be taken into consideration in the same category as the Syria intervention nor other ones. Similarly, Russian presence in Libya mainly consists of Wagner (Harchaoui, 2021), and even in cases of direct military operations, Russia avoids using official markers on fighter jets (Lister et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the Ukrainian case also has its own particularity. Unlike the intervention via invitation in Syria or unilateral intervention to an ongoing conflict in other cases, the Russian annexation of Crimea and the unsuccessful (at the time of writing) full-scale invasion attempt that failed to capture Kyiv and laid back on the Donbas front in 2022 are unprecedented actions on behalf of Russian Federation. Indeed, one can argue that the 2008 intervention in Georgia

¹ This article is based on the author's PhD dissertation.

tactically and strategically resembles the full-scale invasion attempt in 2022 (if not the invasion of Crimea in 2014) in that Russian forces advanced towards the capital, Tbilisi, same as in Ukraine under the façade of punitive measures. Russian military forces were utilized in both cases to reprimand certain policy choices of the respective countries. Despite such similarities, the Ukrainian case still diverges from the intervention in Georgia, considering the duration of the intervention (or conflict), the proportion of the troops and weapons allocated, and finally, more ambiguous strategic objectives. While the intervention in Georgia appeared with limited military options and clearly designated goals and lasted only 12 days, Russian military presence and scale of activity in Ukraine are beyond comparison to this case and have been continuing for months.

Nevertheless, despite these unique characteristics, and in addition to their common unexpected occurrence, Russian aggression in Georgia (2008) and Ukraine and intervention in Syria constitute more peculiar cases than the earlier Russian interventions as the Russian activity in these cases is (1) epitome of confrontation with the West, (2) has broader international involvement, and (3) engendered greater and more severe international reaction. These peculiarities potentially mark a breaking point in Russian foreign policy of the last two decades that has not only looked for cooperation possibilities with the West but also abstained from military involvements in other sovereign countries and, thus, begs for explanation. One can propose that major powers such as Russia reserve *droit de regard*, an entitlement of major powers to have the right to interfere in their spheres of influence (Paul et al., 2014), and argue that the Georgia and Ukraine interventions must be regarded within this framework. However, the highly assertive manner in which Russia has sought its interests in these countries, namely, creating new political entities in these target countries, the annexation of Crimea, and the full-scale invasion attempt of Ukraine, is unprecedented since the end of the Cold War.

To further draw parallels between the three cases and amplify the need for understanding the shift in Russian foreign policy, the intervention via invitation to the Syrian conflict as the single case of Russian intervention outside post-Soviet space concretizes the breaking point in Russian foreign policy, which had prescribed standing clear of conflicts in the Middle East, and multilateral conflict resolution. One may indeed argue that the invitation motive in the Syrian case does not refute the multilateralism Russia adopted in conflict resolution. Still, the Russian military presence and active diplomatic efforts prior to the intervention and the close contact between Assad and Putin may pave the way for an assumption that the invitation was not more than a technicality that the parties found as a solution to moderate the international reaction. Even if this was not the case, we could still not overlook the fact that Syrian intervention was an exceptional practice regarding overall Russian foreign policy in the Middle East, which prescribed a cautious and neutral attitude in the region (Dannreuther, 2019). Furthermore, one might also argue that the invitation motive prevents the Syrian case from falling into the intervention definition provided above. Although the invitation in the Syrian case refutes the coercive characteristic of intervention, it should be noted that the Russian military involvement corresponds to Vertzberger's most crucial items. After all, Russian military involvement in the Syrian civil war was geared towards coercively disqualifying the Syrian opposition and preserving the status quo and impeded Syrian autonomous decision-making and sovereignty. From this aspect, Russia indeed conducted an *intervention* in Syria rather than anything else.

Finally, no matter- as the current developments have shown- predicting and calculating the risks and repercussions involved in such assertive foreign policy moves are difficult, Russian willingness to face these challenges emerging after the respective interventions implicates another puzzling situation to uncover. Therefore, the shift in Russian foreign policy demonstrated via the three interventions can be summarized as the deliberate and audaciously conducted increase in the level of assertiveness in the post-Soviet space, particularly Georgia and Ukraine, and the unilateral widening in the scope of Russian military involvement, particularly in Syria. Thus, the question remains: How should one understand the Russian administration's conviction that these assertive policies that go even as far as aggression in these cases were necessary and that Russia was prepared for every repercussion?

