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*HOSTILITY, CHANCE, AND REASON:
CLAUSEWITZ AND RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 2008 RUSSO-GEORGIAN WAR*

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Hostility, Chance, and Reason

Clausewitz and Russian Foreign Policy in the 2008 Russo-Georgian War

Cadet Bryan T. Jones
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Abstract

In 2008, the world stood in shock as Russian troops crossed over into the Republic of Georgia and seemingly annexed the sovereign lands of another nation. This five-day war directly resulted in varying levels of success and the achievement of political and military objectives for the Russian Federation. Several studies and analyses have sought to explain the actions of the Russian military and its leaders in an attempt to discern the primary influences on its current foreign policy and military strategy. However, these studies have devoted little attention towards arguably the most renowned and influential of all military theorists – Carl von Clausewitz. His tenets of philosophical and strategic thought, paired with his development of critical analysis towards the study of war, offer a remarkably relevant lens from which to view the 2008 war and more recent conflicts involving the Russian military. By utilizing Clausewitz's own methodology of critical analysis in connection with an empirical case study on one of Russia's recent military actions, this paper will attempt to establish an understanding of Russian foreign policy and military strategy. The research and analysis presented reveals that, contrary to modern arguments, the writings and principles of Carl von Clausewitz are anything *but* obsolete; when applied to the Russo-Georgian War, various principles of Clausewitzian thought aid in characterizing and explaining the actions and decisions of the armed forces and government of the Russian Federation.

Introduction – Russian “Revival”?

In 2008, the world stood in shock as Russian troops crossed over into the Republic of Georgia and seemingly annexed the sovereign lands of another nation. This five-day war directly resulted in varying levels of success and the achievement of political and military objectives for the Russian Federation. The war was an incredibly limited one with specified objectives and goals, yet it marked a definitive shift in international relations and modern warfare. In the first armed invasion by ground troops since the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, Russian forces partnered novel cyberwarfare techniques and procedures with conventional means to achieve their military and political objectives against the Republic of Georgia. As a result, political scientists and researchers have sought to explain what seems to be a “revival” or “resurgence” of the Russian state. This is in the hope of understanding what direction President Vladimir Putin and the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia are taking the military in order to reassert Russia’s place as a regional hegemon within Europe.

Several studies and analyses have sought to explain the actions of the Russian military and its leaders in an attempt to discern the primary influences on its current foreign policy and military strategy. However, these studies have devoted little attention towards arguably the most renowned and influential of all military theorists – Carl von Clausewitz. His tenets of philosophical and strategic thought, paired with his development of critical analysis towards the study of war, offer a remarkably relevant lens from which to view the 2008 war and more recent conflicts involving the Russian military. Concepts like the trinity of hostility, chance, and reason, the notion of war as an

instrument of policy, the embodiment of military genius, and the emphasis on friction and the ambiguity of war all present connections to Russia's recent military operations.

This paper seeks to first understand and analyze the key principles of Clausewitzian thought. In doing so, it will then apply these principles to the invasion of Georgia in the hope of reaching a clear understanding of the foundations of the modern Russian Armed Forces. Specifically, this thesis will answer the following research question: *Do the principles of Clausewitzian Thought, when applied to the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, help to characterize Russian foreign policy and military strategy in the 21st century?* By utilizing Clausewitz's own methodology of critical analysis in connection with an empirical case study on one of Russia's recent military actions, this paper will attempt to establish an understanding of Russian foreign policy and military strategy. The research and analysis presented reveals that, contrary to modern arguments, the writings and principles of Carl von Clausewitz are anything *but* obsolete; when applied to the Russo-Georgian War, various principles of Clausewitzian thought aid in characterizing and explaining the actions and decisions of the armed forces and government of the Russian Federation.

The overall organization and structure of research, analysis, and argumentation will proceed in the following manner. First, a literature review will expound upon the text of *On War* and previous research concerning the principles of Clausewitzian thought, along with the underlying theoretical foundations of international relations in relation to Russia's foreign policy. Second, this paper will explain the methodology and thought process behind how research was conducted and specific claims were founded. Next will be a thorough case study analysis of Russia's geo-political and military actions in

the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, attempting to explain the military actions of the state through the application of Clausewitzian thought. Finally, based on the compiled research and analysis, all findings, conclusions, and recommendations will be assessed in an effort to determine whether the principles of Clausewitzian thought do indeed help to structure and characterize Russia's military actions in the 21st century.

Chapter 1: Foundations of Clausewitzian Thought

This chapter will provide a explanation and analysis of the various key theoretical principles first developed by Carl von Clausewitz. First, it will briefly cover the concept of the Trinity in order to help describe Clausewitz's theory for a universal nature of war. Second is the notion that war itself must always be viewed and applied as an instrument of policy. Next, an analysis of the qualities that Clausewitz deemed necessary for "military genius." Lastly, the deciding factor that, as Clausewitz stated, separates "real war from war on paper" – friction.¹ By accomplishing this, the reader will be provided with a concise and in-depth look into the principles that guided Clausewitz's thoughts in order to help describe the theoretical and philosophical foundations of war.

The Trinity

Viewed as one of the most important and enduring principles of *On War*, Clausewitz's concept of the Trinity has been utilized to explain the incredibly difficult and complex task of theorizing the nature of war. The Trinity seeks to offer a cornerstone from which to understand "the complexities of real war fueled by passion, undermined by chance, [and] shaped by reason."² The concept of passion and hostility in war, which stems from the deep emotional and natural forces "inherent in the people," maintains that war is, by definition, violent.³ The second element, chance, plays upon the notion that war is ultimately a human endeavor. Due to this, and the fact that humanity is

¹ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (1832), Indexed Edition, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 89.

² Colin M. Fleming, *Clausewitz's Timeless Trinity: A Framework for Modern War* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 2.

³ Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.

defined by its imperfection, the courage attributed to a nation's army shape the elements of chance and probability, "within which the creative spirit is free to roam." Finally, Clausewitz defines reason as a dominant tendency in war, emphasizing its element of subordination and instrumentality to overall policy, the government and its political aims.⁴

Although his Trinity is often viewed and described as an illustration of the *equality* between these three aspects, Clausewitz refuted this point of view, writing that the concepts of hostility, chance, and reason are "deep-rooted in their subject... yet variable in their relationship to one another."⁵ The key point of this manifestation of military thought is not to equate or fix the relationship between the three defining characteristics. The true object of this philosophical development in the study of war is to be able to construct and design a theory that successfully channels the universal nature of war, yet still maintains a balance between the three components of the Trinity.

An important and often misinterpreted view of Clausewitz's Trinity connects and subsumes the elements of hostility, chance, and reason within the principles of statehood; namely, the identities of the people, the army, and the government. Even though Clausewitz makes mention of the connections between these Trinitarian partnerships, it is ultimately incorrect to likewise assume that his original definition of the Trinity is fundamentally linked to the state and its "sections of society" only.⁶ Ultimately, the attributes of hostility, chance, and reason within war transcend the notion of

⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Fleming, *Clausewitz's Timeless Trinity*, 9.

statehood, and reach far beyond the fundamentally isolated and limited views of a nation's government, army, and people.

The defining feature of Clausewitz's Trinity, and what truly makes it an enduring element of military thought, is its constant applicability and usefulness in illustrating the theory behind the nature of war. In stark difference to the rapidly changing *character* of war, the constant universality of the *nature* of war can be explained by the relationships formed by the concepts of hostility, chance, and reason. Clausewitz argued that although different periods in history may possess varying kinds of war, each with "their own particular way, using different methods and pursuing different aims," the nature of war remains unchanged.⁷ Drawing from his personal experience as an officer that served in both the Prussian and Russian armies during the Napoleonic Wars, Clausewitz was able to construct a tenet of military thought that was enduring and applicable to all manifestations of war, regardless of its time, place, or method in which it was fought. His goal in writing *On War* was not to present a compilation of rules and maxims from which to apply to prescriptive scenarios of battle. Instead, it was to draft a universal definition of the nature and essence of war, while "allowing for the subjectivity of a changing character of war."⁸

Friction and the Ambiguity of War

Even with the elaborate and intricate developments of his theoretical principles, Clausewitz still acknowledged that what one thinks and theorizes about war is

⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, 708-709.

