GEOSTRATEGY AND IDENTITY: MOTIVATIONS FOR THE RUSSIAN SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

by

ALISON LOGAN MINTZ

(Under the Direction of Jeffrey D. Berejikian)

ABSTRACT

Following the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation began the process of rebuilding itself as a great power. I argue that this process involves a grand strategy of establishing a sphere of influence. We see this sphere expanding as Russian foreign policy has intensified towards certain states, and we are told by the Kremlin that intervention is done on behalf of ethnic Russians living abroad in these states. Curiously, there are several states which appear to be actively targeted for the Russian sphere, but lack an ethnic Russian population. Conversely, there are several states which face little attention from the Kremlin, but have large numbers of ethnic Russians. This observational discrepancy prompted my empirical investigation of the types of states that Russia targets for its sphere of influence. In this investigation, I contrast the effect that geostrategic significance and historical legacy have on the intensity to which Moscow pursues a
state as a part of its sphere. In doing so, I find that the percentage of ethnic Russians is not significant in determining whether or not a state is targeted by the Kremlin. Instead, results show that legacies of the Russian Empire/Soviet Union and geostrategic states with ethnic Russian residents are more intensely targeted. These findings inform us as to a) how spheres of influence are constructed, b) how spheres of influence contribute to a state’s grand strategy, c) how collapsed powers attempt to rebound to great power status, and d) how states follow realpolitik and/or constructivist approaches to foreign policy. On an applied level, this research clarifies observational inconsistencies in the Kremlin’s foreign policy, highlights Moscow’s grand strategy, and aids in prediction of potential new targets for the Russian sphere.

INDEX WORDS: Sphere of influence, Russian foreign policy, Grand strategy, Great power politics, Geostrategic significance, Legacy
GEOSTRATEGY AND IDENTITY: MOTIVATIONS FOR THE RUSSIAN SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

by

ALISON LOGAN MINTZ
B.S., North Carolina State University, 2010
M.A., North Carolina State University, 2012

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Athens, Georgia
2017
GEOSTRATEGY AND IDENTITY: MOTIVATIONS FOR THE RUSSIAN SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

by

ALISON LOGAN MINTZ

Major Professor: Jeffrey D. Berejikian

Committee: K. Chad Clay
Daniel W. Hill, Jr.
Andrew P. Owsiak

Electronic Version Approved:

Suzanne Barbour
Dean of the Graduate School
University of Georgia
August 2017
DEDICATION

This dissertation is the culmination of, not only my hard work, but also that of my parents- Angel and John Mintz. Without their determination and incredible work ethic, I would have never had all of the opportunities that put me in a position to earn a Ph.D. This degree is our accomplishment, because they put in the background work to get me to the starting line, and have tirelessly supported me ever since. Thank you, Mom and Dad, for not only teaching me how to succeed, but showing me how to succeed. Your drive and tenacity is why I still believe in the American Dream.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wrote this dissertation in a myriad of places across the South Pacific— from the rooftop of the Sydney Harbour YHA, to island hopper boats in Fiji and heaps of coaches traveling throughout New Zealand. As a result, there are a wide range of people and organizations who deserve acknowledgment: from the Wynyard Station Cole’s that fueled my early morning writing sprees to the dozens of Air New Zealand and Quantas flight crews who kept the coffee rolling and the words flowing. Even though it took extra self-discipline to focus when the Great Barrier Reef was on my doorstep, I am grateful to Mike Tarrant and Discover Abroad, for giving me the best scenery in the world to write in.

My committee of Andy Owsiak, Chad Clay, and Danny Hill deserves special acknowledgment for their patience while I was sixteen time zones away and out of telecommunications reach for a majority of the time. I especially appreciate the faithful efforts of my advisor, Jeff Berejikian, in ensuring that this dissertation was completed in a timely fashion. Jeff has not only been my dissertation advisor, but also a life advisor, and I am thankful for the years of wisdom he has imparted to me via napkin at Walker’s Coffee Shop. On a larger scale, I’d like to thank the University of Georgia and the School of Public and International Affairs for supporting its student body, while also preparing us for a fruitful post-graduate life. I am also grateful for Richard Uzzell, for originally sparking my interest in Russia. Without his enthusiasm and dedication to teaching, this dissertation might be written on an entirely different topic. There are many more people who have been acknowledged along the way, and I continue to appreciate them individually for their help in this process.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II: THE RUSSIAN SPHERE OF INFLUENCE</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III: MOTIVATIONS FOR THE RUSSIAN SPHERE OF INFLUENCE</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV: THE ETHNIC INTERACTION</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER V: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MOTIVATIONS</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CITED</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Regression Results for Determinants of the Russian Sphere</th>
<th>73</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Legacy as a Conditioning Variable for Geostrategic Significance</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Conditioning Effect of Ethnicity</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Distribution of Influence Attempts Across Country-Years</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Distribution of Natural Resource-Rich States</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Distribution of Transit States</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Distribution of Buffer States</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Distribution of Port States</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Distribution of Conflict-Adjacent States</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Distribution of Geostrategic States</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Distribution of Legacy States</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Distribution of States with Ethnic Russians</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

With the 2014 annexation of Crimea and 2008 invasion of Georgia, there have been renewed conversations about the Russian sphere of influence. While these two states are examples of Russia extending its sphere, there are several states which have remained untouched by the Kremlin, despite similar circumstances. What explains Russia’s pursuit of a sphere of influence in some situations—both geographic and temporal—and not in others? What does this pursuit tell us about Russian grand strategy as a former great power? This dissertation seeks to answer these questions by investigating the types of states that are targeted by the Kremlin for inclusion within the sphere of influence. I argue that the Kremlin uses its sphere of influence as a part of its grand strategy for reclaiming great power status. As such, the composition of this sphere informs us as to the strategy that the Kremlin uses in pursuit of great power status.

I explore two potential criteria for composition: historical legacy and geostrategic significance. By investigating the extent to which these two types of states are pursued by Russia, I can evaluate whether Moscow is taking a realpolitik approach to great power status (geostrategic significance), or a constructivist approach (historical legacy). Thus, this research highlights the manifestation of realist versus constructivist theory in foreign policy, especially in terms of potential pathways to becoming a great power. On a more applied level, this research adds to the literature on Russian foreign policy, particularly in terms of which specific countries it considers to be most significant to its progress as a great power.
By investigating the motivations behind the Kremlin’s sphere of influence, this dissertation demonstrates: a) how spheres of influence are constructed, b) how spheres of influence contribute to a state’s grand strategy, c) how collapsed powers attempt to rebound, and d) how states follow realpolitik and/or constructivist approaches to foreign policy. These results have the potential to enhance diplomacy by revealing Russian motivations and strategy, and predicting states where the Kremlin is particularly invested.

I begin by highlighting some of the puzzling characteristics of the Russian sphere of influence, and then introduce past attempts to explain these characteristics. The following chapter places the modern Russian sphere of influence in historical context, defines and illustrates this sphere, and examines the role that it plays in Kremlin grand strategy. I then provide a theoretical underpinning for my hypotheses on the motivations behind the sphere, including a separate chapter on the interaction of motivations. These hypotheses are then tested quantitatively, before I conclude with an assessment of the findings and implications.

The Puzzle of the Russian Sphere of Influence

The study of Russian foreign policy is a baffling endeavor, made more enigmatic by the dearth of information from the Kremlin. One of the hallmarks of Russian foreign policy is their sphere of influence, of which the motivations for it are, themselves, quite perplexing. Take for example, the breakup of Yugoslavia- a dramatic conflict involving Slavic peoples with a socialist past. Curiously, Yugoslavia saw minimal intervention from Moscow during the conflict, despite drawing considerable attention from the rest of the international community (Bowker 1998).
Another case of inaction can be found in the Kremlin’s laissez-faire approach to Estonian integration within the EU and NATO. Estonia is less than 100 miles from St. Petersburg, and almost a third of its population was ethnically Russian. Nevertheless, the Kremlin hardly attempted to dissuade it from accepting the offer of EU (and later NATO) membership.

Conversely, Russian military support of breakaway republics in 2008 escalated to the point of armed incursion of Georgian sovereign territory. In contrast to Yugoslavia, most Georgians are of Middle Eastern descent, rather than Slavic. What began as domestic unrest, soon spiraled into a show of force by the Kremlin as Russia unleashed a variety of military, economic, and political tools to support South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Presently, Russian forces have been intensely engaged in the Syrian civil war. Putin has long supported Syrian president Bashar Assad as the legitimate government of the country, and has repeatedly vetoed UN Security Council resolutions aimed at dethroning him. The Kremlin has played an active role in Syrian peace talks and has even deployed its own aircraft and soldiers for military support. There are essentially no ethnic Russians residing within the country, and Syria is over 1000km from the Russian border.

Similar examples abound of Russian intervention in some situations, but not in others. Why was Russia so keen to intervene in Georgia, but was content to mostly observe the breakup of Yugoslavia? If we consider these actions to be Russian efforts at consolidating a sphere of influence, this raises the question of how the Kremlin determines its sphere of influence. While such observations show that there is some discretion involved in Russia’s selection of sphere states, these observations alone are insufficient to identify the basis for such discretion. Thus, there exists a knowledge gap as to what motivates the Kremlin to include a state within its sphere of influence.
Past Explanations of the Russian Sphere of Influence

Since Russia is unique in its sphere of influence, the behavior of other states provides little insight into its motivations. Some research has been done on the empires and colonies of other countries, but not much has been researched on the Russian sphere. The intervention of one state in the affairs of another is often attributed to pursuit of natural resources (Schweller 1999b, Klare 2002, Bercovitch 2009).\(^1\) Schweller (1999b) notes that, according to realist principles, states will compete for scarce resources. While competition for resources has been used to explain Belgian colonization in the Congo and other incursions into foreign territory (Gibbs 1991), few scholars have commented on the role that natural resources play in determining the perimeter of the Russian sphere. Instead, most of the commentary on the relationship between natural resources and spheres of influence has centered around the use of energy resources to coerce states into remaining within the sphere (Blank 1995, Kleveman 2003).

Of the studies that do specifically focus on Russian interventions, most cover foreign policy writ large, rather than the sphere of influence. Mankoff (2009) argues that Russian intervention in the affairs of other states is a way to prove Russia’s status to the rest of the world, rather than just a means of obtaining power. Clunan (2009) uses the theory of aspirational constructivism to explain Russian attempts at resurgence by claiming that their “need for collective self-esteem creates aspirations—often based in the nation’s past\(^2\)—that directly shape its national and security interests.” These aspirational theories ground Russian foreign policy in a

\(^1\) This consideration is captured in my geostrategic significance variable.
\(^2\) This consideration is captured in my historical legacy variable.
theoretical framework of identity and interests, but do not provide any concrete direction for sphere formation.

Another constructivist approach puts forth the idea that Russian foreign policy is based on Russia’s sense of honor, along with the degree of security that Russians feel, and not by Russia’s quest for power, nor by the structure of the international system (Tsygankov 2012). In response to this approach, I would argue that the anarchy of the international system is, itself, threatening to the degree of security that Russians feel. As a result, their quest for power is inevitably intertwined with their sense of security, and their sense of honor bound by the status they achieve within the system.

The social psychology approach uses social identity theory to explain the Kremlin’s inclusion and exclusion of states within its group. This theory is based on the idea that Russians viewed their collapsed state status as unfavorable, and seek to correct this by building a group with a more favorable identity (Larson & Shevchenko 2010). While it makes sense that Russia would consider a collapsed status as unfavorable, there is little indication of the group members that could make their identity more favorable. This and the previously stated constructivist theories could be specifically applied to the sphere of influence, but scholars have yet to do so.

Realist attempts at evaluating Russian foreign policy towards its neighbors are similarly inadequate for explaining sphere membership. One of the prevailing realist explanations stems from the balance-of-power camp. These scholars argue that Moscow uses its neighbors as buffers against NATO and EU intrusion (Mankoff 2009, Greene 2012). Lo (2002) argues that the continued relevance of balance-of-power considerations in world politics implies a corresponding conviction in the value of spheres of influence. Similarly, Morozova (2009) asserts that the geopolitical factors of power, status, relative position vis-a-vis other states, and
hegemonic spatial control become crucial independent variables explaining the entirety of Russia’s post-1993 foreign policy.

Mankoff (2009) argues that, since Russia lacks defensible frontiers, it has historically utilized other states to block it from its rivals. Thus, Mankoff explains that the Kremlin’s “somewhat manic approach to the former Soviet Union” is based on a larger strategy of great power competition. Other scholars have noted that much of Russia’s foreign policy is based on reducing the influence of other major powers, especially in limiting the expansion of NATO and the EU (Dunn & Bobick 2014). Lo (2002) goes so far as to claim that Russia maintained a zero-sum mentality against the West, at least under the Yeltsin regime. He argues that, even today, Russia’s primary frame of reference for its foreign policy is based on relations with the West. These realist explanations continue to emphasize Russia’s relations with its neighbors, in lieu of an actual sphere of influence.

The clearest justification for the Russian sphere of influence comes from the Kremlin itself. The breakup of the Soviet Union saw the displacement of 25 million Russians living in newly-formed foreign countries. Since then, the common refrain from the Kremlin is that Russia intervenes in other states to protect these ethnic Russians abroad (Putin 2014, 2015). This defense has also been acknowledged by those outside the Kremlin. Page (1994) notes that, from the very beginning, the most potent foreign policy issue for Moscow was ensuring the equitable treatment of Russian minorities in the near abroad.

This theory does not withstand observational evaluation. There are many state in which ethnic Russians are subjugated to biased treatment, yet we see little (if any) Russian response. For example, Azerbaijan has an even larger percentage of ethnic Russians than Georgia, yet no efforts have been made to forcibly protect these citizens. Conversely, this theory does not explain
Kremlin intervention in states which lack ethnic Russians. It is this empirical inconsistency that spurred me to more thoroughly examine the Kremlin’s motivations.

Due to the increasing prevalence of spheres of influence in current events, the policy community has also undertaken research on the issue. While the political salience of spheres makes them an important subject of policy expositions, an empirical analysis of the subject is wanting. Despite several policy acknowledgments that the Kremlin is, indeed, maintaining a sphere of influence (Page 1994, Kramer 2009), research needs to focus more on explanations, rather than descriptions. The few studies that do present explanations for the Russian sphere do not reflect the reality of the situation.

A review of the literature shows that spheres of influence are supported both by the balance of power inherent in realist theory and the identity arguments of constructivism, however, there has yet to be any systematic research on geostrategic significance and historical legacy as motivations for the Russian sphere. While there is a firm basis for grand strategy (Spykman 1942; Organski 1968; Carr 1946; etc.) and the behavior of great powers (Wight 1946; Mearsheimer 1995; Morgenthau 1948; etc.), there is less work on the grand strategies of those great powers which have collapsed and attempted to rise once again. This is especially true when considering how such powers use spheres of influence within their grand strategies.

I hope to fill the gap in the literature on collapsed powers using spheres of influence as a part of their grand strategy, and in doing so, shed some light on the motivations behind the Russian sphere of influence. As such, this dissertation will move from beyond the common analysis of general Russian foreign policy, to the infrequently studied realm of Russian spheres of influence. In doing so, it will account for the inconsistencies displayed in Russian foreign policy. Furthermore, it will explain the motivations behind the sphere, rather than merely
describing its occurrence. The few scholars who have engaged in a peripheral assessment of sphere motivations have not analyzed the specific motivations presented in this research: historical legacy and geostrategic significance. Neither, have their arguments withstood the test of observational accuracy, let alone empirical examination.