This article reviews the responses given to this question and provides a framework that diverges from others that focus on material interests and modifies already existing ones, taking ideational factors into consideration. In doing so, it delves into the literature addressing the Russian motivation for Georgia, Syria, and Ukraine interventions and underlines that Russian great power identity and status-seeking bind the cases together, implying a firmer explanatory stance. Pointing out that status-seeking militarily rather than peacefully also requires being accounted for, the article comes up with a framework to understand Russian interventionism based on two main propositions: (1) Russian decision-makers perceive military intervention as a condition to fulfill Russia's great power status, and (2) Russian decision-makers appeal to intervention to demonstrate their risk-proneness and resoluteness for the sake of realizing Russia's great power identity.

2. Varying Responses for Russian Interventions

Under the efforts to understand the motives behind the decisions of Russian interventions in Georgia, Syria, and Ukraine, different dimensions of current Russian foreign policy formulation have been addressed by a large body of work. Admitting that each case represents unique and diverging developments, most explanations for Russian interference in Georgia, Syria, and Ukraine assemble and rely on the necessities and incentives stemming from geopolitics and great power rivalry, national security calculations, and combined with or independent of such material interests, pursuit of identity-driven interests, namely, identity actualization.

2.1. Syria

To elaborate, inquiring on Russian motives for Syrian intervention, a group of researchers focus on the potential security risks of the Syrian conflict for Russia, such as Caucasian jihadists who would return to Russia after toppling Assad (Allison, 2013; Charap et al., 2019; Freire & Heller, 2018), while some others consider geo-economic interests Russia wishes to exploit from the region (Abdi, 2021; Afridi & Jibrán, 2018) and in similar vein, balancing the US within the game of geopolitical rivalry (Simura, 2015; Tellal, 2015). Kozhanov (2017), on the other hand, provides a more multilayered explanation and contends that, in addition to the security risks of the Syrian conflict for Russia mentioned earlier, financial compensation for the Western sanctions imposed after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 via securing economic gains from the resolution of the conflict as well as protecting the interests of Russian oil companies motivated Russia's intervention in Syria. Kozhanov (2017) also underlines a symbolic impetus for the intervention and proposes that Russia sought to make the West understand its willingness to be included in the resolution of international conflicts as opposed to the Libyan case and isolation it faced after the Crimean annexation. Dannreuther (2019) joins Kozhanov for a combination of security concerns and ideational factors in Russian intervention in Syria. Finally, in addition to the researchers who claim that Russian involvement in the region is part of a grand strategy for being a major power, others proposed that Russian intervention was an act of opportunism and that Russia developed interest in the region due to external factors such as Western intervention in Libya (Ambrosetti et al., 2020). Therefore, the literature portrays the intervention in Syria as guided by material interests combined with symbolic motives.

2.2. Georgia and Ukraine

Similarly, some studies explain Russian assertiveness in the post-Soviet space with great power competition. The *realpolitik* dimension is highlighted in the Georgian intervention (Rondeli, 2010). The geopolitical rivalry argument framing Ukraine as a site of contention between the US and Russia is also present (Lakomy, 2021; Trenin & Novak, 2015). Still, there are

multilayered explanations in these cases as well. Karagiannis (2014), for example, proposes that Russia intervened in Georgia and Ukraine as a result of the confrontation with NATO as well as to increase its influence and save face from the Western involvement in post-Soviet space. Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist (2009) also highlight the emotional dimension and propose that Russia's decision for Georgia was based on honor and symbolic gains from the intervention. There are also studies that combine geopolitical and ideational factors such as identity or ideology. Eriksen (2021), for example, asserts that *realpolitik* wedded with Eurasianist ideology paved the way for the annexation of Crimea.

Similarly, Biersack and O'Lear (2014) argue that Russia's reasoning for annexing Crimea was as much influenced by geopolitical necessities as identity. Particularly, control of the Black Sea Fleet and potential energy supplies from the new maritime territory contributed to Russia's historical attachment to Crimea. Another identity-based explanation is provided by Aridici (2019), who argues that Russian civilizational nationalism that attributes to Russia a superior identity vis-à-vis other culturally akin nations paved the way for intervention in Ukraine as Ukrainians were not seen as equals but 'little brothers.' On the other hand, Allison (2014) argues that intervention in Ukraine took place due to a convergence of geopolitical competition, ideational factors, and the need for domestic political consolidation.