⁸ Magnus Muren, "Carl von Clausewitz's Contribution to Our Understanding of War," *International Relations – Read.Be.Read Publishing* (January 25, 2017), accessed October 10, 2017, <https://rbrpublishing.com/2017/01/25/carl-von-clausewitz-contribution-to-our-understanding-of-war/>.

noticeably different to what actually occurs during it. Nested within the element of chance, the notion of uncertainty in war is what Clausewitz described as the factor that distinguishes “real war from war on paper.”⁹ This “friction” is what helps define the imperfect and often unforeseen aspects of war – it makes actions that seem simple upon conceptualization, difficult upon implementation. More modernly defined as the “diverse difficulties and impediments to the effective use of military force,” friction accounts for the effects and instances in war that simply cannot be measured or predicted.¹⁰ This is due primarily to its association and symbiotic relationship with chance and probability. Clausewitz identified a seemingly additive, or cumulative, property of friction – which is that minor and often unnoticeable difficulties tend to accumulate in size and proportion. It is these difficulties that ultimately “combine to lower the general level of performance, so that one always falls far short of the intended goal.”¹¹ By accounting for this element of friction and the unforeseen circumstances that arise from the exertion of incredible physical force between belligerents, Clausewitz was able to effectively illustrate and characterize the constant ambiguity and confusion of war.

War as an Instrument of Policy

Another important aspect that is key to the understanding of Clausewitz’s beliefs is his tenet that war exists primarily as an instrument of policy. This seemingly unbreakable relationship between the military and political actions of the state is defined

⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 119.

¹⁰ Barry D. Watts, “Clausewitzian Friction and Future War,” *Institute for National Strategic Studies*, McNair Paper 52 (October 1996), accessed December 1, 2017, 2, <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/ndu/mcnair52.pdf>.

¹¹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 119.

by the notion that “war is not merely an *act* of policy but a true political *instrument*, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means.”¹² Essentially, Clausewitz implies that war should never be waged for war’s own sake; there must always be a political goal in mind, and war is to be used as a method and means of attaining that goal. This can be effectively explained through the concept of ends, ways and means – another equally important derivation of Clausewitzian thought. In order to achieve a stated political goal, the object of war is “to impose [one’s] will on the enemy.”¹³ The manner in which this is performed is through rendering the enemy powerless and putting them “in such a condition that they can no longer carry on the fight.”¹⁴ The means in which to achieve this are acts of physical force, which are manifested in specific battles and military campaigns¹⁵

What unifies the ideas and principles of Clausewitzian thought is war’s constant connection with policy, and that the “enduring fascination in Clausewitz has largely been attributed to his insight that war’s nature evolves from political beginnings.”¹⁶ This linkage of war to higher political aims complements the aspects of the Trinity and the true nature of war. By clearly articulating the impossibility of absolute war, void of “any previous estimate of the political situation,” Clausewitz correctly identified the roles that probability, emotion, and ultimately political will play in the determination of war’s true

¹² Clausewitz, *On War*, 87.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹⁶ Fleming, *Clausewitz’s Timeless Trinity*, 23.

characteristics.¹⁷ War should never exist as an isolated and disconnected act of violence; by analyzing and connecting political realities with the objects of war, one can better understand the ways and means to achieve them.

Military Genius

To Clausewitz, the level of complexity and difficulty that characterize many of the problems that military commanders face is on par with that of mathematical problems that would challenge Isaac Newton.¹⁸ Thus, to successfully lead a state and its armed forces through war, one must possess the mental capabilities and strengths of a “genius.” This entailed possessing what Clausewitz saw as a “very highly developed mental aptitude for a particular occupation,” which in war would come to fruition as those mental attributes that would flourish and influence all military activity.¹⁹ To become a genius one must have a complete and detailed understanding of war and its elemental characteristics and components, and be able to utilize them to succeed on the battlefield.

War in its most realistic and empirical form exists in various realms of confusion, complexity, and increasing volatility; Clausewitz described these realms in *On War* as those of *danger*, *physical exertion*, *uncertainty*, and *chance*.²⁰ To rise to the level of military genius, one must be able to recognize and understand these realms, and act in such a manner that inspires and guides those under one’s command towards victory. In order to counter each of these manifestations of complexity in war, Clausewitz believed

¹⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, 78.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 100.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

that certain characteristics were required of *all soldiers*, and not just the commander. These ranged from courage and ambition, a strength of body and soul, a skilled intelligence, and an expectation of the unexpected.²¹ All of these characteristics, requirements, and attributes coalesced into two defining qualities that Clausewitz deemed as indispensable for the military commander and subsequent genius: *coup d'oeil* and *determination*. Coup d'oeil – a term of French origin – is best described as an inner and innate ability that one possesses which allows them to quickly observe and understand events as they are unfolding, and then act with rapid decision-making skills. Clausewitz articulated that this ability would create “an intellect that, even in the darkest hour, retains some glimmerings of the inner light which leads to truth.”²² Determination – the second quality of a military genius – more or less means the courage and resolution to follow through on decisions that come about from analysis and the innate intellect of coup d'oeil. This courage differs starkly from the physical courage that Clausewitz describes earlier in the same chapter – determination is specifically a *mental habit*, and is the courage that allows one to accept responsibility for one's actions while in the face of moral danger.²³

Lastly, an individual that is to be deemed worthy of the title of military genius must above all else possess *monumental ambition*, an immense *strength of mind and character*, and a thorough *grasp of politik*, the German word combining policy and politics into one single idea. Clausewitz believed that regardless of any form of

²¹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 104-105.

²² Ibid., 102.

²³ Ibid.

patriotism, nationalism, enthusiasm, or other emotion that a commander may possess, the greatest motivator for success was a “longing for honor and renown... a thirst for fame and honor.”²⁴ This self-ambition was viewed as the greatest and most powerful form of passion that would inspire leaders and commanders to act, and would compel the military genius to strive for the utmost excellence and greatest success possible. In response to this powerful emotion and ambition, a strong military leader must also continually possess a strength of mind and character, manifested as a form of *self-control* and an emotion “which serves to balance the passionate feelings in strong characters without destroying them.”²⁵ This characteristic quality, similar to that of a stoic nature, does not entail the *lack* of emotion or passion – simply, the complete *control* of one’s emotions. Clausewitz understood that being able to rein in one’s passion, anxiety, and stress only adds to the strength of a commander’s character. It would ultimately provide them with the staunchness necessary to resist attacks and blows, and quickly respond with a continual and resolute temperament of both mind and body.²⁶ Finally, in order to be truly successful at waging a war and its campaigns, a military genius must have a thorough intellectual understanding of national policy. In connection with his belief that war is an instrument and tool of policy, Clausewitz argued that at the highest levels of military strategy, the realms of military and political thought coalesce into one; in his mind, “the commander-in-chief must also be a statesman, but he must not cease to be a general.”²⁷ Due to war’s irrefutable connection with policy and

²⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, 106.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

politics, the greatest of military geniuses and senior-ranking commanders must have a comprehensive view and understanding of national policy – for it is ultimately policy that comes to dictate military strategy.

Chapter 2: An Overview of Relevant International Relations Traditions

Before a thorough analysis can be conducted on Russia's military actions in the Caucasus, a solid foundational understanding of the current arguments and schools of thought surrounding Russia's modern foreign policy is necessary. This section of literature review covers the prevailing theoretical principles of international relations, and assists in helping to explain the primary reasoning and thought processes behind the Russian Federation's recent political and military actions. By outlining the key assumptions and principles of realism, institutionalism, and constructivism, one gains an additional insight into understanding how the political and military leadership of Russia view their country's position in the realm of international relations, and what actions and behaviors are necessary to secure their sought-after dominance on the European continent.