I believe that this dissertation provides a fresh approach to viewing an under-explored phenomenon in a causal and empirical manner. As such, it contributes to the literature by explaining a) inconsistencies within Russian foreign policy, b) motivations for the Russian sphere of influence, c) the role of spheres of influence in grand strategy, and d) the behavior of collapsed great powers. I assert that a comprehensive explanation for the Kremlin’s sphere of influence can be found by analyzing Russia’s historical legacy and geostrategy.
CHAPTER II: THE RUSSIAN SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

The current Russian state has always existed as an empire in some form. The commonly held predecessor to the Russian state (Channon & Hudson 1995) was Kievan Rus—located in modern-day Kiev, Ukraine. Kievan Rus conquered much of what is today Eastern Europe. Following the demise of Kievan Rus, its people were absorbed by the Grand Duchy of Moscow and were joined by other Slavic principalities. This created the basis for Imperial Russia, in which Ivan the Terrible doubled the size of the original principality by acquiring territories in Central Asia and Siberia. The Rurik, and then Romanov, dynasty ruled Imperial Russia from 1721 until the Russian Revolution in 1917. This empire included modern-day Ukraine, the Baltics, Belarus, Moldova, Finland, Poland, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Mongolia, and Turkey. At one point the empire totaled almost one-sixth of the Earth’s land mass.

The Russian Revolution (and subsequent creation of the USSR) saw these conquered territories become their own Soviet Republics. These republics were subordinate to the metropole government in Moscow, without any real control over their governance. The policy of *korenizatsiia* (nativization) was used to build support for the unique ethnic identities of the various republics, but this policy was quickly reversed by Stalin as the russification of the USSR became widespread. In addition to the fifteen formal republics of: Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia; the USSR also maintained satellite states. These
Eastern Bloc states included present-day: Poland, Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Albania, Serbia, Kosovo, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo, Slovenia, Montenegro, Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary. Though these were formally independent states, they submitted to varying forms of political control from the USSR. The motivation for the maintenance of satellite states was announced by Stalin, who stated that “the Soviet Union must see that "the present capitalist encirclement is replaced by a socialist encirclement. (Tucker 2008).” The encirclement was formalized in 1939, when the USSR entered into the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact with Nazi Germany- a secret protocol that divided Romania, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia and Finland into German and Soviet spheres of influence.

The collapse of the Soviet Union initiated the independence of the fifteen Soviet republics, and the lessening of control over the Eastern bloc. The de facto leader of the defunct Soviet Union, then became the de jure inheritor of its interests- many of which still reside in the same regions it previously called its own. Today’s Russian sphere of influence reflects the territories it has always retained. This historical context emphasizes the fact that Russia has always had an expansionist vision for controlling nearby lands, and this vision can be seen in its foreign policy within its Near Abroad.

**Defining Spheres of Influence**

Russia’s modern approach to territorial control manifests itself in terms of its sphere of influence. This study defines a sphere of influence as a geographically proximal area in which a great power exerts dominant influence to affect developments of another country, although it has no formal authority to do so (Keal 1983; Hast 2014). I argue that spheres of influence are
different from colonial empires because a) their purpose is political, rather than economic, b) their territory is generally contiguous, and c) their influence is informal. Lake (1996) offers the idea that relations amongst states can vary along a continuum from anarchy to hierarchy, alliance to empire. In the case of spheres of influence, this relationship would resemble a hierarchical empire.

A key feature of a sphere of influence is that, while the sphere is not entirely exclusive to one state, it is dominated by one state, i.e., no other great powers are as influential (Keal 1983). States within the sphere may be susceptible to the influences of other states, but will adjust their policies to align with those of the dominant state a majority of the time—especially on key issues. Thus, there can only be one great power who claims a particular sphere of influence.

Geographic proximity separates spheres of influence from formal empires and colonies. For the sake of this dissertation, I limit the space for the Russian sphere of influence to exist only within 1800km of the Russian border. States outside of this parameter cannot be considered for the sphere, however not all states within this area will be included within the sphere. States that fall within this boundary include: Serbia, Syria, Turkey, Tajikistan, Japan, Germany, Norway, and Iraq, amongst others; while states that fall outside of the boundary include: France, Italy, India, Pakistan, and the Philippines, amongst others. This differs from the idea of British colonies in America or the French empire in Africa because a sphere can be seen as geographic extensions of the great power state. Starr (2013) notes that proximity makes states relevant to one another through some combination of both opportunity and willingness, especially in states with long contiguous borders that go through areas with valuable resources, strategic features, and on both sides of which live members of the same ethnic group. He continues to discuss how two
proximate states are easily able to interact with each other and perceive the other as important and relevant (Starr 2013).

Proximity is critical to the concept of a sphere of influence because the Kremlin seeks to surround itself with allies in an effort to protect its core from foreign intrusion (Deudney & Ikenberry 2009). As a state with such a long border, Russia has always feared foreign incursion (Deudney & Ikenberry 2009). Thus, there is as much a defensive protection element to spheres of influence as there is an offensive expansion element. The concept of a contiguous sphere is important because of the understanding that undesirable phenomena (instability, certain ideologies, conflict, weakness, etc.) often spread as a contagion. Thus, the creation of a sphere acts as a buffer for this contagion in a way that isolated states scattered across the world would not.

An additional reason for this geographic insistence is based on the assumption that Russia is a rising state, and does not yet have the capability to spread its power to the extent that a superpower would. The maintenance of political dominance within many states across the globe would likely prove too much for the Kremlin. This strategy could backfire in a way that would lead to the Kremlin’s downfall, rather than the resurgence that was originally intended. Extension of influence into distant lands is militarily and logistically difficult, economically expensive, and socially challenging- as the citizens may be less than responsive to those who share very little with their culture. Thus, the political power of the Kremlin is likely to weaken over space because of its lessened ability to follow through fully and promptly on both punishments and rewards.

Spheres of influence aspire to the informal empires elucidated by Doyle (1986), as they seek to form a relationship in which one state controls the effective political sovereignty of
another. Dmitri Trenin (2009) argues that Russia has a sphere of interest, rather than influence, i.e., the Kremlin is interested in influencing many states, but does not actually hold that influence over all of them. This study is about that Russian interest in having a state within the sphere, and thus seeks to determine the Kremlin’s motivations behind attempts at influence. The attempt on behalf of Moscow is the key part of this research- and not the actual occurrence of a state submitting to the sphere. A sphere of influence involves a two-way relationship, in which Moscow seeks to influence a state and the target state acquiesces to that influence. The scope of this research does not encompass the response of states to Moscow’s extension of influence, and as such can only investigate attempts at sphere inclusion rather than composition of the sphere itself.

Even if Russia is interested in including a state in its sphere, but that state rejects it or it is swept up by another great power, this state would still have been considered a sphere target, though not an actual member of the sphere. Since this dissertation is a study of Russian foreign policy, rather than a study of other states’ reactions to Russian foreign policy, the outcome variable is the extent to which Russia chooses to include a state in its sphere of influence. The question that this study attempts to answer is “which states is Russia most interested in including in its sphere of influence?” Of course, interest is conditioned by risk propensity and the likelihood of success. Therefore, I interact my main motivations with a likelihood of success variable (see Chapter 4).

Influence may be extended through cooperative or coercive means, but must go beyond ordinary foreign relations (Hast 2014). General cooperation on the international stage is not sufficient to be labelled a sphere of influence, nor is mere dependence (unless that dependence can readily transfer into coercion). Efforts at establishing a sphere of influence as opposed to
general foreign policy can be distinguished by a more intense, and less isolated approach on behalf of the Kremlin. For this reason, my measure of sphere extension comes from an event history dataset which measures the intensity (positive and negative) and frequency of Russian interaction with neighboring states. In this way, I am able to discern the degree to which Moscow pursues a state as a part of its sphere.  

The role of the great power should be clear, in the sense that target states are understood to be delegates rather than colleagues (Ó Tuathail, et. al. 2006). Doyle (1986) notes that informal empires (which is what spheres aspire to be) can be achieved by force, by political collaboration, by economic, or by social means; however, they are distinguished from the rest of world politics by foreign control over a subordinate polity. By virtue of geography, frequent and/or intense extensions within 1800km are likely to be efforts at a sphere of influence, rather than just foreign policy.

Foreign relations that do not fall within the sphere of influence category include: Russia-US counterterrorism cooperation, the trading partnership between Russia and the Netherlands, or Russian mediation in the Angolan Civil War. None of these examples involve a motivation by the Kremlin for domination as the great power over the other state. This is evidenced by the fact that the other state is a) already a great power itself, b) under the umbrella of another great power with no hope of luring it away, or c) geographically too distant. While there is some form of cooperative relation in the above examples, these relationships are not of the “lead-delegate” variety which defines sphere of influence states.

---

3 A full conceptualization and measurement discussion for sphere of influence extension is described in Chapter V.
4 In addition, Russia has otherwise expressed little interest in this country, leading one to believe that they are not truly considering it as a part of their sphere. This appears to be more of an international duty, rather than personal relationship.
5 And the Kremlin has no interest in them becoming this type of relationship
Russia is unique in its sphere of influence because most great powers have instead built empires/colonies or engaged in more balanced relationships with other states. Few other great powers have disregarded the sovereignty of others to pursue a contiguous and informal area over which they intended to exercise dominant power. Other great powers might have a sphere of influence, but none have behaved within it in the same way that Russia has. The Russian sphere is unique in its size, dominance, and exclusivity.

The E.U. is certainly a great power in pursuit of a European sphere, but it is not led by one state, and is not backed by the threat of force. The U.S. has launched many political, military, and economic interventions from Iraq to Latin America. Some might say that this is just a hegemon doing its job to patrol the world, while others would argue that the U.S. has made the world its sphere of influence (Haas 1994, Kagan 2015). Because of this hegemony, there is no set boundary or contiguity that underlies U.S. influence, and thus the label “sphere of influence” does not quite fit. China has a sphere of influence, but it is not nearly as expansive as the Russian sphere. While Beijing remains concerned with uniting Taiwan with the mainland, they have not actively sought influence in many other Asian states. In fact, two of the other largest East Asian states (the Republic of Korea and Japan) are staunch U.S. allies. China tolerates U.S. military bases and close economic connections amongst Asian nations and Pacific islands. The extent to which Beijing pursues a sphere is also less intense than the extent to which Moscow targets states for its sphere, as coercion and threat of force are less readily wielded.

Russia is further unique in the fact that it has continued to exercise influence in its former imperial territories. We see little evidence of the U.K. seeking to exert dominance in India, or of France in Algeria. I assert that this difference can be attributed to the geographic proximity that is inherent in a sphere of influence, but absent in former colonies. Other great powers seek to
extend influence in their neighboring states, though these states were likely not previous appendages. China has sought influence in the South China Sea, the U.S. has established dominance in the western hemisphere, and the EU is continually pushing its eastern boundaries. These situations differ from the Russian case in more ways than the fact that the targeted states were not once a part of the dominating country itself.

The major difference is that these neighborhood policies are inclusive. While China has announced that all of the South China Sea is in its “core national interest” (Weitz 2011), it has not declared any particular country to be within that interest. As hegemon, the US acts as the world’s policeman, while the EU may be the least discerning government when it comes to acquiring states within its fold. The key point is that there is less discrimination in determining which states fall within the dominion of these powers—China because it has not aggressively pursued any states, and the US and EU because they intervene all over the map.

That a state would have a grand strategy focused on the pursuit of a sphere of influence is not surprising, given the emphasis that scholars such as Sun Tzu have put on positioning and holding strategic ground. Scholars as early as Thucydides have noted how strategic interaction leads to polarization among states (History of the Peloponnesian Wars), which is often a product of spheres of influence. Following the end of the Cold War, military competition amongst great powers has been de-emphasized, and positional competition over the scarcity of security has taken its place (Schweller 1999a). Realists predict that as states grow wealthier and more powerful, they seek more widespread political influence, expansion of interests, and territorial control— and the more powerful they grow, the better able they are to achieve these goals (Choucri & North 1989). The powerful nation that finds itself bordering on a power vacuum feels compelled to fill the void with its own power because neglecting to do so could allow for
other states to do so in their stead (Schweller 1999b). Another reason to act is because weakness is contagious and a state must keep regional instability from spilling into its borders. This protection from contagion is often cited by Putin as a defense of aggressive Russian foreign policy (Schweller 1999b).

It should be noted that, under the principles of international law, such spheres may appear deeply at odds with the widely held convention of state sovereignty. The United Nations Charter holds that all states are the supreme wielders of power, and no other state should have dominion over them (UN Charter). Outside of these legal constraints, there exists the reality of international politics and the inevitable exercise of power. Thus, spheres of influence are informal arrangements, in the sense that there is influence, but not direct governance. Spheres of influence are, therefore, not empires or colonizers because the sovereignty of the target states remains intact. Despite enduring a considerable amount of pressure, states of interest retain their right of self-governance.

**The Role of Spheres of Influence in Russian Grand Strategy**

Before examining the role that spheres of influence play in current Russian grand strategy, we must first define the term grand strategy. B. H. Liddell Hart states that “The role of grand strategy is to coordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations, towards the attainment of the political object of the war – the goal defined by fundamental policy” (Hart 1941). Barry Posen (1984) defines grand strategy as a state’s theory about how it can best cause security for itself. I use the term to mean a long-term and comprehensive plan that utilizes a wide variety of state resources towards the fulfillment of a central goal. The
compilation of shorter-term, smaller tactical decisions should coalesce to support a state’s grand strategy.

Clausewitz acknowledges that policy considerations which may seem erratic are actually based on longer term goals inherent in a state’s grand strategy (Clausewitz 1832). This might explain why Russia would loan millions to a Central Asian state, despite no hope of that state ever paying it back. In fact, many Kremlin foreign policies that some scholars have deemed “erratic” (Mankoff 2009) can actually fit quite cozily within Russia’s grand strategy. If a defining characteristic of grand strategy is the consistent devotion of all policies to a singular goal, I argue that such a situation can be seen in Russia’s pursuit of a sphere of influence.

The extent to which the Kremlin has a clear grand strategy has been a topic of debate. Many point to the bureaucratic politics model and presence of competing interests to support the idea of a lack of a coherent grand strategy (Bennett 1999), but this appears contradictory to the notion that Russia maintains a strict power vertical of executive authority (Monaghan 2013, Ledyaev 2008). Because of this concentration of executive power, it seems that the trifles of bureaucratic politics would not significantly detract from the Kremlin’s adherence to grand strategy. In fact, some scholars insist that Russian foreign policy is simply dictated from the highest levels of the Kremlin (Monaghan 2014).

The presence of a grand strategy is reflected in both policy and rhetoric. In 2009, former President Medvedev released the National Security Strategy to 2020, in which he called for a cohesive grand strategy by announcing that “strategic planning is the most important factor in the development of this country and the provision of national security for it” (Medvedev 2009). This document highlights the importance of a unified governmental approach, and the “transformation of the Russian Federation into one of the leading powers in terms of influence on world
processes” (Medvedev 2009). The strategy also calls NATO’s encroachment towards Russian borders unacceptable, thereby reflecting a balance of power mentality to the sphere of influence.

This statement, combined with the assertion that Russian troops are necessary to “promote strategic stability and partnership abroad,” (Medvedev 2009) allude to the way in which Russia views itself as a great power. Neil Macfarlane (2009) notes that “Russia’s determination to regain control over the former Soviet Union is driven, in part, by a need to reestablish a sphere of political influence befitting a great power status.” In fact, following his country’s 2008 conflict with Georgia, Medvedev publicly denounced the unipolar world and claimed a sphere of influence, including, but not restricted, to its border states (Medvedev 2008). More recently, President Putin defended the right of the Kremlin to protect Russian interests in the Near Abroad, particularly when it involved ethnic Russians (Putin 2014).