At this point, Götz's (2017) study focusing on the causes of Russian near-abroad assertion deserves a special mention as it is the most comprehensive one accounting for the interplay among the geopolitics, regime type, state capacity, identity, and leadership career and personality. Rather than singling out one or two of these factors, Götz draws attention to Russian geopolitical perceptions shaped by great power identity and assertive policies in line with these perceptions made possible via increased state capacity as Putin's choice of an authoritarian turn provided the state with ample resources. Therefore, literature on the cases of Ukraine and Georgia portrays these conflicts guided by both material and symbolic interests and differentiates them from the Syrian case in terms of the level of symbolic interests.

For example, Rezvani (2020, p. 895) contends that the Syria intervention is not "totally irrelevant" to other interventions that took place in post-Soviet countries but diverges from them in that it is motivated by power politics and security as opposed to being in guidance of 'historical responsibility' in post-Soviet space. However, while Reshetnikov (2017) exemplifies this parallel historical responsibility rhetoric in the cases of the annexation of Crimea and intervention in Georgia (2008), Freire and Heller (2018) highlight that Russian interventions in Ukraine and Syria share the same motivation of status-seeking, which is, according to Forsberg (2014) also a dimension of the Georgia intervention.

3. The Missing Link

The problem with this large body of work on the three cases is that they treat Russia's great power identity and status-seeking behavior in relation to that either as a contributing factor to the other ones or as only one of the many. It is worthy of consideration that while material explanations (e.g., geopolitical and economic interests) provided for the three cases vary contextually, the explanations accounting for the symbolic gains that Russia pursues through these interventions do not differ from each other. In other words, harvesting recognition of its great power identity and the rights and privileges coming together with this recognition links all three cases together, makes up a pattern, and hints itself as the overarching or embedded factor with better explanatory power.

While this is the case, it makes more sense to consider great power identity and impulse for status-seeking in Russian foreign policy as a prism through which geopolitical and national security-related realities are perceived and processed. Eventually, interests need to be defined to exist, and they emerge only after obtaining an understanding and definition of the self (Ringmar, 2002). As Murray (2018) succinctly summarizes:

"A state's self-understanding positions it in the world and provides the reservoir of meanings that the state draws upon to represent itself and others in its interactions with different states. As a consequence, self-understandings are of paramount importance in shaping the representations a state makes when interacting with other states, and in understanding how these representations position the state vis-à-vis other actors in the system."

Based on this proposition, we can conclude that states act in relation to their self-understandings and expect recognition of these self-understandings from others. As identities as self-understandings accord a certain position to a state in the international order, status becomes a recognized identity (Murray, 2018), a righteous place among other peers. Moreover, states allocate much of their time and resources to ensure or maintain this place (Ringmar, 2015).

Accordingly, status-seeking in Russian policy should be treated not as a consequence of geopolitical rivalry with the US but as an identity issue in itself. However, this does not mean that the US or the Western world is not in interaction with Russian self-understandings and policies related to them. On the contrary, taking Russian status-seeking behavior as an identity issue requires us to approach the problem from a social perspective. After all, "recognition is a social desire" (Murray, 2018), and what makes their status problematic in the eyes of Russian decision-makers is the unparallel between their self-asserted position in the international order and the lack of recognition of this self-understanding from other actors.

4. Great Power Identity and Status in Russian Foreign Policy

In fact, another large body of work underlines the importance of great power identity, thus great power status, and symbolic gains motives in the shape of recognition in overall Russian foreign policy. To start with, Narozhna (2021) proposes that since the 18th century, the only consistent trope in the Russian biographical narrative has been that Russia is destined to be a great power.² So, this self-description is utilized by the elite frequently, especially in times of crisis, to justify foreign policy choices. Such manipulations do not, however, refute the dimension of great power identity that induces status-seeking as it became more explicit after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The sudden collapse of massive political structures catches their decision-makers unprepared for the necessary structural and collective cognitive adjustments, leaving them with aspirations and resentments. Therefore, great power identity and seeking the recognition of this greatness are highly relevant to the foreign policies of successor states such as Russia after the Soviet Union. As an unprecedented case of status loss, the dissolution of the Soviet Union left a legacy of humiliation and a feeling of status inconsistency (Smith, 2014). Thus, status inconsistency is not only an academic concept denoting the disparity between self-attributed status and status accorded by others but also a perception shared by Russian decision-makers (Smith, 2014).