Realism – Key assumptions and causes of war

As one of the key conceptual frameworks of international relations theory, realism helps to explain the behaviors of state actors on the international stage and assess the reasoning for their respective actions. Realism focuses on a state's expressed need for security and power. This stems from the inherent competitive and violent nature of the world in which states exist. Key theorists in the realm of realism include John Mearsheimer, Hans Morgenthau, and Kenneth Waltz, each providing their own respective views on the theory as an explanation of international politics due to the direct result of human nature.²⁸

²⁸ Robert H. Jackson and Georg Sorensen, *Introduction to International Relations*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 305.

The tradition of realism within international relations theory is comprised of four primary assumptions about the nature of state and international interaction. First, that the international system as a whole is one of anarchy – meaning that there exists no international or supranatural authority that enacts rules and regulations over states.²⁹ This leads into the second proposition of realist thought: that states are the central defining actors and authorities of decision. Theorists of the realist tradition view states, rather than key individuals within states or international organizations, as the autonomous centers of power in the realm of international relations.³⁰ The third assumption of realism is that state actors are completely rational, unitary, and will act to maximize their self-interest and relative gain on resources.³¹ Lastly, the primary goal and concern of all states under realist thought is survival; state actors have an inherent desire for power and strength to ensure their self-preservation.³²

In attempting to explain the reasoning behind states going to war, proponents of realist thought often have a very Clausewitzian conception of war, arguing that it is a completely rational act and that states will pursue it as an instrument of policy. In this view, as Clausewitz writes, “the political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be considered in isolation from their purpose.”³³ Leveraging

²⁹ Jack Donnelly, “The Ethics of Realism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, ed. Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 150.

³⁰ Robert E. Goodin, *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 133.

³¹ Donnelly, “The Ethics of Realism,” 150; Goodin, *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, 133.

³² Goodin, *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, 133.

³³ Clausewitz, *On War*, 87.

this notion of why states pursue war as a rational means for achieving political goals, leading theorists of realism have further developed this reasoning for the causes of war. Kenneth Waltz, one of the founders of neorealist thought, constructed three interrelated “images” for the causes of war. The first image, in direct correlation with Clausewitz’s view of war, postulates that conflict has its roots in the flawed and imperfect nature of humanity – that “the evilness of men, or their improper behavior, leads to war.”³⁴ Second is the argument that the internal structure and organization of the individual state is vital to understanding its reasoning and propensity towards war.³⁵ The third and final tenet for the causes of war directly relates to the anarchy of the international system and the primacy of state power. Essentially, if a situation arises in which a state’s interests are in direct conflict with those of another, the state “will use force to attain its goals if, after assessing the prospects for success, it values those goals more than it values the pleasures of peace.”³⁶ With no supreme international authority to govern and regulate the actions of states, war will often result due to direct competition over resources and differing political objectives of individual state actors. Thus, any attempt to limit or outlaw the usage of war as an instrument of policy is ultimately futile while states remain the dominant actor in the anarchic realm of international relations.

Institutionalism and Liberalism – the importance of norms and cooperation

In stark contrast to the views, assumptions, and components of realist thought, the teachings of institutionalism and liberalism focus on how the development and

³⁴ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 39.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 160.

spread of norms and rules can mitigate competitive nature and ultimately foster cooperation between states. The primary claim within this school of thought is that institutions – defined as “persistent and connected sets of rules that prescribe behavioral roles” – help alleviate problems of competition between states and promote cooperation.³⁷ This forms a direct connection with the theory of neoliberalism (one of the primary contemporary approaches to international relations), in which the argument is that even in the anarchic system of states, the construction of norms and institutions can result in direct cooperation.³⁸ A key component of neoliberalism deals with institutions and their effect on international politics. The overall concept of institutions within the realm of international relations help “stipulate the ways in which states should cooperate and compete with each other.”³⁹ This coincides with the belief that humanly-devised constraints shape human behavior, and that they help control how states behave both domestically and on the international stage. The primary role of institutions, according to Douglas C. North, is to “reduce uncertainty by establishing a stable structure to human interaction.”⁴⁰ They can also come to affect the nature of the state

³⁷ Jeffrey W. Legro, *Cooperation Under Fire: Anglo-German Restraint during World War II* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 13.

³⁸ Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

³⁹ John J. Mearsheimer, “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security* 19, no. 3 (Winter 1994/95): 8, accessed December 7, 2017, <http://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/pdfs/A0021.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Douglas C. North, “An Introduction to Institutions and Institutional Change,” in *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, ed. James Alt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 6, accessed December 7, 2017, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/6edc/3f857ff7a7b5ea74a7f29b0473ca9824613a.pdf>.

itself by facilitating change in the standard operating procedures of national-level structures and organizations.⁴¹

One of the key limitations in the institutionalist and liberalist schools of thought is that, in contrast with realism, it lacks a single defined and coherent explanation for the causes of war. According to Michael Doyle in his thesis on democratic peace theory, the primary cause for war is the result of the actions and behaviors of undemocratic regimes. He stated that “democracies were peaceful, but only with one another. States that were both liberal and representative would maintain peace with one another, but not reliably with other non-liberal, non-representative states.”⁴² Other international relations theorists have made the argument that the root causes of war stem from the breakdown of balance of power between states, and that the institution of cooperation and “mutually beneficial commerce” is ultimately what reinstates peace.⁴³ Andrew Moravcsik has made the claim that proponents of the liberalist school of thought see the causes of war relating to “conflicting state preferences derived from hostile nationalist or political ideologies, disputes over appropriable economic resources, or exploitation of unrepresented political constituencies.”⁴⁴ Again, the key conclusion drawn from this school of international relations theory is that unlike with realism, tenets of

⁴¹ Legro, *Cooperation under Fire*, 15.

⁴² Michael W. Doyle, “Liberalism and World Politics,” *American Political Science Review* 80, no. 4 (December 1986): 1151-1169, accessed December 6, 2017, <http://www.ir.rochelleterman.com/sites/default/files/doyle%201986.pdf>.

⁴³ Tim Dunne, “Liberalism,” in *The Globalization of World Politics: an Introduction to International Relations*, eds. John Baylis and Steve Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 163.

⁴⁴ Andrew Moravcsik, “Liberal Theories of International Relations: A Primer,” Princeton University (2010), 2, accessed December 7, 2017, www.princeton.edu/~amoravcs/library/primer.doc.

institutionalism and liberalism fail to offer a clear, succinct, and defined reason for the cause of war.

Constructivism – the influence of organizational culture

The key tenet of constructivist theory within international relations is that various components of state activity and behavior are socially constructed within and by the state itself, rather than being consequences of imperfect human nature or the anarchical structure of the international system.⁴⁵ Jeffrey Legro, one of the original constructivist theorists, stated that there are two primary components to the argument that preferences of state bureaucracies are what shape national behavior. First is the claim that the interests of states are not born from the inherent nature of the international system, but within the structure and culture of the state itself. Secondly, he asserted that states are not to be viewed and considered as unitary actors, like in the realms of realist or liberal thought, but that they are in fact a collective of defined entities.⁴⁶ This leads to the significant role that organizational culture plays in the construction and implementation of state preferences and beliefs. Legro defines organizational culture as “a pattern of assumptions, ideas, and beliefs that proscribe how a group should adapt to its external environment and manage its internal affairs.”⁴⁷ Essentially, the theory behind the organizational culture approach to international relations is that the cultures and inherent beliefs of bureaucracies and organizations within the state shape and

⁴⁵ Patrick T. Jackson and Daniel H. Nexon, “Whence Causal Mechanisms? A Comment on Legro,” *Dialogue IO* 1, no.1 (Spring 2002): 81, accessed December 7, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S77777 77702000079>.