Such rhetoric is bolstered by action, as Russian involvement across the Near Abroad demonstrates. Nikolay Kozhanov notes, “Russian support for Damascus, close relations with Tehran, and rapprochement with Egypt are presented as the restoration of the Kremlin’s influence that was lost after 1991” (Kozhanov 2015). Similar instances of a Russian sphere of influence abound: the 2008 annexation of South Ossetia and Abkhazia from Georgia; massing of troops on the border of Transdnistria (combined with acknowledgment of the breakaway states independence); mediation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict; military installments in Kazakhstan, Armenia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Belarus; considerable aid to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan; abundance of energy projects in Central Asia and Turkey; territorial dispute with Japan over the Kiril Islands; and many other foreign policies indicate that Russia plans to maintain a certain degree of control over its neighbors.
Russia maintains close political ties with the leaders of former Soviet states, especially, Belarus and Kazakhstan. Economically, Russia has tried to invigorate the Eurasian Economic Union to facilitate trade within the sphere. Russia has also sought to strengthen the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) by running joint military exercises and updating its unified command structure (Aggarwal & Govella 2011). The maintenance of this sphere is largely orchestrated by Russian energy supply and foreign direct investment in energy projects (Mankoff 2009). In this way, Russia can coerce other states to adhere to its will. Additional tools include: arms trading, backing of pro-Russia political parties/candidates, civil nuclear assistance, joint military exercises, and many others.

The Kremlin is even looking beyond the area of the former Soviet Union to Eastern Europe writ large. In an effort to maintain influence in its former satellites, Russia has awarded Hungary nuclear power contracts and has successfully navigated a deal with Budapest to run one of their major gas pipeline projects- a move that explicitly defied blocking orders from Brussels (Traynor 2014). The Serbs are also embroiled in negotiations over energy projects with the Russians and have witnessed extensive diplomatic outreach by the Kremlin.

Thus, it seems clear that Russia is, indeed, pursuing a sphere of influence as a major part of its grand strategy. In this way, the Kremlin uses its sphere of influence as a primary tool for its grand strategy of resuming great power status. The way in which it compiles this sphere informs us of the types of states that are most important to the Kremlin. By assessing the characteristics of states that are accepted into the Kremlin’s sphere of influence, we can understand what is most important to Russia in its attempt to reclaim its great power status. I hypothesize that the determination of where this sphere is extended can be largely explained by two factors: historical legacy and geostrategic significance. These factors represent the tendency for collapsed powers
to hold onto their lost territories against rational calculations, and on the other hand, the revisionist aim of balancing power and amassing influence in strategic areas. Additionally, these factors represent two strains of political thought: the status and identity of constructivism and the power and influence of realism.

**Power Transition Theory & Spheres of Influence**

Now that we have firmly established that spheres of influence are a driving force in Russian grand strategy, the next task is to understand why this is the case. It has already been noted that Russian grand strategy is centered on the idea of regaining its former great power status (Larson & Shevchenko 2010, Tsygankov 2005). I hypothesize that the pursuit of a sphere of influence is one of the methods that Russia uses to accomplish this goal.

The reign of Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union saw Russia as one the largest and longest-serving empires, but the fall of the Soviet Union ushered in an era of distress for the Kremlin. Perhaps it is a result of so few cases, but little has been written on the attempted rebuilding of fallen great powers. Nevertheless, the interests and actions of these former superpowers inform the shape of the international system. By assessing Russian grand strategy, this research provides a window into the behavior of those states which were formerly status quo, but are now revisionist- a rare phenomenon in international politics and, as such, a hole in the literature.

Macdonald & Parent (2011) discuss the strategy of retrenchment in declining states, but there is a dearth of research detailing those states that are clawing their way back up the great power ladder. After hitting rock bottom in the early 1990’s, Russia is, indeed, on the rebound.
with its growing economy and geopolitical influence. The obvious problem in uncovering previous research on the subject is that most fallen great powers don’t get back up. The Ottoman, Roman, and Byzantine Empires didn’t exactly bounce back, leaving the British and French Empires as cases. Neither of these fits the situation of Russia, as Russia was never a colonizer.

An analysis of the colonizers shows that they tended to retain those territories in which there was historical and cultural attachment, particularly when there were large numbers of ethnic persons in the area (MacDonald & Parent 2011). Some scholars assert that decolonization can be seen more as a transition from formal to informal colonial control (MacDonald & Parent 2011). The Peaceful Transition Problem (Carr 1964) describes the potential for declining states to enter into conflict with their successors, a theory that may be depicted in the Russia-U.S. tension. This problem could explain why Russia is so intent on countering Western incursion into former Eastern Bloc countries.

In terms of power-transition theory, Russia/USSR has transitioned from being a status quo state during the Cold War to being a revisionist state in the post-Cold War era. Revisionist states view the current system as a security threat, and seek to redistribute influence – often by means of colonial or territorial acquisition (Carr 1964). Status quo states, on the other hand, prefer to keep the international system as it is- presumably because they stand to gain from the current situation (Shuman 1933). During the Cold War, the USSR was content with bipolarity and its superpower status, clearly defining itself as a status quo state. However, following its fall, Russia was no longer content with its role on the international stage, and became a revisionist state.

Rising states are revisionist by their very nature. In the early 1990s, however, Russia lacked the capability to act on its new interests. Rynning and Ringsmoe (2008) describe how,
according to the power-transition version of realism, a static set of interests— the desire to establish a great power’s sphere of influence—interacts with changing relative capabilities to give a state opportunities to challenge the current power structure. Lemke (2002) adds to power transition theory to note that each region contains its own great and small powers. Now that Russia has recovered from the shock of the 1990s, it has both the interests and capability to be a great power.

How can we be sure that Russia really is revisionist? What if they are actually satisfied with their current role in the world? Gilpin (1981) delineates a number of criteria to determine if a state is revisionist: 1) How often do they participate and abide by the rules of international organizations? 2) Has the actor established a clear preference for a radical redistribution of material power in the international system? Is the actor’s behavior aimed at realizing such a redistribution, including the use of military force? Russia routinely flouts international laws and norms, as evidenced by its annexation of Ukraine and invasion of Georgia. Furthermore, Russia has actively sought to counter U.S. hegemony, and alter the current international system to create room for it as a rising power.

Other major power states such as China and India appear to more or less accept the current structure. China is an active participant in international organizations, and generally abides by its laws and norms (Johnston 2009). While it is a growing power and certainly has incursions into the South China Sea, Beijing does not overtly threaten to counter the hegemony of the United States (Johnston 2009). India, too, seems to lack revisionist aims (Baldev & Paul 2003). Both countries appear more interested in economic growth than political power (Baldev & Paul 2003).
While Russia is no longer a superpower, its permanent seat on the UN Security Council, nuclear weapon arsenal, land mass, and plethora of energy resources presents a strong case for it to still be considered a great power. Internally, Russia still views itself as a great power and its identity is closely tied to the significant role it believes it plays on the international stage (Clunan 2009). We see evidence of Russia acting as a great power by its involvement in international affairs (Larson & Shevchenko 2010), opposition to NATO expansion (Tsgankov 2012), and general pursuit of a sphere of influence befitting a great power (Macfarlane 2009).

Despite such improvement from the immediate post-Cold War years, Russia is still overshooting its means. It has the resources to act on some of its revisionist goals, but it does not have the capabilities of the old Soviet Union. For this reason, it is sometimes over-ambitious in its revisionist efforts, particularly when it comes to extending a sphere of influence. For example, the CSTO was founded in the hopes of countering NATO, but has since become a pale imitation. The alliance lacks coordination and strength, and has dropped several members since its initiation (Aggarwal & Govella 2011). This overshooting lends credence to the historical legacy variable because Russia behaves as though it deserves its old influence, even though it isn’t nearly the power that once maintained that influence.

Spheres of Influence as Tools of Great Power Politics

Clearly Russia’s revisionist efforts rely heavily on the maintenance of its sphere of influence. Depending on the way in which spheres of influence are created, they can represent a realist and/or constructivist approach to the revisionist agenda. Later chapters will provide empirical evidence to determine the Kremlin’s approach.
The realist underpinnings of spheres of influence are apparent in their preference of relative power and zero-sum games over absolute power and positive-sum games, a willingness to use realpolitik methods, emphasis on power and confrontation, and effectiveness at balance of power. In an effort to prevent American hegemony, Russia is apparently countering through assembly of its own coalition in a classic balance of power strategy. Spheres of influence contribute to a similar aggregation of power as the alliances noted by Russett and Starr (1989) in their capability aggression model. This aggregation is most often used to counter threats larger than the individual, i.e., the Russian sphere of influence is used to counter the Western threat.

This effort is enabled by realpolitik tactics, such as the use of energy to coerce neighboring states, and indirect support of kindred candidates in neighboring elections (Larson & Shevchenko 2010). The concept of zero-sum is apparent in the idea that one state entrapped within the Russian sphere of influence is one less state lost to the West. On the same note, relative power seems to be more important in Russian foreign policy because of the emphasis on countering the control of other great powers. The quest to influence other states demonstrates the nature of power, and particularly great power politics (Mearsheimer 2001).

Realists assert that the perpetual conflict over power is enabled by the anarchic nature of the international system, in which no higher power stops Russia (or the other states) from taking what they want (Waltz 1979). The Russian National Security Strategy to 2020 outlines the idea that Russia needs to gain control in strategic regions now to deter and/or defend against threats later. Such a goal rings of defensive realism (Jervis 1978). While Russia has made some attempt
at using international organizations to pursue its goals, those organizations are quickly discarded when they do not adequately fulfill the Kremlin’s strategic interests.

This type of behavior appears to support realist claims that international organizations are at the mercy of the great powers (Mearsheimer 2001). In that vein, norms against outright power-grabbing, or territory-grabbing for that matter, appear to matter very little to the Kremlin.

Despite liberal institutionalists’ beliefs about the power of international organizations and norm cascades (Bull 1977; Finnemore & Sikkink 1998), Russia went ahead with the Georgian invasion and countless other foreign policies that were frowned upon by the international community.

Should we find that Russia pursues states based on geostrategic significance to aid them in their power aggregation, then we might conclude that the Kremlin is pursuing their grand strategy in more of a realist fashion, rather than a constructivist one.

I present an alternative approach to spheres of influence based on constructivism. According to this approach, the goal of a sphere remains the recoup of lost status, however the gain is social rather than material. This social gain is acquired in a different manner than that of the material gain. The manner of acquisition for constructivist spheres is focused more on states which share a common identity. In this way, Russia is able to recreate its past empire with the same composition as before. The constructivist sphere is less about power politics, and more about identity politics. Should we find that Russia pursues states based on historical legacy, then we might conclude that the Kremlin is pursuing their grand strategy in more of a constructivist fashion, rather than a realist one.

---

6 Push for World Trade Organization membership, bid for the G8
7 Abandoning the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe when asked to withdraw troops from Georgia and the breakaway Moldovan region of Transdniestria
The constructivist sphere may be a stepping stone to the acquisition of power through a realist sphere in the sense that Russia may feel more like its old self by reclaiming lost territory. Such a newfound sense of status may then propel the country towards more power-centric expansion because of international and domestic recognition of the fact that Russia has regained its past splendor. Conversely, the Kremlin may prefer to first build a sphere based on material strength in order to gain the capacity to later build a sphere based on restoring its historical legacy. In this sense, either type of sphere could be the end of the means or the means to an end. Of course, it is likely that the Kremlin is interested in building both spheres simultaneously because both historical legacy and power are important to it, and the two are not always mutually exclusive.

By assessing the use of spheres of influence as a tool in the “great power rebuilding toolkit”, this study adds to the literature on great power politics by exploring the rarely studied behavior of great powers that have not only collapsed, but are once again rising from the rubble. Russia fulfills this categorization because it was a superpower during bipolarity\(^8\), then a collapsed power upon the fall of the USSR, and is now seeking to rebuild its lost power. In this sense, it represents a super power, collapsed power, and rising power.

Few states can claim to go through all three of these stages, especially within the span of twenty years. Thus, this study provides new insights into the grand strategy of this type of state, and in particular the way that these states use spheres of influence to regain their former power. In doing so, it shows what such states value most as they seek to regain great power status. Additionally, this research weighs the contribution of realism versus constructivism as motivations for the Russian sphere of influence. It seeks to determine whether these states are

---

\(^8\) Technically this super power was the USSR, but Russia has clearly been deigned the successor state and was the origin state (Suny 2011).
primarily concerned with maximizing power through acquisition of geostrategic states, or regaining status and identity through reclaiming lost imperial appendages.
CHAPTER III: MOTIVATIONS FOR THE RUSSIAN SPHERE OF INFLUENCE

As previously discussed, a state may take a realist or constructivist approach towards rebuilding itself as a great power. I argue that this approach is manifested in the way in which that state constructs its sphere of influence. I assert that a realist approach is marked by a state seeking a sphere of influence that encompasses states which are geostrategically significant. Conversely, I assert that a constructivist approach is apparent when a sphere is sought based on states which represent an identity reminiscent of the former great power, regardless of whether those states are currently helpful in fulfilling a great power mandate. To determine the approach that Russia is using, I empirically assess the degree to which the states it is targeting are representative of either the geostrategic or legacy motivation. A full definition of the two motivations is outlined in the chapter below.

**Geostrategic Significance**

Geostrategic significance refers to the added value of a state based on its location. Importantly, geostrategic significance is unique to a particular state because of their specific situation. What is geostrategic to China may not be geostrategic to Russia because the two have different ambitions, values, and capabilities. Regimes that base their sphere of influence off of geostrategic significance are likely taking a realist approach to their revisionist agenda. This is clear because geostrategic states offer increases in power, indicating that the revisionist state is
basing its decisions off of realpolitik calculations. Spykman & Rollins (1939) were some of the earliest scholars to note that the geographic objectives of a state are the most persistent aims in its struggle for power. Scholars have used geostrategic salience as a predictor for numerous outcomes in international affairs, including contiguous rivalries (Rider & Owsiak 2015) and territorial conflict (Huth & Allee 2002). More specifically, Starr (2013) points to the value that some territory has in terms of its real resource value to people via arable land, potable water, minerals of value, access to seas or rivers, and other features of militarily strategic value.

The significance of geostrategic land has been used to examine territorial behavior of other major powers, such as the conflict between China and Taiwan (Wachman 2008). Wachman (2008) addresses the question of why Taiwan is worth fighting for by contrasting the two motivations of geostrategic significance and Taiwan’s contribution to Chinese identity. Wachman concludes that “reframing the conflict about Taiwan in terms of the literature on territorial disputes highlights the utility of thinking about the perceived tangible value of the land and its salience relative to other territory” (Wachman 2008). More generally, Diehl (1999) reviews the “‘intrinsic importance of territory,’” including such components as natural resources, control over populations, access to trade, and strategic value. This emphasis on military and economic strategy has underscored the importance of regions such as Central Asia to the Russian sphere of influence (Kleveman 2004). For this reason, I hypothesize that:

H1: Russia is more likely to pursue a sphere of influence in states which have geostrategic significance to it, as opposed to states which do not.
I operationalize this concept by identifying five geographic characteristics that provide value to a state. One such characteristic is that of natural resources. There are a variety of natural resources that could be valuable, such as: arable land, potable water, energy minerals, and/or precious stones. If these resources lie under the control of a weak government, more powerful states are likely to initiate conflict over these goods because they perceive there to be an opportunity to overpower the resource-endowed state. Such an endowment is likely to spawn competition between multiple powers, especially if those states are within reasonable geographic proximity. Even in the absence of such competition, a major power is likely to attempt to influence the resource-rich state in an effort to share in some of the spoils of the good. Therefore, it would make sense for a state to want a resource-rich country within their sphere of influence, so that they might increase their own power. This rationale rings of realpolitik foreign policy because access to resources is beneficial for absolute power, as well as relative power since these resources would no longer be available for competing states.