For instance, former foreign ministers Andrei Kozyrev and Yevgeny Primakov both reiterated that Russia "is doomed to be a great power" or will perish (Salajan, 2019). Similarly, Vladimir Putin attributes Russia great powerness due to its potential, history, and culture (Salajan, 2019) and continuously protests Western non-recognition of Russia's status as an equal. He also argues that it's somewhat of a moral duty for others to give Russia its deserved respect as they defeated the Nazis in WWII (Götz, 2017). Again, for his foreign minister, it is unimaginable that Russia plays a subordinate role in the international arena (Lavrov, 2013). Thus, Russian foreign policy behavior is designed by decision-makers in line with this perception. When necessary, in other words, when they feel a lack of recognition, they choose among other options moves that they expect to work for, making other actors accord more status to Russia.

² Also see Neumann (2008, 2015).

It is intriguing at this point that while Russian decision-makers appeal for more status, status inconsistency theory describes Russia as an overachiever great power, meaning it has more status than the expected level in the theory's model. In their study diverging from the Correlates of War (COW) project by subjecting great powers to an ordering among themselves as opposed to COW's fixed major power definition, Volgy et al. (2011) empirically demonstrate that some great powers are 'greater' than others and there can be cases where the level of great power status might change during time. Volgy et al. also divide great powers into two: underachievers, who are accorded less status than their actual capabilities, and overachievers, who are accorded more status than their actual capabilities. In their empirical analysis, Russia corresponds to having more status than its capabilities as a major power. Therefore, it is expected that Russia would opt to preserve the status quo and refrain from revisionist and risk-prone foreign policy moves, as these would mean diminishing the excess status vis-à-vis its capabilities. The authors also argue that the loss of capabilities by the demise of the Soviet Union did not result in status loss for Russia as status markers such as G-8 seat was offered, and UNSC membership was not questioned.

This theory, however, disregards how Russian decision-makers perceive their status. Such status markers are less important to them than what Alexander Wendt (2003, p. 511) terms 'thick recognition,' the recognition of the essential components of their identity, abiding by the related red lines, and granting the related roles to play in international society. Engaging in status-seeking behavior actively tells us clearly that Russian decision-makers consider Russia as an underachiever major power whose capabilities and unique characteristics deserve more respect and kind of manner, which they consider as more equal terms. Larson and Shevchenko (2014), for instance, underline this perception and assert that Russia keeps the US responsible for its status loss and engages in the crises with the US in an emotional manner, in particular anger, such as in cases of Kosovo, Georgia, Ukraine, Magnitsky Act, and Snowden Affair. Therefore, in line with the other aspect of status inconsistency theory that deals with underachiever major powers, lack of thick recognition, at least perception of this lack in Russian decision-makers pushes them in the direction of assertive foreign policy actions, such as military intervention. If the Russian decision-makers were not so sure of their deserved status and considered themselves an overachiever, they would not be willing to take high risks and expose their weaknesses, thus jeopardizing their status. Thus, Volgy et al.'s anticipation based on data demonstrating Russia as an overachiever falls short in considering the elite perceptions.

Furthermore, status denotes "collective beliefs about a given state's ranking on valued attributes (wealth, coercive capabilities, culture, demographic position, sociopolitical organization, and diplomatic clout)" (Paul et al., 2014), and some of these attributes may be measured empirically, yielding objective assessment of an actor's status, and preventing disputes over the statuses of the actors of international politics. However, measurable attributes of actors are not conclusive in the decision to grant recognition of status. North Korea's incontestable nuclear capabilities, for instance, are not sufficient for most of the other powers having similar capabilities to grant North Korea the status of a major power. Similarly, Russia has recurrently voiced discontent about facing mistreatment from its 'equals' in international affairs. We mostly do not, on the other hand, observe that actors without the capabilities of major powers claim a major power status. They do so only after reaching those capabilities. For instance, China's thriving capabilities and economic influence provide a firmer ground for China to claim the same status as the US than it did a few decades ago. Status dynamics of international politics, therefore, can only be studied by accounting for the combination of certain material capabilities and endowment from other actors, and it is the latter and the social and intersubjective aspect of status that conceivably causes conflict.