⁴⁶ Legro, *Cooperation under Fire*, 17.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

determine national aims. In contrast to the realist and liberal emphasis on external factors and the role of the international system, the organizational culture approach emphasizes internal factors of the state in determining actions and behaviors.⁴⁸

The influence of organizational culture on state preferences and behavior also has a significant impact on the role that armed forces have in ensuring national security. They will often display very common characteristics, seeking “to maximize autonomy and size and reduce uncertainty.”⁴⁹ Legro argues that escalation in military force is expected “because restraint conflicts with the very nature of autonomy-seeking, offense-oriented, war-winning military organizations.”⁵⁰ Although a nation’s armed forces and its members do not naturally emphasize an inherent desire for war, they acknowledge the belief that once war has been initiated, operational autonomy is vital to success. Emphasis is put on the notion that any form of restraint is inconsistent with the principles of “concentration of force and the goal of total victory.”⁵¹ As a component of the constructivist school of thought, organizational culture is important because it helps to shape the behavior, identity, and preferences of the state in a way that external factors simply cannot. Moreover, just as cultures are embedded within individual bureaucracies, they are also inherently determining factors of states’ armed forces. This leads to enduring cultures of organizational and strategic thought, which ultimately

⁴⁸ Jeffrey W. Legro, “Culture and Preferences in the International Cooperation Two-Step,” *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 1 (March 1996): 120, accessed December 2, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2082802>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

affect how a nation will utilize its armed forces to apply the use of violence and design its force structure to ensure the security of the state.

Chapter 3: Methodology – Clausewitzian Critical, Historical, and Qualitative Analysis

The methodology and structure behind this paper's research and analysis will be presented in the following manner. First, the nature and overall purpose of research will focus primarily on the utilization of historical and empirical examples through the application of various strategic and philosophical principles of war to help explain the recent actions of the Russian military. This will also highlight the key function of empirical research and evidence, and the role it plays in theoretical validation and gaining clarity in the study of war. Next will be an explanation of the concept of Clausewitzian critical analysis, and how this method will help to pair the empirical evidence presented within the case study analyses to theoretical principles. Lastly will be an overview and characterization of empirical research, and the nature behind individual case studies and their application. The comprehensive analysis of the case study presented in this paper will help to further elaborate on Russia's military strategy and foreign policy, with the overall goal of understanding past historical situations in order to gain greater clarity in the study of war.

Nature and Purpose of Research

In order to properly assess the nature of this paper's research question, the crux of this analysis will center on the ability to accurately and effectively connect the development of modern Russian military strategy and foreign policy with the principles and teachings of Carl von Clausewitz. By analyzing changes and innovations to modern Russian strategic thought and culture through the study of war, it follows that one can accurately determine the level of application to Clausewitzian theory. As evidenced by the prior research conducted on changes to the Military Doctrine of the Russian

Federation, it is clear that the Russian government and armed forces have incorporated new concepts to their overarching strategic foundation, while still adhering to numerous enduring tenets previously championed by architects of Imperial Russian and Soviet military strategy.

The overall purpose and design of this research and subsequent case studies is to explain historical example through the utilization of the principles of Clausewitzian thought. In doing so, one hopes to first gain a clearer and more succinct understanding of the strategic decision-making processes of Russia's military and political leaders. This will then enable the reader to properly assess the direction in which Russia's military has progressed over the past decade and where it intends to head in the near future. This overall emphasis on empirical evidence and historical analysis harkens back to one of Clausewitz's key contributions to the realm of the philosophical and strategic study of war. This was the belief that empirical evidence formed a "key function in his methodology, using it to test the validity of his conceptualizations" against the complex realities of the imperfect wars in which he fought.⁵² This paper will utilize both Clausewitz's theoretical principles on the study of war, and his own method of critical analysis in the hope of gaining a greater sense of clarity and truth to the underlying strategic thought behind Russia's recent military operations.

Clausewitzian Critical Analysis and the Emphasis on Empirical Evidence

A key component of the methodology for this research and subsequent paper revolves around the concept of critical analysis. Thus, what follows is a brief explanation on the development and theoretical structure behind Clausewitzian critical analysis, and

⁵² Fleming, *Clausewitz's Timeless Trinity*, 21.

how it aids in connecting theory and historical evidence. Devoting an entire chapter of *On War* to his concept of critical analysis, Clausewitz emphasized the necessity of paring theoretical principles to historical events and truths.⁵³ He argued that the aspects of “analysis and observation, theory and experience must never disdain or exclude each other; on the contrary, they support each other.”⁵⁴ In developing his methodology of critical analysis, Clausewitz articulated three principle components that help guide the study of war and its theoretical principles. First is the “discovery and interpretation of equivocal facts,” directly relating to the collection and research of empirical and historical evidence. The second component of critical analysis deals with the “tracing of effects back to their causes.” Clausewitz characterized this as *critical analysis proper*, later assessing the fact that “effects in war seldom result from a single cause; there are usually several concurrent causes.”⁵⁵ This necessitates a thorough analysis of the nature of causes and their effects, as it will help develop a clearer theory more in-tune with its empirical evidence. Lastly is the concept of providing an “investigation and evaluation of means employed.”⁵⁶ This and the previous activity of critical analysis are central to historical inquiry and the development of theory, as Clausewitz argued that “it is vital to analyze everything down to its basic elements, to incontrovertible truth.”⁵⁷ Ultimately, historical and empirical evidence acted as a core element of his study of war, and its partnership with the development of theoretical principles accentuated his belief

⁵³ Clausewitz, *On War*, 156.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

that “theory should be studied, rather than become doctrine” based on its own foundation.⁵⁸ By using this methodology of critical analysis, this paper will offer an analysis of Russian military actions, and in turn pairing it with theoretical foundations of Clausewitzian and Russian strategic thought.

Qualitative Analysis – Empirical Research and Case Study Selection

Stephen van Evera articulated that the application of case studies to empirical and qualitative analysis offer five main purposes: “testing theories, creating theories, identifying antecedent conditions, testing the importance of these antecedent conditions, and explaining cases of intrinsic importance.”⁵⁹ In an effort to create a clearer understanding of recent developments in modern Russian military strategy, this paper will seek to test the theoretical principles of Clausewitz with the military actions of the Russian Federation, thus focusing on van Evera’s first purpose. In coordination with the application of Clausewitz’s critical analysis, the empirical research, evidence, and inquiries presented will elaborate on Russia’s military strategy in order to understand the decision-making processes in past historical situations to gain greater clarity in the study of war.

Among the various methods of analysis that pertain to answering this specific research question, the main line of effort will be structured around a case study of the Russo-Georgian War of 2008. This conflict was chosen due to its nature and characterization as the first major conventional Russian military campaign of the 21st century. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Armed Forces experienced

⁵⁸ Fleming, *Clausewitz’s Timeless Trinity*, 21.

⁵⁹ Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 65.

a significant change in its force posture, strategic foundation, and overall theory towards the application of military force. This case study seek to highlight and explain those changes and the rationales behind them. In assessing this conflict, the primary focus will be directed towards an examination of the strategic planning, thought, and actions conducted by the leaders of the Russian government and its military. It is through this analysis that an assessment of the true applicability of Clausewitzian principles can begin to develop.