There has been considerable work done that illustrates the value of natural resources as demonstrated by their role in intra- and interstate conflict (Renner et.al. 1991; Brock 1991). Renner et al. (1991: 109) claim that “throughout human history, but particularly since the system of sovereign nation states, struggles over access to and control over natural resources … have been a root cause of tension and conflict.” Since natural resources are clearly worth fighting over, it would make sense that they are also worth investing in as a part of a sphere of influence. Since many resource-rich states struggle with governance (Collier & Hoeffler 2005; Homer-Dixon 1994, 1999), a more powerful intervening state can provide assistance in administrative issues related to the resource. Regardless of the assistance that an outside state can provide, Kim and Woods (2016) assert that “great powers have a strong incentive not to upset the relationship
with their client petrostate ally for both strategic and economic reasons.” States that are close allies with resource-rich countries, and/or can exert some control over their natural resources have economic and political leverage over other states in the international community.

The Kremlin is probably most interested in natural resources that are related to energy production, such as natural gas or oil. Acquisition of these goods would support the energy monopoly that Russia already maintains, and would allow it to perpetuate influence over states that depend on it for this energy (Stegen 2011). Blank (1995) treats energy as both an incentive and a tool, and situates it as a central tenet of Russia’s grand strategy. Similarly, Cohen (1996) compares today’s struggle for control over energy reserves and transit routes to the Great Game of the Russian Empire. Both time periods feature competition over territory as a strategic calculation.

Evidence of the use of energy as a political tool can be seen in Moscow’s manipulation of natural gas to Ukraine and Belarus. As Anita Orban (2008) notes, “whereas military might and nuclear weapons formed the core of Soviet cold war power, since 1991 the Russian state has viewed its monopolistic control of Russia's energy resources as the core of its power now and for the future.” Since the Kremlin’s main industry is energy, control over other states’ natural gas and oil reserves would significantly boost Russia’s economy.

These natural resources are meaningless if they cannot be transferred, therefore, states for which energy or other goods are transferred are also geostrategic. This is especially true if there is no viable alternative to that specific transit area, because of geographical or political constraints. Transit states are also highly relevant in situations where the good being transited is particularly valuable, or the market awaiting the good is especially large/wealthy. By acquiring a transit state within their sphere, more powerful states are able to monopolize the provision of that
good and manipulate those who depend on it. In an absolute power sense, states which have some control over transit routes are able to safeguard their own provision and receipt of goods, ensuring that no other state can affect their sale/purchase and enabling their economy to reap the full rewards of the good.

Erickson (1999) alludes to pipeline politics and comments that “siting pipelines for the export of oil and gas from Baku [Azerbaijan] not only has the potential to work major geopolitical change, but is being deliberately designed to do so.” Examples of transit routes include proximity to shipping lanes, the chokes of narrow straits, pipelines, and other passages that are frequented by heavy trafficking of valuable goods. More specifically, other scholars acknowledge Russia’s goal to control the flow of energy supplies by insuring that the only option for natural gas and oil transit is through Russian-controlled pipelines (Cohen 1996). Cohen (1996) further notes that Russia is establishing a sphere of influence in the process of managing access to these energy reserves.

Garver (2006) highlights the important role that transit routes can play in great power foreign policy by examining the Chinese case of overland transportation links with Central, Southwest and South Asia. He notes how new lines of transportation will be bearers of Chinese influence to Central, Southwest and South Asia, and that trade flows will promote dependency on Beijing from the regions to its west (Garver 2006). Of particular interest to Russia are the countries with pipelines through which flow its sustenance of oil and natural gas. Should this flow be interrupted, it would cost Moscow an inordinate amount of money and could disrupt its influence over the customers who depend on the Kremlin’s supply. For this reason, the Caucasus and Central Asia have been touted as geographically significant to the Kremlin’s grand strategy (Hauner 1990).
Access to the sea is important for transit routes, but it can also be important for naval activities. For this reason, access to warm water ports is another characteristic that make a state geostrategic. As we have already discussed, water is significant for its facilitation of trade. Landlocked countries with no sea port are at a disadvantage because they are limited in their means of transport, which is likely to affect their customer/supplier relationships. The harm to customer relationships is not only economic, but also political in its implications for stymying levers of coercion. These widespread impacts of sea lanes are often responsible for maintaining and/or shifting the international balance of power (Blunden 2012). With the onset of modern technology that allows ships to move through frozen water, the Arctic has become the new battleground for shipping lanes.

Blunden (2012) notes that “where the merchant fleets go, navies will shortly follow.” Without access to the ocean, states will be limited in their projection of military power and will have less opportunity to engage in military exercises and utilize a full array of military weapons (Mahan 1890). States that border on mostly frozen water in the far North or South are essentially treated as landlocked because of the difficulty associated with breaking through ice. We can see the importance of warm water ports to Russia based on their annexation of Crimea- a move some attribute to Moscow’s desire to maintain its naval base at Sevastopol (Orr 2014). The Russian enclave of Kaliningrad is yet another example of Kremlin efforts to maintain a sea port, not only for their Baltic Naval fleet, but also for trading purposes (Hauner 1990).

In addition to positioning of naval bases, the opportunity to establish land-based military installations is another consideration for state inclusion within the sphere. Thus, a state’s proximity to relevant conflict may make it geostrategic, especially in those states that can provide military access that would otherwise be difficult to come by because of natural or
political barriers. For Russia, one might imagine that the relevant conflicts include: unrest in the Caucasus, Afghanistan, and Syria. Domestic terrorism in the northern Caucasus has long plagued Russia and has threatened to destabilize the country’s post-Soviet unity. Given the Islamic fundamentalist undertones of the rebellion, many Kremlin officials are concerned with the spread of Muslim extremist violence to the region (Moore & Tumelty 2008). As such, Russia has amped up its efforts at severing the coordination of Islamic terrorist groups in the Middle East with those in the Caucasus.

These efforts include military positioning near the trouble spots in the Caucasus, and also directly targeting the root of the problem in the Middle Eastern countries that spawn foreign fighters. Page (1994) comments on the stationing of troops in Tajikistan to provide a bulwark against Islamic fundamentalism. Other reasons for positioning of Russian troops in Central Asia include the need to keep watch on the civil unrest in the Russian Caucasus via Armenia and Azerbaijan. Russia’s latest foray into Syria is explained by Brown (2017) as the need to reassert itself in the larger military conflicts of the time period. While these scholars have provided security rationales for isolated acts of Russian intervention, Averre (2009) provides a more comprehensive explanation by comparing Moscow’s aim to that of Brussels—to shape its external environment by establishing stable and friendly states on its periphery as a prerequisite for security.

Even the anticipation of violent conflict may be enough to warrant inclusion, especially when a given state’s stability is directly related to the security of the intervening state. Where violence threatens to spill into another state, that state may wish to preempt unrest by controlling the political scenario. A concerned state may also find it in their best interest to have military positioned nearby to address the issue should it erupt. Thus, neighboring states can be just as
geostrategic as the states of actual unrest, and are probably more viable options for military placement. This is particularly true if such unrest could foment terrorism, as it has in the Caucasus.

The opportunity to launch non-traditional military installments may also provide sufficient justification to include a state within the sphere. These efforts might include the deployment of border patrols to halt trafficking issues that are disruptive to a state’s domestic population. Kim (2013) acknowledges that Russia’s interest in Central Asia is partly because of the Kremlin’s investment in halting the narcotics trade that stems from Afghanistan. An intervening state could be more interested in the economic side of military affairs. Russia maintains one of the most robust military-industrial complexes, and is likely to appreciate an opportunity to increase its sales to periphery states. Once a state has been consolidated within the Kremlin’s sphere, Moscow will likely become its lead supplier above those of other interested states. This sales relationship has been identified by Kim (2013) as one of the reasons that Moscow is focused on Central Asia.

The importance of geography in foreign policy has highlighted the need to assert influence in areas that check the power of other great powers (Spykman 1942; Strausz-Hupe 1942, etc.). Thus, I hypothesize that Russia will exert influence in states which are buffer zones between other great powers as a classic balance of power statement. These states provide a leverage point or window to where another great power has dominance in order to provide Russian representation. These strategic points push the boundaries of the sphere outwards to encompass the maximum amount of territory and resources. Such points also provide for a quick response in times of conflict and demonstrate to the rest of the world that Russian interests are involved in that region.
One aspect of this variable that should be carefully considered is the extent to which another power has already made advances towards a particular state, particularly if that state is Western. According to scholar Dmitri Trenin, “the former imperial borderlands of Russia are deemed to be both elements of its power center and a cushion to protect Russia itself from undesirable encroachments by other great powers” (Trenin 2009). NATO, in particular, is considered a serious threat, and has fed the historical fear of the Baltic region being used as a base for intervention from the West (Mandelbaum 1995). When encroachment is threatened, Russia will likely take steps to consolidate influence in the border states in an effort to bulwark against penetration by other great powers.

In *The Grand Chessboard*, Zbigniew Brzezinski (1997) identifies the three grand imperatives of imperial geostrategy as: preventing collusion and maintaining security dependence among the vassals, maintaining transit routes, and keeping enemies at bay. These imperatives are largely captured in my conceptualization of the geostrategic variable. To measure geostrategic significance, I use a measure similar to that of Huth & Allee’s Territorial Claims Data (2002) of binary variables of strategic and economic value over country-years.

In conflict literature, Paul Huth (1996) posits that challengers are less likely to relinquish their claims if the territory is of geostrategic importance. He defines geostrategic territory to include land that offers military advantage, transit routes, and/or natural resources- thereby encapsulating the aforementioned categories, except for the buffer state category. To account for the buffer states, I use my own indicator for whether or not the state is a member of NATO or the EU. The other categories are coded dichotomously as having plentiful reserves of fossil fuels, being adjacent to current conflicts that Russia is embroiled in, having a warm water port, or
being located along a pipeline route. To measure geostrategic significance, I created a simple additive scale from the five factors to represent one comprehensive geostrategic measure.

This variable differs from the legacy variable because it advocates for an immediate attempt at exerting influence in geostrategic states, versus the mere potential for an eventual attempt at targeting these states. The legacy variable envisions an intermediate step of first establishing an identity reminiscent of past great power status before considering the outright pursuit of geostrategic states. The theory behind the legacy motivation is that, only with this identity firmly established, can a revisionist country hope to successfully influence geostrategic states. Thus, the two motivations differ in the way that the geostrategic variable: 1) minimizes the role of history in a revisionist agenda, 2) acknowledges time and resource constraints by opting to directly influence geostrategic states rather than first courting legacy states, and 3) de-emphasizes the importance of identity, as opposed to real power.

Legacy

The second potential motivation for the Russian sphere of influence is that of legacy. This variable captures states whose current territory was formerly a part of the Russian Empire or Soviet Union. I expect legacy to motivate the Russian sphere of influence as shown in the second hypothesis:

H2: Russia is more likely to pursue a sphere of influence in states where it has legacy territory, than in states where it does not.
I argue here that Moscow is reconstructing itself as a great power, less on the basis of real power, and more on the basis of imagined power. The days when the Kremlin could exert influence in the Near Abroad were days in which the Kremlin was a great power. By reasserting influence in the places where it was once dominant, Russia can relive those glory days. This argument takes a constructivist slant by asserting that the Kremlin seeks to regain its great power status by rebuilding its past empire. The theory is that Moscow can regain lost ground by reconstructing its identity to match that of its more successful days. This identity may not necessarily reflect real power acquisitions, but is more symbolic in nature. Diehl (1999) acknowledges that symbolic aspects of territory, such as its history and relationship to group identity are important in assessing that state’s value. The group identity created by former Soviet states is one reminiscent of a great power. Starr (2013) comments on the way that, “territory provides an important component of group identity and becomes endowed with extraordinary symbolic importance to people.”

Kremlin leaders probably feel that exerting influence in legacy states sets them up both internally and externally to make more real power gains geostrategically (Oushakine 2009). Thus, this approach is more of a means to the end of acquiring power, rather than acquiring power outright (as evidenced in Figure 1). By rebuilding the current empire in a way that reflects the historically great Russia, other states will see them as the great power they once were. This image may encourage other states to acquiesce to the Kremlin’s demands for geostrategic territory, thereby enabling Moscow to fulfill its great power ambitions. Within Russia, the citizens and lawmakers may be more likely to regain confidence in their country and support its potentially tumultuous return to great power if they see a reflection of the former empire.
Acting in a way reminiscent of its zenith—even if such actions no longer translate directly into great power—will enable the Kremlin to regain its identity as a formidable state. With this identity intact, it will then be able to pursue a foreign policy that is advantageous for its current great power ambitions, such as pursuing geostrategic objectives. Without the intermediary step of recreating a great power identity, I argue that it will be difficult for any state to begin a revisionist agenda based solely on real power gains. As such, the exertion of influence in legacy states is an indirect, rather than direct path on a state’s revisionist course. This motivation does not presuppose that a revisionist state will ultimately pursue geostrategic territory. Exerting influence on legacy countries may be the end in and of itself for revisionists to create a great power identity, without an eventual need to pursue more hard power.

Figure 1: Legacy as a Conditioning Variable for Geostrategic Significance

Additional inspiration for the legacy pursuit is the prevention of a domino effect of influence loss. In 1990, many former Soviet or satellite states immediately looked to the West, and Russia lost most of its influence in surrounding countries. Following this reduction in influence, the Kremlin is likely eager to prevent further loss amongst former Soviet states. The composition of the USSR lent itself to fragmentation because of the policy of lumping differing ethnic groups into one state. Breakaways of ethnic enclaves followed the collapse of the USSR, resulting in independent states with independent foreign policies. The Kremlin is probably concerned about maintaining the integrity of the Russian state (particularly within the Caucasus) and feels that, should it lose influence in the post-Soviet space, it could also lose control over
portions of Russia-proper (Suny 1993). Such breakaways would stymie Moscow’s chances of returning to great power status.

The existence of former Soviet republics as independent states is a constant reminder of the fall of the USSR and reordering of the world system. As such, the Kremlin is likely to want to limit the impact of that reminder by at least maintaining influence in those states. This foreign policy is useful for adjusting the narrative and righting what was perceived by Moscow as unfortunate events of history, i.e., the triumph of the West over the USSR (Putin 2005). Such a tactic is also being used by other great powers, as evidenced by China’s efforts to right the wrongs of Western imperialism by reclaiming Taiwan (Wachman 2008).

According to Wachman (2008), part of China’s motivation to reclaim Taiwan stems from an underlying desire to reunite the island with its historic homeland- a goal not unlike that of the Kremlin’s goal of political reintegration with post-Soviet states (Erickson 1999). In this way, “Taiwan is often represented as if its sole value to Beijing stems from the identity ascribed to it as an undifferentiated part of China, rather than as a particular part embedded in a geographical context that has specific physical attributes” (Wachman 2008). Such a view is reminiscent of the importance that post-Soviet space plays in Russian identity, as opposed to its geostrategic significance. Few would argue that the Kremlin is plotting to physically and legally retake the land it once had, however it is clear that Moscow does aim to regain its political influence in this region. Thus, the Taiwan example is not perfectly applicable, but is relevant in terms of the motivations behind foreign policy towards former lands.