When this is the case, we cannot confine ourselves to explaining Russian status-seeking behavior only by an aspiration for material benefits. Murray (2018) claims, for example, that recognition is not a material but a social desire, and for Volgy et al. (2014), status is a "matter of positively distinctive identity, identity verification, and positive social attribution." When an actor demands recognition of its great power status, it does not only declare a right to its share in material sources that other major powers access. Even if this is the case, this endeavor might not

only be about them because "accumulation of material capabilities is an act of self-realization... that secures identity" (Ashley, 1986). Thus, identity, rather than physical existence, can be the referent-object of security, especially considering that a challenging power like Russia's status-seeking practices might be very costly and threatening to its physical security (Murray, 2018).

It is essential at this point to take notice of how an actor perceives its historical role and identity. The extent to which it perceives itself as worthy of more status will determine what kind of actions it will take to realize its identity. Strongly motivated by the subjective judgment of its status, it might overestimate its capabilities or underestimate the international reaction to its certain activities. A significant study by Freedman (2016) draws attention to how historical juxtapositions of an actor's status might engender status anxiety. Having a lower status than in the past, an actor might seek to correct the 'historical mistakes' resulting in status loss. In situations where there is a mismatch between an actor's former and present status, "status incentives" such as membership in international organizations will not make a difference for them (Freedman, 2016, p.799) because the gap to be closed through certain status-seeking acts is not only vis-à-vis other peers, but it is a matter of self-evaluation through time. They might, of course, hold others responsible for their decline and incorporate antagonism towards others into their narrative.

Elias (1996) argues that societies with such temporal disparity in self-evaluation might spend centuries adjusting to the new reality and strengthening their self-esteem. Until then, they struggle with what Elias & Scotson (1994, as cited in Freedman, 2016, p. 804) calls the problem of the "we-ideal": "a group's idealized image of itself from the days of its greatness treated as a model that members 'feel they ought to live up to, without [ever] being able to do so.'" Similarly, Jervis (1976) demonstrated that the past experiences of elites and their generation have an influence on their understanding of contemporary politics. It is through this influence that they might overlook some more rational options, end up with cognitive errors, and inaccurately interpret history (Jervis, 1976). These propositions on temporal comparisons establish that the way ideas and history shape interests cannot be overlooked. For instance, Vladimir Putin's national address on 24 February 2022 on "conducting a special military operation" in Ukraine very well illustrates how leaders refer to 'historical injustices,' the past greatness of their state, and their role in correcting these injustices, bringing this greatness back. Thus, no matter that an actor loses status due to a combination of its internal and external dynamics, temporal status inconsistency gazes outside for the responsibility and seeks former recognition from outside. The experienced status loss, therefore, becomes a catalyst in the emergence of conflict due to misrecognition.

However, this cognitive dimension of status loss and status-seeking does not designate assertive foreign policy moves as impulsive risk-taking. Putting these moves solely in emotional terms would rub Russian decision-makers of rationality and question their calculation skills. The point is that status insecurity interacts with the judgment of Russian decision-makers and might motivate them to push the boundaries of 'normal' diplomatic conduct. Still, among other assertive and softer options, why Russian decision-makers prefer military intervention within its status-seeking strategy is unclear, and this puzzle should be where to look when understanding Russia's interventionist approach to Georgia, Syria, and Ukraine.

5. The Interplay Between Russian Great Power Identity And Russian Interventions

This article contends that to understand the recent Russian interventionism, one should not take for granted that post-Soviet space presents a peculiar case in Russian military interventions. It is also possible to examine the Russian interventionism of the 2000s by refraining from this, grounding the analysis on the assumed categorical and analytical similarities between the cases of Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria defined above. Examining the motivational similarities