Since 2008, the Russian Federation has expanded the scope and range of its military involvements. In 2014, following the perceived and largely corrupt annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, Russian troops engaged in armed conflict on Ukraine's eastern borders in the Donbass regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. That conflict continues to this day. More recently, President Putin has deployed Russian air, land, and sea forces in and around the failing Syrian state in an attempt to aid Bashar Al-Assad's corrupt and tyrannical regime. Both of these instances of Russian military intervention speak volumes to the level of geopolitical influence that Putin and his administration wish to exert within Europe and the Middle East. Although the present conflicts in Ukraine and Syria are current and would thus provide, as Colin Fleming states, "an interesting test of the adaptability of Clausewitzian ideas to modern examples," the very fact that these conflicts are still ongoing restricts the ability to articulate an overall assessment of the political, military, economic, and diplomatic ramifications of the engagements.⁶⁰ As Fleming explains:

Exploring... a war from our recent past is much easier, providing time to pause and reflect which is difficult when wars are ongoing. It is possible to chart the journey of policy from the beginning of war all the way to its

⁶⁰ Fleming, *Clausewitz's Timeless Trinity*, 19.

conclusion, thus providing the opportunity to gauge the extent to which policy is shaped, and possibly trapped, by its interplay with hostility and chance.⁶¹

Clausewitz also offers very direct guidance and thoughts on historical analysis in reference to case studies. In describing the use of historical events to demonstrate and explain theory, Clausewitz orders that “care must be taken that every aspect bearing on the truth is fully and circumstantially developed – carefully assembled, so to speak, before the reader’s eyes.”⁶² One of the greatest mistakes in the realm of historical analysis, and subsequently case studies, is the act of merely touching the surface of the specific event studied, and instead trying to focus on multiple events and examples that both the author and reader know very little about. Given the choice between covering one distinct and detailed event, versus several lightly-researched examples, Clausewitz implores the professional academic and student of war to focus specifically and thoroughly on one instance:

We maintain, however, that where a new or debatable point of view is concerned, a single thoroughly detailed event is more instructive than ten that are only touched on. ... [S]uch superficial, irresponsible handling of history leads to hundreds of wrong ideas and bogus theorizing.⁶³

Thus, this is the primary reasoning behind the use of one case study – the 2008 Russo-Georgian War – as the mechanism for using Clausewitzian concepts to characterize 21st century Russian military strategy. While the conflicts in Ukraine are much more current, their ongoing nature leaves much to be answered. The more defined finality of the Georgian conflict allows a more thorough assessment of the

⁶¹ Fleming, *Clausewitz’s Timeless Trinity*, 19.

⁶² Clausewitz, *On War*, 171.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 173.

political conclusions, and creates a visible sense of the cause-and-effect nature of Russian military operations in the 21st century. This is by no means an assertion that principles of Clausewitzian thought are unable to be applied to these current conflicts – quite to the contrary. If the thesis of this work is correct and much of Clausewitz’s work and ideas are still incredibly relevant today, they must be able to be applied to a wide range of conflicts varying in character, era, and level of escalation. This paper will hopefully act as a “stepping stone” to further research and theoretical application of Clausewitzian principles to modern wars.⁶⁴ A thorough analysis of the Russo-Georgian War and an application of Clausewitzian thought will aid in a similar future endeavor to do the same for the conflicts in Ukraine and Syria.

Potential Limitations and Risks to Research

Obviously, with a large portion of research directed towards attaining a greater understanding of the decisions and thought processes of various leaders and central figures in Russian military strategy, it is inherently difficult to ascertain completely factual data and evidence. Simply put, it is incredibly difficult to truly gain an understanding of what the beliefs and decision-making processes of individuals like President Putin and his General Staff are. A thorough collection and compilation of research and analysis on the actions of the Russian military and its leaders helps to mitigate this obstacle. This process stems from the notion that the actions and behaviors of organizations can be traced to its organizational culture of strategic thought and the influence of specific leaders. Again, as stated above, there exists an inherent complication in attempting to argue the inner machinations, structure, and leadership of

⁶⁴ Fleming, *Clausewitz’s Timeless Trinity*, 18-19.

a nation's armed forces, along with its culture of strategic thought and decision-making processes. It quickly becomes apparent that a thorough and clearly articulated analysis of past of conflicts and innovation are vital to the comprehension of modern Russian military strategy and the influential theoretical concepts that have shaped its development.

Chapter 4: The Russo-Georgian War – 5 Days in August

Widely regarded as the first modern and conventional European war of the 21st century, the Russo-Georgian War occurred in early August 2008 between the armed forces of the Republic of Georgia, the Russian Federation, and the Russian-supported forces of the South Ossetian and Abkhazian republics.⁶⁵ For many, this short conflict illustrated a “return of history,” countering Fukuyama’s 1999 argument, and birthing what seemed to be a new Cold War.⁶⁶ The five-day war was the first invasion by Russian land forces into the territory of another sovereign nation since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Following a decade-long worsening of diplomatic relations between the two nations after the fall of the Soviet Union, which included the election of Vladimir Putin as President of the Russian Federation and the Rose Revolution in Georgia, tensions in the region of Transcaucasia reached an all-time high in early 2008. Then, in five short days from August 8-12, Russian sea, air, and land forces engaged and largely dominated the Georgian Armed Forces along a two-front offensive in the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.⁶⁷ What follows is an empirical analysis of the conflict, comprised of the pre-conditions and causes for war, an assessment of both sides’ military and strategic performance, and finally the political and military implications based on the war’s results. The historical evidence and facts drawn from this analysis,

⁶⁵ Michael Emerson, “Post-Mortem on Europe’s First War of the 21st Century?” *Centre for European Policy Studies* (August 2008), <http://aei.pitt.edu/9382/2/9/382.pdf>.

⁶⁶ Hans Mouritzen and Anders Wivel, *Explaining Foreign Policy: International Diplomacy and the Russo-Georgian War* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012), 1.

⁶⁷ Roy Allison, “Russia resurgent? Moscow’s campaign to ‘coerce Georgia to peace’,” *International Affairs* 84, no. 6 (2008): 1145, accessed 20 February 2018, doi:10.1111/j.1468-2346.008.00762.x.

when paired with the key components of Clausewitzian Thought, will help to create an accurate characterization of modern Russian military strategy and foreign policy.

Background to the Conflict – Causes, Pre-conditions, and Geopolitical Goals

For much of the 20th century, the Republic of Georgia existed as a satellite republic under the political and military control of Moscow and the Soviet Union. It was not until the last decade of the 20th century when, impassioned by the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia abolished the autonomy of the South Ossetian Oblast and re-declared its independence once again in April of 1991. Following a 1992 ceasefire that halted conflicts between South Ossetian and Abkhazian separatists and Georgian armed forces, Russian and Georgian peacekeepers were stationed in Ossetia with the hope of preventing any potential resumption or reescalation of conflict.⁶⁸ This ceasefire “froze” the conflict between Georgia and Russia in such a manner that the status quo became a “*de facto* separation of South Ossetia from the rest of Georgia.”⁶⁹ In a little over a decade, specific and deliberate policies from the Kremlin would “unfreeze” this conflict and create the nexus for armed conventional conflict between the two nations.

Without a doubt, the primary catalysts and reasons for the severe deterioration of Russo-Georgian relations in the 21st century were the subsequent elections of Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2000 and Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili in 2004. Under Putin’s presidency, the Russian Federation began its policy of “Passportization”, by which the Russian government began producing and distributing Russian passports

⁶⁸ “Georgia’s South Ossetia Conflict: Make Hast Slowly,” *International Crisis Group* no. 183 (June 2007): 1, accessed 27 February 2018, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/183-georgia-s-south-ossetia-conflict-make-haste-slowly.pdf>.

⁶⁹ Roy Allison, “Russia Resurgent? Moscow’s Campaign to ‘Coerce Georgia to Peace’,” *International Affairs* 84, no. 6 (2008): 1146.

to Abkhazian and South Ossetian citizens. This government action would give diplomatic weight to the Kremlin's claim of protection of Russian nationals within the borders of Georgia at the outset of conflict. Opposing this Russian involvement, and

Administrative Map of Georgia⁷⁰

under the new Saakashvili presidential administration in 2004, the Georgian government began to emphasize a strengthening of ties with Europe and the United States. Putin and the Kremlin interpreted the so-called “Rose Revolution” which brought Saakashvili to power in Georgia as “attempts by Washington to exert greater soft power and leverage in Russia’s sphere of influence.”⁷¹ Paired with this increasing relationship

⁷⁰ “Administrative Map of Georgia,” Nations Online, accessed April 22, 2018, http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/map/georgia_map2.htm.