States of the former Soviet Union are so paramount to Russian foreign policy that the abbreviation “FSU” (former Soviet Union) is a ubiquitous term, sometimes substituted by the
label “Near Abroad.” The fact that this area receives its own unique foreign policy\(^9\) is significant in its own right, let alone the fact that such policies are often laced with neo-imperialist overtones (Erickson 1999). Kremlin officials have made it clear that their 'vital interests' include 'special rights and responsibilities' in the geopolitical space of the FSU (Erickson 1999). These comments, combined with outright claims that priority should lie with FSU countries because they are Russia’s vital interests and immediate security concerns (Erickson 1999) lead one to believe that Russia’s strategy for regaining its great power status lies in the reassertion of influence in its Near Abroad.

Some Russians insist that post-Soviet space must remain a closed geopolitical preserve (Erickson 1999). Gachechiladze (2002) notes that the Kremlin considers all post-Soviet territory to be in their sphere, and that encroachment into this territory by other major powers is intolerable. Henry Kissinger claims that Russia's 'dominant geopolitical thrust' is essentially the assertion of 'great power' status designed to restore Moscow's pre-eminence in territories formerly under its control. In Dmitri Trenin’s models of explaining Russian foreign policy, he offers the “Restoration Model” as the Kremlin’s intention to restore lands that the Russian Empire lost in the 1918 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (Trenin 2001). Some scholars go back even further to suggest that Russia’s ideology since Peter the Great has been to unify the Eurasian landmass (Trenin 2001).

Some scholars view Russian foreign policy as mostly an effort to regain former Soviet or Russian imperial territory (Piotrowski 2001). Piotrowski (2001) asserts that “the key to understanding Moscow’s present security policy lies in Russia’s historical context” and that “its identity is tied to decisions about the geopolitical orientation of post-Soviet state policy.”

\(^9\) Including a Foreign Ministry bureau devoted solely to this region
Furthermore, he notes that “the Russian equivalent of the Monroe Doctrine is securing an exclusive zone of influence over the whole area of the CIS” (Piotrowski 2001). The CIS is, of course, composed entirely of former Soviet states.

Many Russian citizens, including policy-makers, view themselves as former Soviets just as much as they see themselves as Russians (Likhacheva & Makarova 2015). As such, these people feel a shared identity with other former Soviets across Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Instead of being divided by nationality, these Russians feel a sense of belonging with former Soviet citizens that share their history, language, political culture, and cuisine. People bound by the Soviet Union under the same leadership, laws, and national unity for many decades do not simply cease to feel connected. In a country where national pride is as paramount as it was in the Soviet Union, it is highly probably that identity will continue. The achievements and struggles that Soviet citizens underwent is forever ingrained in their psyche and unites them as former Soviets. This identity causes Russian policy-makers to favor cooperation with those countries who share(d) Soviet identity (Likhacheva & Makarova 2015).

In fact, the legacy variable highlights the fact that the Russian sphere of influence looks quite similar to maps of both the Soviet Union and Imperial Russia. Stan Rynning argues that “the state security elite, out of which Vladimir Putin emerged, charted a new course for Russia once it gained the reins of power, but it was a course rooted in the history of the state, not an improvised response to 1990 diplomacy” (Rynning 2015). The future of the Russian Federation is inextricably tied to its past. Its identity and security interests are consumed by its desire to regain the influence it had during the previous three centuries (Clunan 2009). As Dmitri Trenin notes, “‘Soviet,’ ‘imperial,’ and ‘tsarist’ denote three epochs of the historical Russian state, not three different states” (Trenin 2009).
I operationalize this variable by dichotomously coding whether or not any portion of a state’s current territory was formerly a part of the Russian Empire or USSR. At first thought, it may seem difficult to separate legacy from other qualities that these states may be more likely to embody by virtue of being legacies. These qualities—Russophile populations, ease of interaction due to established institutional remnants, autocracies, geographically proximate, and weak capacities—may instead be the drivers of the Kremlin’s behavior. Those qualities that can be statistically controlled for will be, but there is an implicit understanding that some underlying characteristics will remain and these characteristics will be wrapped into the variable as a whole.

**Ethnicity**

While I put forth the two previously stated motivations, the prevailing refrain from the Kremlin and other pundits is that Russia’s sphere of influence is dictated by the existence of ethnic Russians living in the states at hand (Putin 2015). The reasoning behind this claim is that the Kremlin feels the need to ensure ethnic Russians are protected overseas (Putin 2014). Moscow avers that the best way to accomplish this goal is to make the Russian presence felt in these states so that foreign governments will have cause to safeguard the rights of ethnic Russians living within their borders (Dunn & Bobick 2014).

By the turn of the century there were approximately 26 million Russians settled in the Near Abroad (Erickson 1999). While many of those have since emigrated back to Russia, the plight for those that remain abroad is often undesirable. Backlash from the Soviet era resulted in a wave of nationalism within many former Soviet states (Smith 1998). Anger over previous cultural subordination has propelled the dominant ethnic groups to reassert themselves at the
Kremlin officials believe that this reassertion has taken the form of discriminatory policies regarding hiring practices, citizenship restrictions, and language requirements (Porter & Saivetz 1994). Political instability and deteriorating economic conditions have fueled these nativist sentiment, especially in those post-Soviet countries that were hardest hit after the fall of the USSR (Menon 1995).

These purportedly discriminatory policies have propelled the Kremlin to intervene on behalf of the Russian diaspora, as demonstrated by Igor Zvelov’s (2008) call to action that “Russians living outside Russia constitute a category of people that, under Russian law, can and should be protected by the Russian state.” Defining an ethnic Russian is clearly the next logical step in the diaspora defense. Conveniently, the law “On State Policy of the Russian Federation with respect to Compatriots Abroad” (Russian Federation 1999) provides just a definition by claiming that compatriots are “people living in other states deriving from some ethnicity that has historically resided in Russia.” The law further includes people who have “made a free choice to be spiritually, culturally and legally linked to the Russian Federation”, including those who have committed “an act of self-identification, reinforced by social or professional activity for the preservation of Russian language, the native languages of the peoples of the Russian Federation, or the development of Russian culture abroad” (Russian Federation 1999).

This vague definition of compatriot allows the Kremlin flexibility to intervene in a variety of circumstances, particularly on behalf of political, rather than humanitarian objectives. Dunn & Bobink (2014) argue that, “no matter what language it uses as justification, Russia intervenes on behalf of its compatriots in breakaway provinces, if and only if, doing so serves its goal of reestablishing the sphere of influence it lost in the 1990s.” To do so, both the diaspora
and Kremlin strive to amplify the perceived injustices towards ethnic Russians abroad in an
effort to justify intervention by the Russian state.

This justification comes in a form that is strikingly similar to the “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P) doctrine effused by the UN and US. R2P is a political doctrine that compels third party intervention in conflicts where the host country is unable to fulfill its responsibility to protect its citizens (Stahn 2007). In most cases, R2P situations occur when a state is either committing acts of atrocity against its own people or is turning a blind eye to such acts (Stahn 2007). According to Dunn & Bobink (2014), Putin has declared his attempts to reestablish the Soviet empire in Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova as mere exercises of R2P by comparing them to NATO intervention in Kosovo. Thus, R2P is not only a convenient excuse for the Kremlin, but is also a way to satirize US and UN policy.

R2P and the Russian definition of “ethnic Russians abroad” are both vague concepts that lend flexibility to political endeavors. James Rudolph (2014) claims that “Putin distorts R2P, but this is exactly the point: to distort the rhetoric of international humanitarian action to reveal the realpolitik at its core.” By claiming the same rationale for intervention, Putin not only proffers a viable excuse, but also places the Western world in a Catch-22. The West can either accept Russian intervention, or condemn it and risk simultaneously condemning the principle of R2P and its own foreign policy. The latter action paints Russia and the West in a similar neo-imperialist light, while seemingly accepting Russian aggression as a necessary foreign policy that the West also employs. Dunn & Bobink (2014) argue that Moscow’s annexation of Crimea has demonstrated that Russia, like the United States, has once again recaptured the superpower status that allows it to use international law as a means of securing strategic needs.
Evidence of the R2P excuse resides in several examples of Kremlin intervention into the former Soviet Union. Moldova was one of the first countries that Russia occupied in an effort to protect ethnic Russians. The separatist region of Transnistria contains the Russian diaspora in Moldova, and has been subject to military support from Moscow since 1992. Former Russian Deputy Prime Minister, Dmitri Rogozin made clear the Russian prerogative to defend ethnic Russians abroad when he commented that “any action taken by Moldova or Ukraine to hinder the free passage of Transnistrians would be a direct threat to the security and constitutional freedom of 200,000 citizens of Russia permanently living in Transnistria” (Rogozin 2014). Similar concerns have been voiced in Georgia and Ukraine (Kramer 2015).

According to Putin, the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster that displaced tens of millions of compatriots outside Russian territory and infected Russia itself with ‘the epidemic of disintegration’. (Rynning 2015). This concern is publicly stated in the National Security Strategy to 2020 and the Foreign Policy Concept of 2009, which call for the protection of the rights and interests of Russian citizens abroad. Sergei Stankevich, a political advisor to Yeltsin, commented that “the attitude toward the Russian population and the Russian heritage of this or that state is the most important criterion for Russia in deciding whether to assign the state in question to the category of friend” (1992). Lo (2004) blasted this rationale as an excuse for intervention, but offered no real reason for which the ethnic card needed to be used as an excuse.

Not only is Russian intervention popular amongst the diaspora, but it is also well-received at home. The fact that the Kremlin is demonstrating great effort to support Russians outside the Russian Federation gives hope to its citizens within the border that their government will protect them. This is especially important because of the diminished government capacity
following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the realization that the government could not provide for its citizens. Thus, the projection of Russian might and seemingly devout interest in its citizens, is exactly what the Russian populous needs to support its government. This sentiment is highlighted by Dunn & Bobink (2014): “Putin articulates a national vision to an otherwise disoriented post-Soviet population, one that for many reasons is often nostalgic for the Soviet past (Klumbyté 2010; Oushakine 2009; Ries 2009; Szmagalska-Follis 2008).”

While the intentions of the diaspora protection argument are dubious, the empirical question of whether the presence of ethnic Russians drives Moscow’s sphere of influence remains, and will be examined in later chapters. Perhaps the motives are indeed based more on pleasing domestic constituencies, or maybe the presence of the diaspora simply provides a better opportunity for the sphere by enabling a receptive audience. Surely, however, there is overlap between the ethnic excuse and the geostrategic and legacy motivations.

Most of the Russian diaspora lives in post-Soviet states, so it can be difficult to untangle the legacy and ethnic defense motivations. In fact, the ethnic variable requires the legacy variable, as there are no observations with ethnic Russians that are not also legacies of the former USSR. It should, however, be noted that there are many states which are legacies, but which lack ethnic Russians as a percentage of their population. Thus, legacy is a necessary, but insufficient condition for ethnic Russians as a percentage of the population.

The expansive concentration of ethnic Russians in post-Soviet space is a reminder of how expansive the USSR and Russian Empire once were, thus the protection of this diaspora is also a protection of the former great power identity. The ability to extend influence over states with large Russian populations shows an ability to emit influence where the Russian borders were once extended. The Kremlin may consider any state with a large percentage of ethnic Russians as
a legacy state, thus protecting ethnic Russians abroad can be seen as protecting the Russian legacy. Melvin (1995) notes that “as well as providing a justification for its external policies, the creation of a Russian diaspora also offered Russia a new identity as a historic homeland for Russian communities abroad.” The Russian diaspora represents Russian territory in a social, rather than physical sense and is perhaps seen as needing to be protected in the same way as legacy territory. As such, the protection of ethnic Russians abroad contributes to Moscow’s identity as a great power, capable of exerting influence to places it once controlled.

The ethnic defense can also relate to the geostrategic motivation. There exists some overlap between geostrategic states and the Russian diaspora, though not quite to the extent as the overlap of legacy states and the diaspora. One could argue that land on which many ethnic Russians live is, by its very nature, geostrategic land. Instead of natural resources, these states have social resources that may be able to produce political results for the Kremlin through mobilization. Diehl (1999) notes that territory is salient based on the shared ethnicity of the people living on it. Additionally, states which host the Russian diaspora are often states which border rival powers (Latvia) or are near relevant conflicts (Tajikistan).

In summary, I expect the ethnic argument to be mostly a justification for aggressive foreign policy that the Kremlin pursues for reasons other than protection of the diaspora. As Melvin (1995) states:

“The transformation of the settler communities into a part of the Russian nation provided an important justification for beyond the borders of the Russian Federation. Protection of the diaspora became one of Russia’s vital national interests. This justification for Russian external action was also interwoven with ideas about Russia’s status in the international community: it’s
objective national interests outside the Russian Federation made it a great power in world affairs.”

Here one can see how the Kremlin associates protection of the diaspora with both legacy and material interests in a way that furthers its quest for status as a great power. However, I assert that this ethnic explanation for Moscow’s behavior is window dressing for the deeper motivations I have already set out. The following empirical chapters show that Russia is prone to intervene in states which lack sizeable Russian ethnic groups, but fails to act in states where there are large numbers of ethnic Russians.

Some may question whether the two motivations that have been laid out are exhaustive, and even exclusive, in determining the Russian sphere of influence. There are several states which are geostrategic, but not legacies (Austria, Cyprus, Republic of Korea, and Turkey). There are also many states which are legacies, but are not very geostrategic (Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, Moldova, etc.). Conceptually, these variables differ wildly. While both variables are geographic in nature, they are not dependent on geography in the same way. Clearly, geostrategic significance is based on the current situation, while legacy is an historical variable. Geostrategic states offer a pragmatic way for a country to achieve its goals, while the legacy variable provides a constructivist approach to reshaping a country’s identity. This identity may be a means to help a revisionist country achieve the real power associated with geostrategy, or it may be an end in and of itself.

While it has already been shown that there is sufficient difference between the two motivations, there are situations in which the two may coexist- or at least appear to coexist. Many states share both geostrategic and legacy values, such as: Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Lithuania,
etc. There are also scenarios where both characteristics are claimed, but only one is the actual motivation. Wachman (2008) notes that “groups that desire to retain control over a territory for symbolic or historic reasons use some form of strategic and/or resource discourse as a means of backing up their claim and to give it wider appeal.” One might also expect the opposite to be true. Another perspective from which to view these two motivations is to consider how they might combine to make a state even more desirable than they would otherwise be (Wachman 2008).
CHAPTER IV: THE ETHNIC INTERACTION

The previous section conceptualized the two motivations that I hypothesize are behind the Kremlin’s expansion of its sphere of influence, as well as the motivation that the Russian government gives for the expansion. I note previously that my motivations may overlap with the ethnic justification from the Kremlin, but here I go further to assert that the extension of the sphere to states which have large numbers of ethnic Russians, as well as geostrategic and/or legacy characteristics, is not solely due to confounding variables and common exposure. Instead, I argue that there is a meaningful interaction between my hypothesized variables and the popular ethnic argument. This interaction highlights the conditioning of my hypothesized variables by opportunity for success— which is identified by ethnicity.