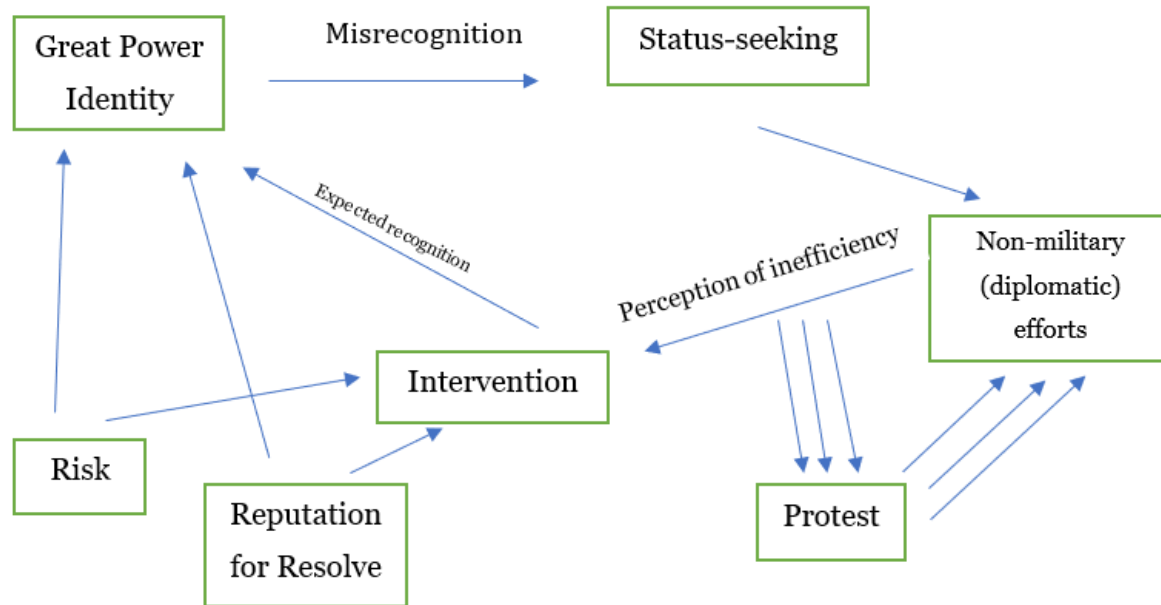
and relative weight of divergences in decision-making in Russian interventions of Georgia, Syria, and Ukraine, this article makes two propositions for how to understand Russian decision-making in these cases:

(1) Russian identification as great power and status-seeking in consequence of this identification not only put military intervention inside the horizon of possible actions to take during a crisis, but it also provides intervention as an end itself because of the perception that the ability to conduct an intervention is a status-signal to transmit to those who do not treat Russia in accordance with its self-attributed status.

To elaborate, faced with misrecognition of its great power identity and denied of rights and privileges demanded with this identity by the West and mainly the US, Russian decision-makers engage in what Murray (2018) calls recognitive practices, such as intervention. Contrary to the Clausewitzian proposition that military force should be restrained as much as possible because it is costly and unpredictable (Posen, 2014), intervention becomes an option because the perceived net-recognition benefits of military force outweigh the perceived net-recognition benefits of non-intervention (Lindemann, 2010). As misrecognition persists, these recognitive practices tend to get assertive and finally become a meta-practice that demands recognition itself (Murray, 2018). Thus, intervention in Russian foreign policy is a recognitive practice that indicates a demand for great power status. As Russia fails to get the desired outcome, each subsequent intervention has the potential to reiterate this demand and obtain a function of status symbol that signals great powerness and, thus, becomes an end rather than a means. Since status is a subjective phenomenon, status symbols function as means to shape others' perceptions (Paul et al., 2014), such as exemplary military technologies and major diplomatic initiatives. In the Russian case, it is the intervention itself.

At this point, it is also important to note that the presence or perceived level of misrecognition of Russia's great power status might differ in the eyes of Russian and American decision-makers. In other words, the focus of an inquiry on Russian interventionism should be geared towards presenting the imbalance between the situational perceptions of Russian decision-makers and the Western ones in order to demonstrate the intersubjective nature of the problem. While American decision-makers think that they are engaging in extremely normal diplomatic conduct, the Russians might think the opposite, or vice versa. The red lines, perceived/showed (dis)respect, and the perceived recognition of interests might differ for both parties. Such an intersubjective nature of the problem requires us to account for both sides of the story. Therefore, studying Russian interventions should not disregard the actions of other actors that might have objectively amplified the Russian perception of misrecognition, but it should mainly focus on how those actions are actually processed through Russian self-understandings. Thus, the inquiry should be about how these differences are tied to status games and how the perception of continuous misrecognition convinces Russian officials to engage in military intervention. This leads us to the second proposition of the article: how Russian decision-makers deal with the problem of misrecognition.