⁷¹ Lionel Beehner et al., “Analyzing the Russian Way of War: Evidence form the 2008 Conflict with Georgia,” *Modern War Institute* (March 20, 2018): 16.

with the West, Saakashvili sought to reintegrate and regain control of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, while also campaigning for membership into NATO. His national security strategy for the Republic of Georgia consisted of restoring the country's national borders, stabilizing the Caucasus and Black Sea Region, and securing his country's status as a true energy transit corridor.⁷² The distinct leadership polarity among the Russian and Georgian governments at the dawn of the 21st century would only be magnified "against the backdrop of serious crises in Russian-Georgian relations, which seemed to intensify as Georgia deepened its security relationship with NATO and the United States."⁷³

Before being able to properly understand the results and implications of the Russo-Georgian War, it is ultimately necessary to formulate a clear comprehension of the national interests, geopolitical goals, and economic connections that the Russian Federation has with the Republic of Georgia, most notably in the years immediately preceding. Viewed as one of the most volatile and ethnically mixed regions in the world, Transcaucasia acts as a distinct geographical buffer between Europe and the Middle East, bordering Turkey, Iran, and the Russian Federation. The region is vital due to its economic connection with the presence and transportation of oil; by gaining control of Transcaucasia, Russia would be able to exert considerable influence throughout much of Central Asia and the Middle East. Additionally, an increase in political influence over Georgia would have brought Russia significant control over the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, which would lead to a dominance over the energy and transportation corridor

⁷² Beehner et al., "Analyzing the Russian Way of War," 16.

⁷³ Allison, "Russia Resurgent," 1147.

that links the Middle East with the Black Sea.⁷⁴ Connection with the Black Sea also presented very significant military influences on Russia's action in the Transcaucasus region. Similar to the Crimean peninsula, Georgia's Black Sea coastline within the region of Abkhazia existed as a crucial strategic imperative and goal for the Russian military.⁷⁵ By obtaining yet another foothold along the coast, the Russian Black Sea fleet would stand to gain a significant naval advantage throughout the region. Finally, there exists an immense historical and cultural connection between Russia and Georgia. With its many beaches, luxurious mountain retreats and fine foods, Georgia became a "playland" of Imperial and Soviet leaders since the 19th century. The birthplace of Joseph Stalin, Georgia has become to Russia what India was to the British Empire: its "jewel in the crown."⁷⁶

From these interests and connections, one can derive two primary geopolitical goals that the Russian Federation had in armed conflict with the Republic of Georgia. First, Russia sought to deny Georgian sovereignty and eliminate Georgian military presence in the contested areas of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Before the conflict was even in its nascent phase in early 2008, relations between Russia and Georgia were by far the worst among post-Soviet states. Also by this time, President Putin and the Kremlin had granted a significant majority of inhabitants within Abkhazia and South Ossetia Russian citizenship, hoping to establish and maximize close relations with the

⁷⁴ Ariel Cohen and Robert E. Hamilton, *The Russian Military and the Georgia War: Lessons and Implications* (Carlisle, PA: United States Army War College, 2011), 2.

⁷⁵ Allison, "Russia resurgent," 1147-1150.

⁷⁶ Beehner et al., "Analyzing the Russian Way of War," 11.

separatist republics.⁷⁷ These actions, coupled with the frozen nature of conflicts in the North Caucasus regions, would spawn what Ariel Cohen and Robert Hamilton termed a “creeping annexation of both territories.”⁷⁸ The second, more long-term and far-reaching geopolitical goal dealt with preventing Georgia from joining NATO and increasing its ties with Western Europe and the United States. By accomplishing this, Russia was not only influencing the Republic of Georgia, but *all* former Soviet states – specifically Ukraine – by sending a strong message that continued insistence on and progression towards NATO membership would undoubtedly lead to armed conflict.⁷⁹ This in turn would aid in clearing the path towards Russia’s long-term strategic goal of restructuring a “sphere of influence” across Eastern Europe and all former Soviet Republics, leading to a Russian resurgence and rise as a regional hegemon. Security - the core national interest of the Russian Federation – is defined by its geography, history, culture, and domestic and foreign policy. Denying Georgian sovereignty and power and countering NATO expansion were intermediate means to achieve this end of greater security for the Russian state. It is with these long-term geopolitical goals and interests in mind that one can more accurately assess the performance of the Russian armed forces during the 5-day war in Georgia in 2008, as well as begin to characterize Russian military strategy in the 21st century.

⁷⁷ Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military and the Georgia War*, 5.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 1.

Strategic Analysis – The Russian Armed Forces in the Russo-Georgian War

Among the various conflicts that have taken place within Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Russo-Georgian War is unique in that it more closely reflects characteristics and trends of more traditional and conventional conflicts. As Matt Killingsworth writes, the 2008 war “followed a much more familiar pattern of two states vying for influence over contested territory, and using military force against one another in order to resolve their dispute.”⁸⁰ The war itself was characterized as the first conventional state-on-state conflict on the European continent in the 21st century. To many observing the region in early 2008, the warning signs for conflict between the two nations were becoming increasingly clear. The culmination of these signs was in mid-July when Russia commenced a military training exercise entitled “Caucasus 2008”, where close to 8,000 Russian troops were positioned along the Russian-Georgian border, training to aid Abkhazian and South Ossetian peacekeepers.⁸¹ Included in this exercise was the distribution of various pamphlets and leaflets to Russian forces with intelligence relating to the composition and disposition of the Georgian Armed Forces.⁸² By the conclusion of the exercise at the end of July, both countries began vehemently accusing each other of escalation. Russia demanded a cessation of hostilities by Georgian forces towards South Ossetia, and the Georgian government accused Russia

⁸⁰ Matt Killingsworth, “Understanding order and violence in the post-Soviet space: the Chechen and Russo-Georgian wars,” *Global Change, Peace & Security* 24, no. 2 (2012): 225.

⁸¹ Bertil Nygren, “Russia and Georgia – From Confrontation to War: What is Next?”, in *Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century*, ed. Roger E. Kanet (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 108.

⁸² Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr, eds., *The Guns of August 2008: Russia’s War in Georgia* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharp, 2009), 71.

of continuing to mass forces along the border even though “Caucasus 2008” had ended.⁸³

On the evening of August 7, 2008 following a short ceasefire after several continuous days of back and forth shelling by Georgian and South Ossetian separatist forces, Georgian forces resumed firing on South Ossetian territory due to artillery bombardments on the Georgian town of Tskhinvali. Included in this resumption of hostilities were Georgian tanks, 122mm howitzers, and 203 mm self-propelled artillery that were directed towards the South Ossetian border.⁸⁴ Shortly thereafter, Russian armed forces began advancing through the Roki Tunnel into Ossetian territory. Georgian troops began to fire upon the Russians, and in response, Russian air strikes began targeting Georgian military bases.⁸⁵ From these actions in such a short period of time spawns one of the most important and ultimately unclear issues regarding the conflict between Russia and Georgia. As Bertil Nygren articulates:

The main question remains whether or not Russian regular troops (with or without the consent of the Russian political leadership), together with South Ossetian militias, had planned and staged the war situation, and Russian troops had entered the Roki tunnel before August 8, or whether the Russian reaction was a more “spontaneous” outbreak after a Georgian military miscalculation.⁸⁶

There have been countless versions varying explanations for the initial cause of conflict between Russian and Georgian forces within South Ossetia. The primary claim among Georgian intelligence and information sources is that the Russian-backed

⁸³ Nygren, “Russia and Georgia – From Confrontation to War,” in Kanet, 108.

⁸⁴ The Government of Georgia, *On the Eve of War: The Sequence of events on august 7, 2008*, Russian Aggression of Georgia, http://www.smr.gov.ge/uploads/file/On_the_eve_of_war.pdf.

⁸⁵ Nygren, “Russia and Georgia – From Confrontation to War,” in Kanet, 108.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 109.