Thus, I argue that my two hypotheses are the primary motivations behind the sphere, but that these motivations are tempered by the likelihood of success faced by the Kremlin. In turn, the likelihood for success is gauged by the percentage of ethnic Russians in that territory. I believe that the percentage of ethnic Russians contributes heavily to the Kremlin’s likelihood for success because many audiences (domestic and international) believe the rhetoric that intervention on behalf of ethnic Russians is a legitimate motivation (Melvin 1995), despite the fact that I believe it is merely used as political cover for the two motivations I have already laid out. The assumption that the presence of ethnic Russians lends states to be more receptive to Kremlin advances, leading me to believe that Moscow will have an easier time intervening in countries with large percentages of ethnic Russians (see Figure 2).
Figure 2: Conditioning Effect of Ethnicity

This conclusion leads me to my third and fourth hypotheses:

H3: States which are geostrategically located AND have high percentages of ethnic Russians will be more likely to be subject to sphere of influence extension by the Kremlin than states which are geostrategic, but which lack large percentages of ethnic Russians.

H4: States which were formerly a part of the Russian Empire or USSR AND which also have high percentages of ethnic Russians will be more likely to be subject to sphere of influence extension by the Kremlin than those legacy states which lack large percentages of ethnic Russians.

The Ethnic Mechanism

There are many reasons to believe that Moscow will have an easier time intervening in countries with a large presence of ethnic Russians. The first is by assisting mobilization in the sense that having ethnic Russians on the ground will help to bring about desired action (Barrington, Herron, & Silver 2003). Secondly, Moscow can use the ethnic Russians as a political lever. Also, the Kremlin can ensure domestic funding because of the previously noted
domestic approval for intervention on behalf of minority Russians (Hagendoorn, Linssen, & Tumanov 2001). Finally, Russia can avoid international sanctions by using the responsibility to protect principle. This will lessen political and economic pressure from other states and international governmental organizations who may condemn what could otherwise be seen as breaches of state sovereignty.

A sizeable Russian diaspora allows for local mobilization in favor of Russian foreign policy in the target country. This population is a physical resource that is conveniently located within the state that the Kremlin may be interested in pursuing. Therefore, they can actively contribute to politics on the ground via political organization, and can also serve as information conduits between the Russian Federation and local state (Barrington, Herron, & Silver 2003). States such as Latvia maintain strong ties with Russian politicians and are still integrated into the Russian political structure; and are thereby able to mobilize in favor of Russian nationalism (Commercio 2011).

Of course, this mechanism is only relevant if such mobilization is dedicated to the same goals of Moscow in terms of sphere of influence extension. Unsurprisingly, diasporas tend to be more concerned with issues of nativization, rather than those explicitly relating to the sphere of influence. Often these issue areas overlap, but they may actually conflict. If a diaspora is too aggressive in its protesting of nativization policies, this may damage the host country’s relationship with Russia. In the event that the Russian Federation is acting in harmony with the diaspora, the two can work towards increasing the relationship of the two countries.

One way of increasing that relationship is by using displaced Russians as a political lever. Hagendoorn, Linssen, & Tumanov (2001) note that Moscow’s policy towards a state will affect the treatment of ethnic Russians within that state. The inverse might also be true in the sense that
the Kremlin can use its ethnic population abroad as a bargaining tool to accomplish other foreign policy goals. This bargaining has been used in the past by diplomacy over language and citizenship policies. In Kazakhstan, Russia has acquiesced to language policies that it originally found to be discriminatory towards ethnic Russians in accordance with further diplomacy on other issues (Melvin 1995). The Kremlin also continues to use its acceptance of citizenship restrictions for ethnic Russians in Estonia as a barometer for its larger foreign policy towards the state.

Another means by which the ethnicity justification reduces the cost of sphere of influence extension is through encouraging domestic support, where it might otherwise not be found. Public opinion shows that the Russian populace believes, and even encourages intervention on behalf of ethnic minorities (Hagendoorn, Linssen, & Tumanov 2001) As Farnham (2004) notes, “domestic politics frequently influences foreign policy through a process of decision-making that grows out of the decision-maker’s awareness of the requirements for effective action in the political context.” In this sense, one can ascertain that one of the major factors in a head of state’s decision-making is the extent to which a foreign policy will be palatable to a domestic audience. In fact, former US Secretary of State James Baker (1995) observed that “in a democracy any foreign policy that cannot attract a domestic political consensus will have difficulty succeeding.”

The burden of foreign intervention falls heavily on a country’s domestic population, and can include higher taxes, conscription, embargoes, etc. Due to this strain on every day citizens, the Russian public may be hesitant to support outright extension of the sphere solely for the purpose of restoring the homeland or gaining strategic resources. When framed in a way that promotes defense of ethnic Russians, such intervention becomes more appealing (Melvin 1995).
This justification goes beyond influencing everyday citizens, but also encourages the bureaucracy, legislatures, and other decision-makers to support the initiative. Without the support of officials and citizens, the action may face several obstacles, such as: inadequate funding, low morale, and inconsistent decision-making. These obstacles lower the likelihood of success for a given operation.

The international audience may also be more prone to condone intervention when it is framed within the diaspora protection context because it resembles the responsibility to protect (R2P) principle (Zakem, Saunders, & Antoun 2015). The acceptability of R2P has been previously explicated in Chapter 3, so here we will focus on how this acceptance eases the cost of action. The international community is often hostile to external intervention in the sovereignty of another state, unless presented through the R2P lens (Stahn 2007). Without the approval of the international community, an intervening state may face: sanctions (if breaking international law), embargoes, military responses, and/or general condemnation that reverberates to a domestic audience who can then enact further obstacles. In the event that the state is accused of human rights violations by an international non-governmental organization, it could incur serious economic costs (Barry, Clay, & Flynn 2012). Such condemnation could be widely dispersed because of news media reporting pressures on international non-governmental organizations to comment on alleged human rights violations (Hill, Moore, & Mukherjee 2013). All of these consequences increase the cost of an action, thereby decreasing the likelihood of that action’s success.

Conversely, international approval can decrease the cost of action by providing coalition support (militarily or monetarily) and/or general approval that reverberates to a domestic audience who can then provide further ease of action. Therefore, international approval can
increase the likelihood of an intervention’s success. For these reasons, most decision-makers consult international opinion for most of their actions (Haefele 2001).

**Decision-Making & Ethnicity**

Acting within the given political context is a crucial component to decision-making (Bennett 1981). In this sense, framing an action as favorable to the current political context is critical to the success of such action (Renshon & Renshon 2008). Thus, the Kremlin’s framing of the extension of their sphere as an effort to protect displaced Russians abroad is a way to increase the success of their actions. This particular method of framing is especially successful because it adheres to the acceptability principle, i.e., a foreign policy must be acceptable domestically and internationally if it is to be effective (Hilsman 1967). The ethnic justification appears to fit this requirement, and has thus led the Kremlin to believe that it is sufficient political cover (Dunn & Bobink 2014). The use of this political cover is necessary because acceptability is an integral part of the decision process, and must be addressed before the other attributes of an alternative can be seriously considered (Meltsner 1972). Hence, the interaction of ethnicity with the other attributes (geostrategic significance and legacy) is critical to the Kremlin’s decision to extend their sphere of influence to a given state.

Even if the protection of displaced Russians abroad is not Moscow’s major intention, their actions may give the perception that it is based on the ethnic composition of target states. Jervis (1976) laid the fundamental groundwork for the importance of perception in international relations by showing how decision-making is affected by cognitive constructions of actors actions and intentions in the international system. Since perception is inextricably tied to
strategic interaction (Lamborn 1997), it makes the political cover more believable when Moscow makes a conscientious effort to strategically target states which have large numbers of ethnic Russians. This is because perceptions can evoke normative obligation and can lead to situations where material gain can appear consistent with moral duty, as is the case with Russia gaining new states for its sphere under the auspice of protecting ethnic Russians (Herrmann & Shannon 2001). In this way, motives can bias perception (Herrmann & Shannon 2001).

Jervis (1976) also described the process of perception by illuminating the way decision makers learn from history. With this in mind, one can certainly see how Moscow has recognized that intervening in states which have large populations of ethnic Russians has been perceived (domestically and internationally) as a normative compulsion rather than mild colonization. As Levy (1994) demonstrates, states are capable of assessing the outcomes of past events and applying that knowledge to current events. when they have attempted to intervene in states with lower proportions of ethnic Russians (Dunn & Bobink 2014). It is, therefore, no surprise that Moscow has learned that extension to states with higher proportion of ethnic Russians are riper for success than states with lower proportions of ethnic Russians.

Rational choice theory touts the positive effect that opportunity of success has on decision-making (Buena de Mesquita 1980, Levy 1992, etc.), i.e., that actors will be more likely to act in situations that they believe will succeed than in situations where they do not believe that success is likely. In his seminal piece, Essence of Decision-Making, Graham Allison (1971) notes that actors will maximize their utility by choosing the alternative that provides the greatest amount of net benefits. To determine which alternative best maximizes utility, Greg Cashman (1993) comments on the need to analyze alternatives by considering consequences and effectiveness (costs and benefits), as well as probabilities associated with success.
From a rational choice standpoint, we know that actors seek events which have a high expected utility (Allison 1971), and therefore they seek events which have a high probability of success (Fearon 1994, Kim & Morrow 1992). Situations which have a high probability of success and low cost of action are better able to generate domestic legitimacy for foreign intervention (Vertzberger 1998). Bruce Buena de Mesquita (1980) laid the groundwork for the somewhat obvious theory that actors do not initiate serious feats of foreign policy if they do not expect to gain from doing so. Thus, rational choice theory implies that the Kremlin would seek states with high percentages of ethnic Russians because of these states’ high probability of success and high expected utility.

As mentioned in the preceding paragraph, one of the factors in determining utility maximization is cost (Cashman 1993). We have already discussed how ethnicity acts to lower the cost of action, thereby making states with ethnic Russians a more appealing option than states without ethnic Russians. Even when there exists a large ethnic Russian population, the political and economic costs involved in extending a sphere of influence can be quite steep (Larson & Shevchenko 2010). As shown by Riker (1996), actors will only pursue a high-cost option if the probability of success is also high. Therefore, Moscow would only be likely to engage in attempts which have a high probability of success, i.e., states with ethnic Russians.

The application of prospect theory to the conclusions achieved under a rational-choice and expected utility framework is useful in building a deductive model of decision-making (Berejikian 2002). Along this line, one can see how likelihood of success is a key determinant in the Kremlin’s decision to extend the sphere. With the natural gas boom and its military-industrial complex in full force, Russia has come a long way in its recovery from the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The stabilization of the government under Putin’s leadership and rising economy,
combine to create a gains frame for Russia. We know from prospect theory that actors in a gains frame are more risk averse than those in a losses frame (Tversky & Kahneman 1979, Berejikian 1997). Since it is in a gains frame, Russia will be even less likely to take risky endeavors and will focus on those states which have a higher degree of success. The importance of minimizing risk is especially relevant to foreign policy decision making because the stakes in the foreign policy arena tend to be high (Astorino-Courtois & Trusty 2000).

Interaction of Ethnicity

Given the aforementioned impact that the presence of a Russian diaspora has on Kremlin decision-making, I assert the ethnicity variable is relevant to the discussion of motivations behind the Russian sphere of influence. While I do not assert ethnicity as a primary motivation, in and of itself, I do believe that it conditions the primary motivations by means of tempering their effect through opportunity for success. This is not to say that I expect states with neither legacy nor geostrategic qualities, but with sizeable Russian ethnic populations, to be more prone to intervention. The motivation behind the intervention is still based on legacy or geostrategy, but ethnicity makes these motivations easier to achieve, and therefore more appealing. Thus, the ethnicity variable will only come into play in the presence of the other two primary variables.

Ethnicity, itself, does not increase the effect of either variable. Instead, it contributes to a latent variable: opportunity for success. I hypothesize that this latent variable will, in turn, increase or decrease the effect of each variable. The interactions of ethnicity with geostrategic significance and the interaction of ethnicity with legacy mean that geostrategic states which have larger populations of ethnic Russians (and legacy states with larger populations of ethnic
Russians) will be more likely to be included within the sphere than geostrategic (or legacy) states with lower populations of ethnic Russians.

This combination of geostrategic/legacy and ethnically Russian states speaks to the need to reconcile values that increase acceptability (and thus the likelihood of success) with other attributes (Farnham 2004). Such reconciliation could mean that a state which is quite geostrategic, but with no ethnic Russians, is less likely to be targeted than a state that is slightly less (but still relatively) geostrategic. This is because policies that are largely unacceptable are unlikely to succeed, and should be avoided even when doing so results in diminished utility of substantive values- such as geostrategic significance or legacy” (Farnham 2004).

One can look to the example of Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. Both are geostrategic and legacy states, but Tajikistan appears to be far lower on the Kremlin’s radar than Kazakhstan. As it turns out, Tajikistan has only .5% of their population as ethnic Russian, while almost a quarter of Kazakhstan is ethnically Russian. In neither of these cases can the difference be attributed to the primary motivations of legacy or geostrategic motivation, and from an observational stand one can note the impact that ethnicity appears to have. An empirical test of this hypothesis will be examined in Chapter 5.

Before concluding this chapter, it should be noted that while ethnicity increases the likelihood of success for Moscow vis a vis domestic and international audiences, one should also consider the effect on the states they are targeting. In this case, ethnicity may even have an inverse effect as it stirs tensions between the state’s ethnic minorities and majorities. The extent to which this statewide effect outweighs the political cover will determine the overall effect of ethnicity. In some situations, the likelihood of success may actually be worse because of spoilt relations between Russia and the host country regarding the ethnic Russian minorities. This is
particularly true if Moscow and the host country diverge dramatically over appropriate policies towards the displaced ethnic Russians.

Regardless of which way the causal arrow points, it is clear that ethnicity conditions the effect of the two main variables of interest. While geostrategic significance and legacy are the primary motivations, effective action requires a sufficient level of acceptability in support of proposed policies, (Kissinger 1964). That level of acceptability is largely provided by the extent to which ethnic Russians populate the target country. The following chapter will empirically assess this hypothesis.
CHAPTER V: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MOTIVATIONS

To test my hypotheses concerning the motivations behind the Kremlin’s sphere of influence, I rely mostly on quantitative analysis. This analysis encompasses observations of country-years in a time-series cross sectional format of countries eligible for inclusion within the sphere from 1995 until 2014, resulting in a sample size of 985 country-years.\textsuperscript{10} The time frame is such to provide for the Russian Federation to settle after the collapse of the Soviet Union and for internal turmoil to reach a manageable level that would befit effective governance. The study does not begin prior to 1995 because Russia was still reeling from collapse, and had not begun its recovery toward establishing itself as a great power once more.

I determined which countries were eligible for inclusion by selecting those states which were less than 1800 km from the Russian Federation border to border.\textsuperscript{11} This definition of the sample space results from careful conceptualization of the sphere of influence. In Chapter 2, I argue that a sphere of influence is partially defined by its geographical proximity to the initiating power and contiguity with other states in the sphere.

Since my main research question centers on where Moscow decides to extend its sphere of influence, the dependent variable is attempted extension of sphere of influence.\textsuperscript{12} This variable is solely concerned with the actions of the Russian Federation and not the behaviors of the target state. Such attempts at extension can take many forms, and may be cooperative or

\textsuperscript{10} 20 years times 51 countries, unbalanced panel due to breakup of Yugoslavia

\textsuperscript{11} For a more thorough definition of sphere extension, see Chapter 2
coercive in nature. The underlying principle of the influence must, however, demonstrate a superior-subordinate relationship in a way that exceeds general foreign relations. To capture this delicate concept, I rely on the Integrated Crisis Early Warning System (ICEWS) event history dataset from the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) and Office of Naval Research (ONR).