Figure 1: A Framework to Understand Russian Military Interventionism (2008-2022)



(2) Russian leadership seeks great power status through interventions because interventions demonstrate their risk-proneness and establish a reputation for resolve.

It is this article's assumption that risk-proneness and reputation for resolve are implicit in interventions. Certainly, interventions involve risks beyond calculation. Because risk-taking is "a nonverbal message as much as a goal-oriented strategy" (Vertzberger, 1995), and reputation for resolve has a deterring effect (Lupton, 2020), financial and political costs that can be potentially catastrophic for Russia, as exemplified especially by Ukraine case are compensated by the expected symbolic benefit of intervention, and thus, Russia's determination of demanding its rightful place in international order becomes proved. It is, therefore, likely that Russian decision-makers are also convinced by the necessity of engaging in intervention often due to its resoluteness and commitment signaling function.

Lupton's (2020) recent study on leaders and their reputation for resolve, for example, makes reputation relevant in international politics again as she, in detail, demonstrates that the reputations of individual leaders rather than countries themselves matter in dealings of conflictual issues. Leaders, especially in their early careers, tend to set an example of how their response to certain matters will be shaped. They might even follow purposefully unpredictable actions in order to build a hesitant approach from other actors. Thus, it is safe to assume that Vladimir Putin's preference to build a reputation for resolve is very much related to Russia's military efforts to ensure great power status.

In addition to the dispositional risk-proneness of a leader, as in the case of Putin, who demonstrated his resoluteness through certain foreign policy activities and high-profile speeches, risk-proneness can also be socially-driven (Vertzberger, 1994). Peer pressure in an organizational culture or earlier commitment to an issue, for example, might provide other possibilities than risk-taking as nonexistent before decision-makers. Considering that the Russian *idée fixe* of great powerness was present in the previous administrations as well, it can also be argued that intervention might appear for Russian decision-makers as the most appropriate option due to socially driven risk-proneness. This steers the direction of inquiry on the organizational culture of Russian foreign policy decision-making and attributes variability to Vladimir Putin and his cohort's determination to make a reputation for resolve, enabling them to undertake enormously risk-laden interventions. Such moves are regarded as signaling Russia's great power status and resilience to act unilaterally when necessary- a privilege of great powers.

Conclusion

This article proposed that Russian interventions in Georgia, Syria, and Ukraine in the last two decades share similar underlying dynamics. It reviewed the present explanations of Russian motivations in respective cases, further justified using great power identity and status-seeking lenses, and proposed a framework that put recognitive dynamics at the center of inquiry to understand Russia's intervention in Georgia, Syria, and Ukraine. The proposed framework makes it imperative to account for the socio-cultural background whereby Russian leadership assumes a great power role, as well as the context in which Russian perception of status inconsistency emerges. The social perspective of the framework subsequently requires looking into the specific stages in which the US and Russia interact in a way that Russian decision-makers become convinced that their non-aggressive status-seeking is exhausted. Finally, it should be demonstrated that the intervened country is not simply a random choice but a part of the recognitive dynamics between the US and Russia so that the risk taken via intervention to the respective country generates a particular effect on behalf of Russia's great power identity. Material gains from such intervention should also be understood as a reference to this dynamic. Russian access to the Eastern Mediterranean through intervention in Syria, for example, cannot be considered a mere strategic victory; instead, for the framework that this paper proposes, how Russian great power identity prescribes accessing the Mediterranean and how intervention in Syria feeds back Russian great power identity becomes more crucial. Thus, this framework provides researchers with possible entry points in the disputes between status quo powers and status-seeker actors by accounting for the status-seeking actor's specific considerations.

Many reckon that the international system is currently under transformation, and systemic transformations have mostly included conflicts emanating from status-quo challenging powers and established power's reaction to preserve the status quo. The debates on whether China will turn to revisionism and how the international system will evolve through China-US confrontation occupy many IR scholars' agenda. The conflicts Russia partakes in are also considered a symptom of this transformation. Further research tracing the process in Russian interventions of the last two decades via this framework will expectedly reveal the intersubjective nature of conflicts that are part of systemic transformation, delineate how states communicate intent, and the watershed moments that could be prevented through insistent diplomacy. Looking deeper into the processes that include the clashes between challenging and status quo powers in this way has become more significant than ever because only through accounting for the intersubjective dynamics in these clashes can we find 'intervention' points to ensure a peaceful transformation.

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