Ossetian separatists directly provoked the Georgian Armed Forces, knowing full and well that the Russian government would be able to use the Georgian military response as a *causus belli* and commence the pre-planned invasion of Georgian territory. The Russian government in doing so sought to provoke the Republic of Georgia into initiating a preemptive war.⁸⁷ The opposing view throughout the Russian political and military leadership largely stemmed from the belief that the Russian Federation deployed its armed forces in a role driven by self-defense and overall protection of citizen nationals and peacekeepers. Ultimately, Moscow argued that the intervention by Russian armed forces served two purposes: first, ending a nascent humanitarian crisis and burgeoning ethnic cleansing of South Ossetian citizens; and second, saving Russian citizens for whom the Kremlin is responsible for, especially when framed under the United Nations' own Responsibility to Protect initiative.⁸⁸

From the outset of the conflict, it was already clear that the Russian government and its armed forces had formulated a well-thought-out strategy and overall plan for the invasion of Georgia. Prior to the initial Georgian bombardment of South Ossetian territory surrounding Tskhinvali, a combined and coordinated Russian political and military strategy had achieved key preparatory successes in setting the operational environment. These two successes can be effectively summarized in the following manner. First as a degradation in the quality of Georgian political and military decision-making; and second as correctly identifying and exploiting a policy gap in NATO-Georgian relations and reasoning, which led to the Georgian government concluding

⁸⁷ Beehner et al., "Analyzing the Russian Way of War," 19.

⁸⁸ Killingsworth, "Understanding order and violence," 230.

that “it had no choice but to fight a war it had little chance of winning, and to fight that war alone.”⁸⁹

This first political-military strategic success – degrading Georgian decision-making – stemmed from a Russian desire to conceive an aura of fear, confusion, and anxiety within the minds of Georgian political leaders and the government as a whole.⁹⁰ Russia accomplished this with increasing political pressure and negated attempts at reconciliation with the Georgian government regarding territorial disputes and “frozen conflicts” in the Transcaucasus region. In doing so, and without any direct military means, Russia was able to cause Georgia’s government and leaders to become more insistent and anxious in its force posturing along its northern border. This led to the growth of a Georgian strategic mindset and retort that as a sovereign nation, it “had red lines in Abkhazia and South Ossetia that – if crossed – would require a response.”⁹¹ In escalating to full-scale conflict on August 7th, the Georgian government forced their hand and brought forth a large-scale Russian invasion. When examining the decision-making processes and capabilities of Saakashvili and the rest of his administration, one finds incredible misperception misinformation, and confusion towards actual Russian intentions.⁹²

This first Russian strategic success led directly into the second of exploiting a distinct policy gap in NATO-Georgian relations. Throughout much of the early 21st century, NATO and the United States had been pressuring Georgia not to react in a

⁸⁹ Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military and the Georgia War*, 21.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 14.

⁹¹ Ibid., 16.

⁹² Mouritzen and Wivel, *Explaining Foreign Policy*, 75-76

provocative or preemptive manner against Russian actions that could be formulated into a reason for military intervention. As Ariel Cohen writes, NATO and Georgia were essentially “talking past each other, with the former taking the long view toward Georgia’s eventual membership... and the latter insisting that its sovereignty and territorial integrity were being compromised and that it could not stand by.”⁹³ In essence, the Russian government and armed forces understood and acted in such a way that it was able to destabilize the foundation of Georgian strategic thought and decision-making capability. This was to such a magnitude that the operational and strategic environment for military operations was already teeming with distinct advantages for the Russian Federation at the inception of its invasion into Georgian territory.

One of the greatest successes that the Russian armed forces had in the 2008 war was achieving operational and strategic surprise at the outset of its invasion. Doing so allowed the Russians to overwhelm the Georgian military as soon as the conflict began, seizing the overall initiative and key military objectives and areas before Georgia and the rest of the international community could react. Russian troops were able to achieve this operational and strategic surprise in three ways. First, by seizing and moving forces through the Roki Tunnel that connects South Ossetia with Russia. Second, by massing forces from Vladikavkaz in North Ossetia down to Tskhinvali. And finally, by being able to deploy large number of troops from different regions of Russia in order to “achieve sufficient force ratios for offensive operations without creating a large mobilization signature prior to initiative the war.”⁹⁴

⁹³ Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military and the Georgia War*, 16.

⁹⁴ George T. Donovan, *Russian Operational Art in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008* (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2009), 10.

As one examines the political and military planning by the Russian Federation, it becomes clear that Russia's strategy against Georgia was conceptualized and matured long in advance of the commencement of invasion operations, and that prior coordination and action gave the Russian Armed Forces distinct operational advantages against their Georgian foe. As Colonel George Donovan, Jr. writes:

The [Russian] armed forces, given a limited aim and clear, strategic tasks, were able to craft a campaign plan that integrated combine arms to achieve all of the strategic objectives with minimal cost in life and equipment. ...The Russian military proved to be an effective means of national power in assisting its government in achieving its geopolitical goals in the near abroad.⁹⁵

Much of these advantages arose from greater success at political-military coordination and synchronization at the highest levels of the Russian government and Armed Forces. This often-perceived image of the Russian military mind, as C.W. Blandy explains, manifests itself in the General Staff and "looks farther ahead than its Western counterpart on the basis that 'foresight implies control'."⁹⁶ By identifying potential weaknesses and vulnerabilities in its enemy's government and force structure, the Russian government is able to work backward, efficiently and effectively planning military operations that nest and link well with political actions and overall geopolitical goals. It is with this foresight and adroitness of strategic planning that Russian leadership was able to direct its focus on the Republic of Georgia in the early 21st century. Russia was thus able to reestablish control, power, and dominance in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and demonstrate to the rest of the world the potential ramifications for former Soviet republics that show a desire to align with NATO and the West. All of

⁹⁵ Donovan, *Russian Operational Art in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008*, 19.

⁹⁶ Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military and the Georgia War*, 17.

this combines to illustrate Russia's aspiration for a resurgence as a great power and regional hegemon within Europe, and the steps that its political and military leaders are more than willing to take to achieve it.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military and the Georgia War*, 91.

Chapter 5: After Georgia – Foundations of 21st-Century Russian Military Doctrine

Following the conclusion of its war with Georgia, the Russian Armed Forces and political leadership within the Kremlin took steps to revise its overall military doctrine and geopolitical stance as a means to reassert its desire as a rising regional hegemon. Over the past decade, under the leadership of President Putin, the Russian Federation has approved and published two distinct revisions to its Military Doctrine, with the first in 2010 and the second in 2014. Both of these documents sought to outline and focus on threats to the overall security of the Russian Federation, steps to ensure the preparedness of the Armed Forces, and resolve to guarantee Russia's security.⁹⁸

Doctrinal Developments – The 2010 and 2014 Russian Military Doctrines

In its first doctrinal revision since 2000, Russia published its 2010 doctrine with the acknowledgement that, although there was a distinct decline in the likelihood of war involving the use of conventional means, the Russian state still faced what it viewed as serious external military threats to its security. Chief among these was NATO, and its desire to carry out actions “in violation of the norms of international law and to move... NATO member countries closer to the borders of the Russian Federation.”⁹⁹ Even though Russia has repeatedly taken this negative stance against NATO, it has not been without the possibility of cooperation and potential de-escalation. In 2010, Russia

⁹⁸ Robert Smigielski, “The Russian Federation’s Military Doctrine,” *The Polish Institute of International Affairs* 28, no. 104 (2010): 205, accessed October 15, 2017, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/113669/a104-2010.pdf>.