From this dataset, I pulled all the events that Russia enacted against countries within the sample space for a given year. These events range from “consulted head of state” to “invaded with military force.” I only included events which were initiated from the Russian government, rather than Russian citizens or other civil organizations. These events are coded by intensity using the Conflict and Mediation Event Observations (CAMEO) scale. Events range from a very intense negative event (-10) to a very intense positive event (10). The overall dependent variable is then calculated by adding the CAMEO absolute values of a country-year to form an interval level measurement. This sum tells us the total intensity of influence that Moscow enacted on a given country-year. Figure 3 below shows that this variable has a range from 0 to ~40,000. Except for a few outliers\(^\text{13}\), most country-years had an intensity of influence within the 0 to 500 range.

\(^\text{13}\) Ukraine in 2014 & 2015, Georgia in 2008, etc.
This measurement makes no a priori assumptions about the way that Russia exerts influence, in neither type nor intensity of action. I included all types of actions and all intensities in the sum, even if they seemed to be small gestures. Since I use the absolute value of intensity, I treat positive events the same as negative events. This is because I believe that both positive and negative tactics are suitable for influence, and did not want to prematurely inhibit the toolbox of the Kremlin. By allowing the inclusion of all types of actions, I do not restrict the behavior of the Russian government.

Different tactics may be available at different times and in different places, so I do not risk falsely constraining the sample. I anticipate that the appropriate mix of actions will naturally emerge along the states that are most intensely and frequently targeted. I plan to do a future study on the efficacy of sphere extension by analyzing the methods with which Moscow sought to influence other states. This study would assess the differences between positive and negative actions, along with the differences between action in different sectors (diplomatic, economic,
military, etc.) and at different levels of intensity. To maintain the focus of this research, I eschew any distinction amongst types of actions and concentrate on the targets, rather than the method of influence.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, I measure the first independent variable of geostrategic significance by creating an additive scale using the following five binary indicators: presence of natural resources, location along a transit route (pipelines), buffer state between the EU/NATO, presence of sea ports, and proximity to relevant conflict. The graphs below show the distribution of these geostrategic indicators across the observations.

The first indicator shows that there are slightly more resource-rich observations in the sample than there are non-resource rich states (Figure 4). Both categories of observations hover around 500.
The next indicator shows that there are approximately twice as many non-transit country-years in the sample as there are transit country-years (Figure 5).
Similarly, there are about twice as many country-years which are not buffers as there are country-years which are buffers between the EU and/or NATO (Figure 6).

Figure 7 demonstrates that there are about half as many observations which are non-ports, compared to the approximately six-hundred observations which do have access to the ocean.
Figure 8 shows that slightly more observations are non-conflict adjacent, as compared to those which are conflict-adjacent.
All of these binary individual indicators were summed to create the additive scale of geostrategic significance. The distribution of observations according to that scale is clearly skewed towards the less strategic side, as evidenced by Figure 9.

The other independent variable of primary interest is that of legacy as a former territory of the Soviet Union and/or Russian Empire, and it is coded on a binary scale. The sources for the geostrategic and legacy variables are all open-source. Figure 10 shows that about two-thirds of observations are non-legacies, while approximately a third are legacies.
The third motivation that I frame my hypotheses against is that of ethnicity. For this reason, I include percentage of ethnic Russians in a country-year as an additional independent variable. This information comes from the University of Illinois’ Cline Center for Democracy’s Composition of Religious and Ethnic Groups Project (CREG) data. The figure below shows that most of the observations contain less than 5% of ethnic Russians within their populations (Figure 11).
Chapter 4 is dedicated to the exploration of the interaction between geostrategic significance and ethnicity, as well as the interaction between legacy and ethnicity. Thus, both interaction terms are included in the model. I also include the lagged dependent variable as a control because of the effect that past extensions will likely have on future extensions.\textsuperscript{14} Since the subjects and variables of interest are largely time invariant, I use a random-effects linear model. The model uses the variables: legacy, ethnicity, geostrategic sum, and a one year lag of the dependent variable. As shown in Table 1 below, both legacy and the interaction between geostrategic sum and ethnicity are significant.

\textsuperscript{14} Lagged by one year
Table 1: Regression Results for Determinants of the Russian Sphere

|                          | Estimate  | Std. Error | t-value | Pr(>|t|)   | Significance |
|--------------------------|-----------|------------|---------|------------|--------------|
| (Intercept)              | 55.72606  | 91.16322   | 0.6113  | 0.5411654 |              |
| Ethnic                   | -910.8462 | 798.58902  | -1.1406 | 0.2543437 |              |
| Legacy                   | 172.95679 | 77.56396   | 2.2299  | 0.0259955 | *            |
| GS.Sum                   | 38.14507  | 32.7532    | 1.1646  | 0.244427  |              |
| lag(Event - 1)           | 0.77021   | 0.02564    | 30.039  | < 2.2e-16 | ***          |
| Ethnic:GS.Sum            | 14.57509  | 3.99675    | 3.6467  | 0.0002804 | ***          |
| Ethnic:Legacy            | 872.2695  | 799.84726  | 1.0905  | 0.2757565 |              |

Adj. R-Squared: 0.54631
F-statistic: 188.244 on 6 and 927 DF, p-value: < 2.22e-16

Substantive effects show that holding all other variables constant, legacies will face 173 more degrees of influence a year than states which are non-legacies, on average. This statistical significance is echoed in real world observation of the Armenian case. Armenia is an ideal plausibility probe for the legacy hypothesis because of its high degree of Russian influence, legacy as a Soviet state, and low percentage of ethnic Russians.

Armenia was a part of the Soviet Union and Russian Empire since 1828, but lacks a large percentage of ethnic Russians (less than or equal to 1% since 2000). As Grigas (2016) acknowledges, “there are few ethnic Russians in Armenia, but even states without ethnic Russians have been considered compatriots.” This empathy can be attributed to the lasting effects of Soviet heritage, and the idea that former Soviet citizens are still connected to one another. Collective Soviet memory in Armenia is evidenced by the popularity of Russian media, continued ties to other states in the former Soviet Union (including Russia), and overall sense of belonging to a larger Soviet culture (Laycock 2016). Some scholars (Larsen 2016) even argue that Armenian citizens and authorities have come to view their former imperial master as a protector, while others (Kurkchiyan 2006) acknowledge the institutional impacts of Soviet legacy on the media and transition towards democracy.
The Soviet legacy is not unidirectional, but can also be seen in lingering Russian attachment to Armenia and the underlying Soviet compatriotism. While the Soviet Union may have fallen, the Soviet identity lives on in Russia (Likhacheva & Makarova 2015). This identity causes Russian policy-makers to favor cooperation with those countries who share(d) Soviet identity (Likhacheva & Makarova 2015). Evidence for Russia’s continued sense of collective identity with Yerevan can be seen in the fact that the median event intensity for Armenia is 835, while the median for other potential sphere states is 245.

This discrepancy indicates the Kremlin’s active relations with Armenia, and inherent goal to maintain the state within its fold. Such observations are consistent with the idea that Armenia is widely perceived as one of Russia’s closest allies in the post-Soviet space and has been Moscow’s key partner in the South Caucasus since the collapse of the Soviet Union (Delcour 2014). The two countries are linked by close military cooperation, as well as substantial trade and migration flows. Over the past two decades, Armenia has been invited and taken part in all Russian-led regional initiatives in the post-Soviet area, including the Eurasian Economic Union. Pursuant to this customs union, Yerevan enjoys favorable trade terms with Moscow, foreign aid, and extensive investments. In addition, Armenia is employed in elaborate economic cooperation, especially in the energy arena. Russian companies have historically sold energy to Armenia at competitively low prices.

The Kremlin is a neutral, but active mediator between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the ongoing Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, despite proclaiming itself an Armenian ally. Through its mediator status, Moscow has been accused of perpetuating the conflict in an effort to keep both countries within its sphere of influence (Cornell 2017). The sustained need for Russian arms boosts Moscow’s economy, while the continual need for political guidance and troops stationed
within the country have helped the Kremlin solidify its presence in the region. The Russian military-industrial complex sells a great deal of weaponry to Armenia, and also keeps two military bases within the country. The two countries cooperate multilaterally within the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and in 2016, Putin signed a decree creating a joint Russian-Armenian military force to patrol Armenia’s entire land border. The decree includes a mutual defense clause, and will also allow Armenia to purchase Russian arms at domestic prices. The attention given to Armenia demonstrates the importance of the legacy motivation, and debunks the ethnic argument. This case reveals that even states with low numbers of ethnic Russians are targeted by the Kremlin. Additionally, the case shows that even non-geostrategic states are heavily targeted, so long as they are a legacy.

Returning to the statistical results, the geostrategic-ethnic interaction shows that in states with higher percentages of ethnic Russians, the effect of geostrategic significance is stronger. The effect of geostrategic significance on influence increases by about 15 units for every percentage increase in ethnic Russians. This means that geostrategic significance will be less relevant to countries with low percentages of ethnic Russians than in countries with higher percentages of ethnic Russians.

Ukraine is a real-world example of significance of the geostrategic and ethnic interaction in determining sphere extension. This case serves as a plausibility probe for the geostrategic*ethnic interaction, in terms of demonstrating how the effect of Ukraine is quite geostrategic, as it has ample natural resources, borders NATO & EU states, is proximal to relevant military conflicts, has a warm-water port, and is located along a pipeline. Ukraine also has a large number of ethnic Russians as a percentage of their population (1995-2014 average of 19%). As evident by the quantitative analysis, these two characteristics work in tandem to
increase the intensity with which Moscow attempts to exert its influence in the country (median event intensity of 2338, when population median is 245).

The geostrategic characteristics of the country make it more desirable than countries with similarly high percentages of ethnic Russians, but no geostrategic qualities (see Latvia below). Ukraine’s role as a buffer state between the EU and Russia is portrayed by the battle over Kiev’s membership into the EU Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement versus the Eurasian Economic Union, and Moscow’s subsequent coercive action when the country moved towards the former agreement. According to Allison (2014), this battle was a keystone in the normative, social, political, and economic division between Russia and the West and may be the underlying reason for the Russian decision to flout Ukrainian sovereignty in 2014. The outcome of the Ukraine battle could “permanently constrain Russian potential as a European regional power and, beyond this, could be used to challenge the legitimacy of the Russian political system” (Allison 2014). Clearly, Ukraine is quite strategic for Moscow’s geopolitical goal of countering Western encroachment.

In terms of being militarily strategic, Ukraine is also rather valuable. Putin made this clear in 2014 when he appealed to article 51 of the UN Charter’s self-defense clause by arguing that Russian forces based in Crimea and the Black Sea Fleet faced a direct threat to their security. The Black Sea Fleet is one of Russia’s largest naval bases, and serves as a strategic command center. The fleet was instrumental in quelling conflict during the 2008 Georgia War and periodic unrest in the Caucuses. In addition to operations in Russia’s southern breakaway republics, the Black Sea Fleet also participates in posturing exercises to keep Western forces in check. The fleet hosts several water-borne missiles and aircraft, that provide both tactical and strategic response. The location of the Black Sea makes it an ideal position to manage the ongoing crises
in the Middle East, from Libya to Israel-Palestine to Iraq and Syria. In addition to the navy, Ukraine also hosts Russian coast guard, air force, and land troops at its base in Sevastopol.

Without this body of water, Russia would be weaker militarily, would lack a flexible response to situations within the area, and would have a diminished presence in the region. Additionally, the sea provides a transit source for Russian goods entering and exiting the country. Over the last eleven years, the Black Sea has carried an average of 547,000 TEUs of Russian cargo capacity per year. Not only do the ports facilitate trade, but they also integrate the country with other countries in Europe and the Middle East. A final boon from the Black Sea is the urban development that seaside towns experience as a result of the economic activity surrounding the ports. The fact that the Black Sea is a warm-water port means that Ukraine carries extra geostrategic significance to the Kremlin because many of Russia’s other ports are frozen for a good portion of the year.

An additional factor in Ukraine’s geostrategic significance is its plethora of natural resources. As of 2013, Ukraine ranked 26th in the world in proved natural gas reserves, and has Europe’s third-largest reserves of shale gas. For an energy giant like Russia, these reserves represent prime investment opportunities. Ukraine also has considerable coal and iron ore, along with arable land that is known as the “Bread Basket of Central Europe.” As one of the top ten global producers for several crops, Ukraine is a proximal supplier of food to Russia.

As previously stated, natural gas and oil are major resources for Kiev, however Ukraine’s provision of these goods is actually less as a primary producer, and more as a transit state. 110 billion cubic metres of Russian gas pass to western markets annually through the Druzhba pipeline that runs across Ukrainian territory, making the Ukraine the main transit route for Russian gas. Moscow also maintained oil pipelines through Ukraine that deposited Russian oil to
the west. Since natural gas and oil are one of the main sources for the Kremlin’s economy and geopolitical chess game, their transport is essential to ensuring Russia’s political and economic power. Russia relies on the provision of basic energy needs to coerce states into alignment with the Kremlin’s policies and contain those states within Moscow’s sphere. Ukraine is a lynchpin in the transit of these goods, as a considerable amount of gas/oil must pass through Ukraine to reach its final customers. Therefore, if relations with Ukraine deteriorate, the repercussions for Moscow could be severe.

As discussed in Chapter 2, desirability is a necessary, but insufficient condition. A desirable geostrategic state must also be attainable- a variable captured by the percentage of ethnic Russians. As the results show, this combination of geostrategic desirability and ethnic attainability is significant in determining sphere extension. The significance of this interaction is displayed in the case of Ukraine. Kiev’s geostrategic value has already been emphasized, but it is this value, combined with a high percentage of ethnic Russians, that facilitates sphere extension.

The presence of ethnic Russians enables sphere extension by supporting mobilization and providing international and domestic cover. Ethnic Russians in Ukraine were instrumental in mobilizing local political support among civilian groups and media campaigns during the 2014 crisis in Crimea. These civilian groups were indispensable in neutralizing and countering the reaction of Ukrainian authorities (Allison 2014). Many studies have acknowledged the potential impact that large numbers of ethnic Russians can have on a state’s political atmosphere (Smith & Wilson 1997).

In Ukraine, especially, there is a collective identity that drives ethnic Russians toward unity with Moscow. Smith & Wilson (1997) note the ease of mobilization and collective action of the diaspora in Ukraine because of political inclusion for Russophones and instability amongst
Ukrainian political leadership. The diaspora is beneficial for furthering the Kremlin’s agenda because it has formed political parties that are supported by Moscow. These parties are able to articulate the Kremlin’s interest in Ukraine and encourage Russophones to execute this interest. In doing so, Russia actively uses the diaspora in Ukraine as geopolitical levers to secure its interests in their sphere of influence.

The presence of ethnic Russians also allowed the Kremlin to claim intervention by invitation, which provided both a domestic and international justification. The power of the invitation argument was demonstrated by the fact that, in 2014, the citizens of Crimea supposedly voted to secede and reunite with other Russians. Putin’s call to “respect the will of the people” was targeted at both international and domestic audiences. At home, public opinion of the Kremlin increased dramatically following the annexation of Crimea because Russian citizens believed they were witnessing a return of Russia to its former glory (Volkov 2016). This resurgence of nationalism and competition against the West is one of the reasons that Putin’s policy toward Ukraine enjoyed such enthusiastic support from Russia’s new middle class (Volkov 2016). Putin (2014) attempted to validate the incorporation of Crimea to domestic audiences by invoking article 61(2) of the Russian constitution: “to guarantee its citizens defense and patronage beyond its boundaries.”

The Kremlin insisted that the Russian minority in Crimea faced human rights abuses, and argued that Russian forces needed to be in the region to protect the thousands of Russian refugees. Putin even went so far as to warn that Russia retained the right to protect its interests and those of the Russian-speaking population in the event of ‘any further spread of violence to Eastern Ukraine and Crimea (Putin 2014). The same type of justification for intervention on behalf of Russian compatriots was used in 2004, following the Orange Revolution.
This tactic provided some cover from international criticism because it echoed earlier cases of US intervention in Africa, which depended on the consent of deposed democratically elected governments. A similar case for remedial secession can be found in NATO’s humanitarian intervention in Kosovo/Serbia, and in Libya in 2012. By claiming intervention by invitation, Moscow made it politically difficult for any Western state to critique their actions for fear of being labelled a hypocrite. Allison (2014) notes that the Kremlin’s humanitarian justifications were probably made “to create sufficient uncertainty in the international community at large, especially among EU states, to limit punitive western responses, as well as gather support among traditionally friendly CIS states.”

Based on the absence of any actual population displacement, such justifications do, indeed, appear to be facades for geostrategic motives. Moscow continued to dismiss reports by The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights that there was no evidence of actions against minority groups (Allison 2014). In fact, those same reports did find that the enforcement of Russian law in the area would negatively impact human rights, and there was ongoing harassment of Crimean Tatars and other residents who did not support the referendum to secede (Allison 2014). Russia, itself, failed to provide any concrete evidence of Russian-speakers being endangered in Crimea. Moreover, “Moscow made no effort to demonstrate that its actions complied with the requirements of necessity and proportionality, which are essential preconditions for a justifiable intervention to protect nationals” (Allison 2014).

The manipulation of ethnic Russians makes sense for the Kremlin, considering the extent to which they provide political cover, both domestically and internationally. This cover lowers the political costs of sphere extension and encourages support for the policies, thereby increasing
its likelihood of success. Practically speaking, the presence of ethnic Russians lowers the costs of mobilization, again increasing the likelihood of success for sphere extension.

The interaction of desirability and attainability has resulted in an intense campaign for influence, culminating with the 2014 Crimean vote for independence and subsequent referendum to join the Russian Federation. The events leading up to and immediately following these votes saw Russian forces infringing upon Article 6 of the bilateral status of forces agreement by forcibly overtaking airports, pressuring Ukrainian military commanders to defect, and blocking Ukrainian ports. The Crimean issue is not new, and has been a territorial struggle between the two states since the fall of the Soviet Union.

Beyond Crimea, Russia continues to press for dual-citizenship for Russophiles in Ukraine, despite Kiev’s objections. The Kremlin also funds diaspora groups and NGOs that support pro-Moscow policies, (Business & Human Rights Centre 2014). Russia’s ruling party (United Russia) enjoys close ties with several parties in Ukraine. In 2005, United Russia signed a cooperation agreement with the party of former president, Viktor Yanukovych (Party of Regions). Yanukovych went on to lead a decidedly pro-Moscow administration. The fact that United Russia is center-right, and Party of Regions is leftward leaning, indicates that this partnership is strictly on foreign policy, and not ideology. The Ukraine Communist Party and the Russian Communist Party also maintain close ties.

Economically, the two countries also enjoy close collaboration. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Ukraine’s main trading partner has been Russia. Kiev relies on Russia as a steady source of export revenue, in addition to depending on Russia for nearly all of its oil and gas. Russia wields power over Ukraine by withholding gas and oil reserves, as it has done on several occasions over the past twenty years. The fact that Ukraine’s unpaid energy bills are rising by
between $1 billion and $1.5 billion a year as of 2016, means that Moscow can repeatedly use energy supplies and payment as a political lever for consolidation of Ukraine into the sphere.

Russian and Ukraine maintain considerable economic integration, as Russia has historically been one of Ukraine’s largest investors, especially in the banking and energy sectors. The countries share co-dependent supply chains in specific industries, as well as close business relationships. The massive Russian military-industrial complex is one of the major industries that is deeply integrated with that of Ukraine, as the two have an elaborate supply and demand circuit. The two states signed a military agreement in 1993, which lasted until 2015. This agreement included common use of naval bases and joint air defense efforts.

The extent of sphere extension under ethnic and geostrategic circumstances is evident in the case of Ukraine. Both this and the Armenian case show that the presence of certain characteristics seems to increase the intensity of sphere extension. In an inverse process, the Latvian case highlights minimal sphere extension when these characteristics are absent. Latvia is one of the cases that sparked this empirical study because it met the ethnic requirement that was supposedly necessary for Russian attention, but little sphere extension has been observed. Furthermore, it lacks the presence of the geostrategic*ethnic interaction that I found to be statistically significant in determining sphere extension. As such, Latvia is a suitable plausibility probe for investigating the utility of my hypotheses.

Latvia is a Soviet legacy with a high proportion of ethnic Russians in its population (average 29%). Ethnic Russians in Latvia face language and citizenship barriers which limit their ability to fully participate in political life. Latvian residents must pass a Latvian language test as part of the citizenship requirements, thereby inhibiting the ability of Russophones to become full citizens. Furthermore, Russians who came to Latvia during the Soviet era were not given
automatic citizenship after the fall of the Soviet Union. There are, however, several political
parties and NGOs that advocate for the rights of ethnic Russians in Latvia.

The ethnic Russian situation in Latvia is not so different from that of Ukraine, in terms of
ability to mobilize and provision of political cover. Despite these similarities, Latvia’s large
number of ethnic Russians has not translated into a great deal of attention from the Kremlin. This
is because ethnicity is only an enabling condition for a state that already has another desirable
characteristic, namely geostrategic significance. Ethnicity, on its own, is insufficient for Kremlin
attention.

Latvia’s geostrategic situation is rather dismal. The state is located along a body of water
and went through the process of NATO and EU membership. Russia has Kaliningrad to service
its port needs in the Baltics, and Latvia was probably deemed to be a lost cause in 2004 when it
committed to NATO and the EU. Latvia is not located near any relevant military conflicts, as
most of those are in the Middle East or Caucasus region. The state also lacks any sizeable
reserves of natural resources, including gas and oil. Thus, Moscow has few opportunities to
boost its economy through energy development projects. Additionally, Latvia is not connected to
Russia’s pipeline system, so the Kremlin is not dependent on Riga to insure safe passage of its
gas and oil to high-paying customers. Without much geostrategic significance, Russia has had
little reason to target Latvia for its sphere of influence (median event intensity of 277, when
population average is 245).

Despite the discrimination facing ethnic Russians, Moscow has not attempted to mobilize
the diaspora in the same way that it did in Ukraine. Instead of armed incursion, Russia has
worked within institutional constraints by taking the case to the European Court of Human
Rights. The Kremlin discourages Latvian citizenship for residents, and instead offers Russian
passports. Tensions have certainly escalated since the crisis in Crimea, with multiple Russian flights into Latvian air space and Baltic Fleet exercises near Latvia’s territorial waters. However, prior to 2014, there were even more ethnic Russians in Latvia, yet relations were relatively distant. Political, economic, and military cooperation and/or coercion have been minimal. Latvia has never been a member of any Russian-led regional organizations, including: the Eurasian Economic Union, Collective Security Treaty Organization, or Commonwealth of Independent States. This case demonstrates that ethnicity is not a valid argument on its own, and must be accompanied by geostrategic value before a state can be considered as a high-level target for the sphere. Together, all of these cases reiterate the statistical significance of the legacy and geostrategic*ethnic interaction in determining sphere extension. The results of this quantitative analysis are mirrored in real-world Russian foreign policy.
CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

These results lend some credence to my hypotheses about the motivations behind the Russian sphere of influence. Firstly, I reject the null of H2, and am instead led to believe that Russia is more likely to pursue a sphere of influence in states where it has legacy territory, than in states where it does not. The statistical and qualitative evidence supports the constructivist mentality that Russia seeks to regain its status by reacquiring territory that it once controlled as a great power. The targeting of legacy states shows the Kremlin’s aim to reconstruct its identity to match that of its great power days, and in doing so rise through the ranks of the international community once again. The legacy characteristic explains why Moscow seeks to include states within its sphere, even if there are no ethnic Russians to protect (Poland, Finland).

Another conclusion from this analysis is that geostrategic significance is relevant, but only in countries where there is a sufficient proportion of the population that are ethnically Russian. The targeting of geostrategic states shows that Russia is concerned with issues such as balance of power and military positioning as a part of its grand strategy. This finding supports the realist approach to regaining great power status, and implies that Russia will seek to include geostrategic states within its sphere. Despite the importance of geostrategic significance, it appears that this is not sufficient as a motivation on its own.

This result leads me to fail to reject the null of H1, and conclude that Russia is no more likely to pursue a sphere of influence in geostrategic states over non-geostrategic states. Instead, geostrategic significance must be paired with the presence of ethnic Russians in order to have
any impact on Kremlin influence. In states with large portions of ethnic Russians, geostrategic considerations appear to result in increased attempts at influence. If states lack a sizeable percentage of ethnic Russians, the geostrategic variable is less significant.

As such, I reject the null of H3 and conclude that states which are geostrategically located and have high percentages of ethnic Russians are more likely to be subject to sphere of influence extension by the Kremlin than states which are geostrategic, but which lack large percentages of ethnic Russians. The significance of the geostrategic*ethnic interaction over the insignificance of the main effect of geostrategy suggests that ethnicity does, indeed, matter in determining sphere membership. Ethnicity serves a moderating function by creating opportunities for success. These opportunities are created by framing the outreach to geostrategic states as a humanitarian effort for ethnic Russians abroad. Thus, the significance of this interaction demonstrates the importance of framing and perception in Russian foreign policy.

While the benefits of having a sizeable ethnically Russian population make a state more amenable for inclusion into the sphere, geostrategic significance makes a state more desirable for inclusion. Thus, a state with many ethnic Russians may be amenable to inclusion, but if it is not geostrategic it will not be desirable. Conversely, a state which is geostrategic may be desirable, but if lacks ethnic Russians it will be difficult to acquire. As discussed in Chapter 4, there are many traits that a state with ethnic Russians embodies which make it ripe for Kremlin influence. These traits include the aforementioned ability to pass outreach off as humanitarian effort, in addition to ease of mobilization and other characteristics.

Together, these traits create an environment which increases the likelihood of successful influence. Clearly, Russia wants to be sure that this environment is in place before they pursue a geostrategic state. This observation points to the importance of likelihood of success in Kremlin
decision-making, and the reluctance to carry through with a policy that stands a significant chance of failure. From this information, we might conclude that Russia is unwilling to aggressively pursue a sphere of influence in geostrategic states when there is a considerable risk of failure. As a state rebounding from major collapse, it is unsurprising that Russia would be in a losses frame and would be risk-averse in its foreign policy.

Intervening solely for the benefits of geostrategy is apparently not worth a considerable risk, but a minimally risky pursuit appears to offer sufficient cause. This could be explained by the fact that Russia, while rebounding, is still fragile from collapse and cannot withstand the backlash that could occur if the pursuit of a geostrategic state were to fail. Why then is there not a significant interaction between ethnicity and legacy? Results prevented me from rejecting the null of H4, so that I had to conclude that states which were formerly a part of the Russian Empire or USSR and which also have high percentages of ethnic Russians are no more likely to be subject to sphere of influence extension by the Kremlin than those legacy states which lack large percentages of ethnic Russians.

The impact of strained relations with a geostrategic non-legacy could be more severe than with a non-geostrategic legacy state, i.e., there is more to lose with a geostrategic state. Losing a military base or pipeline piece could be more devastating than damaging relations with a state that has mostly historical value. One final consideration for the different risk propensities is that legacy states are more interchangeable, whereas geostrategic states are not. Alternatively, legacy states could be considered so much more valuable than other states that the Kremlin is willing to
act on them without the safety net of the ethnic excuse. The rationale behind the varying risk propensities is not addressed in this research, but would be fruitful to address in future studies.

While useful in creating an amenable environment for influence, the presence of ethnic Russians does not make a state desirable. The lack of significance for the ethnicity variable rebuffs the common refrain from the Kremlin about intervening only on behalf of ethnic Russians abroad. This political façade does not withstand empirical examination. As the data demonstrate, Moscow will not pursue states which are not legacies or are not geostrategic, even if they have large portions of ethnic Russians. The motivations can instead be identified as geostrategic and legacy. This conclusion accounts for some inconsistent observations in Russian foreign policy, wherein the Kremlin intervened in states which had no ethnic Russians (Iran) and failed to intervene in states which did have sizeable ethnic Russian populations (Turkmenistan).

The findings of this research reveal that Russian foreign policy is not an incomprehensible series of actions, but is instead a coherent grand strategy by a revisionist state concentrated on altering the international system in a way that returns it to a great power. This strategy of alteration is through an expanding sphere of influence. Contrary to popular belief (Galeotti 1999), this sphere is similarly carefully crafted based on legacy and geostrategic considerations. I hope this research resolves the puzzle surrounding Russian foreign policy by identifying its relations in the Near Abroad as belonging to a sphere of influence, and then providing some statistically-sound explanations for how that sphere is constructed.

I believe this dissertation contributes to the literature on Russian foreign policy by explaining the importance of geostrategy and legacy to sphere formation, and thereby demonstrating how these motivations are integral to Russian grand strategy. The results show that Russia’s grand strategy for renewed great power status is centered around the acquisition of
realpolitik geostrategic resources, and also around the recovery of its identity through constructivist interests. These conclusions allow us to, not only predict specific states that will be targeted for the sphere, but also apply the labels of geostrategic and legacy on a more general scale to the types of potential sphere members.

In uncovering motivations behind the Russian sphere, I have also revealed false motivations by debunking the ethnic excuse for intervention. Now that this excuse has been empirically exposed, one must doubt the sincerity of future endeavors which use this excuse. The fact that ethnicity is an insignificant variable tells us that diaspora protection is not nearly as important to Moscow as resource and identity protection. This knowledge could prove useful in diplomacy and determinations of assets that Moscow may or may not be willing to concede.

More broadly, this research sheds some light on the behavior of collapsed powers, and the way they attempt to regain power. In doing so, it comments on the utility of realist and constructivist approaches to international relations. Furthermore, it notes the adherence to grand strategy and provides some insight as to what that strategy looks like for a collapsed power. For Russia, that strategy shows the importance of balance of power and material gain, along with identity and reputation. An additional characteristic of the collapsed power strategy is the existence of a losses frame and risk aversion, as evidenced by the impact that likelihood of success had for conditioning the other motivations.

As previously mentioned, future research should move beyond motivations of sphere extension to investigate the method of extension. Studies should examine the effectiveness of sphere extension based on: the category of actions (diplomatic, military, economic, etc.), intensity of actions, and whether or not the actions were positive or negative. These studies could not only inform factors affecting overall consolidation of the sphere, but also the type of
extension that work best for different types of states. It might also be prudent to study the effect of ethnicity, legacy, and geostrategy on consolidation of the sphere.
WORKS CITED


Brown, Daniel. (2017). “Russia is using Syria as a testing ground for some of its most advanced weapons.” Business Insider- Australia.


Clausewitz, Carl von. On War. (1832).


Hast, Susanna. (2014). Spheres of Influence in International Relations. Surrey, UK: Ashgate.


Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian War.*


This does not constitute an official release of U.S. Government information. All Statements of fact, opinion, or analysis expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official positions or views of the U.S. Government. Nothing in the contents should be construed as asserting or implying U.S. Government authentication of information or endorsement of the author’s views. This material has been reviewed solely for classification.