⁹⁹ Office of the President of the Russian Federation, *The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation*, Russian Federation presidential edict, 5 February (2010). Accessed October 1, 2017. <https://rusemb.org.uk/press/2029>.

asserted that it would be willing to begin increase cooperation with the NATO alliance, but only on the condition that the organization begin to “accommodate Russia’s interests in their military and political planning.”¹⁰⁰ What this demonstrates is an inherent desire of the Russian government and population as a whole to return to the game of great power politics. After recognizing the dominance of NATO among the majority of European powers, Russia sought to stand its ground against the alliance’s assertiveness. This pertained directly to Russia’s perception that NATO’s expansion into Eastern European territory to be an affront to international law. As its 2010 Military Doctrine illustrates, the Russian Federation’s chief political aim at the time was to acquire and demonstrate increased influence over any NATO decision related to former republics of the Soviet Union. If denied this influence, President Medvedev, then-Prime Minister Putin, and the rest of the Kremlin indicated that it would not hesitate from the potential use of military force to defend its security and vested interests, both domestically and beyond its national borders.

Following its invasion of Crimea and the commencement of separatist-backed hostilities along its border with Ukraine, the Russian Federation published its most up-to-date Military Doctrine in December 2014. The primary differences between the 2010 and 2014 versions of Russia’s primary strategic planning document broadly illustrate the developments in the nation’s foreign policy objectives and the means by which it hopes to achieve them. Specifically, one of the most critical changes between the two doctrines is the removal of the claim that Russia is willing to cooperate with NATO to

¹⁰⁰ Smigielski, “The Russian Federation’s Military Doctrine,” 2.

enhance and accommodate overall Russian security.¹⁰¹ This seems to be a clear signal to NATO and the West that the Kremlin has begun to lose its desire for any diplomatic or military agreement, and as a result has “turned its back on cooperation with Western partners and is working on the creation of alternatives.”¹⁰²

In assessing its various military threats, the 2014 Military Doctrine focuses on Russia’s need to defend its sphere of influence and vital national interests. While remaining hesitant to directly list the nations or regions it views within that sphere, it is clear that President Putin and the Russian Federation seek to continue leveraging its border states and former members of the Soviet Union. Russia’s doctrine acts as a direct message to both neighbors and adversaries that it views all nations within the realm of the former Soviet Union as critical to its sphere of influence, and that it is vehemently committed to defense against internal and external aggression.¹⁰³ The reason behind this commitment to defending these regions can be traced back to the historic nature of Russian strategic culture, with a long-lasting desire for the establishment and maintenance of great power status within Europe.¹⁰⁴ The primary conclusion that one can draw from Russia’s most recent Military Doctrine is an assertive desire to protect vital interest in what it terms the “Near Abroad,” and that any perceived

¹⁰¹ Polina Sinovets and Bettina Renz, “Russia’s 2014 Military Doctrine and beyond: threat perceptions, capabilities, and ambitions,” *NATO Research Division* no. 117 (2015): 2, accessed October 10, 2017, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/new.php?icode=830>.

¹⁰² H. Reisinger, “Putin’s neue Militiaerdoktrin”, *Seuddeutsche Zeitung*, February 19, 2015, quoted in Sinovets and Renz, “Russia’s 2014 Military Doctrine and beyond,” 2.

¹⁰³ Sinovets and Renz, “Russia’s 2014 Military Doctrine and beyond,” 3.

¹⁰⁴ Isabelle Facon, “The Russian Way of War: in Crisis?” in *The Oxford Handbook of War*, eds. Yves Boyer and Julian Lindley-French, Oxford Handbooks Online, 2012, accessed September 30, 2017, doi:10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199562930.0 13.0019.

intervention or expansion into its sphere of influence will be met with armed military force. With its recent actions in Crimea as a backdrop for the doctrine's publication, Russia continued in the next step toward its envisioned return to great power status. In doing so, it also defined its willingness to defend the regions that it views as crucial to maintaining its position as a regional hegemon within Europe.

Institutional and Cultural Changes in the Russian Military

One of the most important effects of the war with Georgia in 2008 was that the Russian Armed Forces were able to learn an incredible amount about military operations in the 21st century and thus reform the structural institutions and culture of the armed forces to better meet their geopolitical goals. Both the successes and failures experienced during the five-day war would propel military reform at all levels, from the General Staff all the way down to tactical unit formations and equipment. Military expenditure was fueled by economic expansion and a rise in overall GDP of the Russian Federation.¹⁰⁵ The Russian armed forces would move away from its Soviet-dominated division structure to a brigade structure that somewhat mimics the United States' emphasis on individual brigade combat teams as the decisive operational unit in its army today. Also, Russia steered away from a primarily conscript-formed army and instead shifted towards incorporating volunteer soldiers that would usually serve for three years and were far more professional than conscripts.¹⁰⁶

The reformed culture and institution of the Russian armed forces can be defined by three specific changes.¹⁰⁷ First was a more profound and intense feeling of élan

¹⁰⁵ Beehner et al., "Analyzing the Russian Way of War," 24-25.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 4.

within the Russian military. For the first time in the 21st century, soldiers of the Russian armed forces were proud to be members of such, and this created a sense of pride and vivacity that was incredibly lacking before the 2008 war. Secondly, the war with Georgia brought about a modernization of Russian equipment, manifested in new and updated weapon systems, mechanized vehicles, troop carriers, and tanks. Finally, the Russian military of the second half of the 21st century so far has shown a new and more effective logistics capability, marked by an ability to transport soldiers and equipment much faster and more efficiently to the battlefield, wherever on Russia's expansive border that might be. This reform in logistic capability and operational initiative seems to encapsulate the Russian-devised concept of operational art. Operational art, first developed by the Soviets during the 1920s after the First World War, came to define the link between strategy and tactics in war:

Operational art determines methods of preparing and conducting operations for the achievement of strategic goals and serves as the point of departure for tactics, which organizes the preparation of conduct of the combined arms battle in accordance with the operation's goals and tasks.¹⁰⁸

With these institutional and cultural changes following its invasion of Georgia, the Russian armed forces became a much more professional, better well-equipped, and better led military with clear operational and strategic goals that were largely in sync with President Putin's geopolitical policies and aspirations. In stark contrast to the Russian military of the late 1990s and early 2000s, the military of the second decade of

¹⁰⁷ R. Taft Blackburn, brief to author, April 16, 2018.

¹⁰⁸ B.N. Morozov, ed., *Kratkii Slovar' Operativno-Takticheskikh i Obshchevoennykh Sloz (Terminov)* (Moscow: Voennizdat, 1958), 188, in Richard W. Harrison, *The Russian Way of War: Operational Art, 1904-1940* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 2.

the 21st century is much more poised to be a viable instrument of national policy for the Russian Federation and its leaders.

Chapter 6: A Clausewitzian View of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and Russian Foreign Policy

With the analysis and study of Russia's actions during the Russo-Georgian War in 2008, one can begin to conceptualize the connections between certain behaviors and decisions and the ideas first developed by Clausewitz. This subsequent application of Clausewitzian thought to the 2008 war will illustrate to the reader two primary claims: first, that the writings and teachings of Carl von Clausewitz are anything but outdated and obsolete; and second, that Russia's military strategy and national policy in the 21st century can be accurately characterized by those same ideas of Clausewitz. This analysis will examine and analyze elements of the Clausewitzian Trinity in 21st-century warfare, a modern view of friction and ambiguity in war, the Russian General Staff's culture of strategic thought through the lens of military genius, and Russian military action as a tool and instrument of national policy.

Exploiting Passion and Hostility through Ethnic Nationalism

The concept of the Clausewitzian Trinity is crucial to understanding the thought processes and planning priorities of President Putin and his General Staff in relation to military intervention in Georgia. Achieving a balance between the aspects of hostility, chance, and reason, Clausewitz writes, is absolutely necessary to the success of military campaigns. Any foundation of military theory or strategy that does not consider aspects of the Trinity "would immediately become involved in such a contradiction with reality, that it might be regarded as destroyed at once by that alone."¹⁰⁹ While this emphasis on a link between physical and moral forces originally related to Clausewitz's

¹⁰⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.

experiences as an officer facing Napoleon's Grand Armée in the early 19th century, it still directly applies today. Essentially, because physical and moral forces coalesce and combine in warfare, "moral forces play a role when physical forces are unleashed: in battle."¹¹⁰ For President Putin, this expression of Clausewitzian passion and moral force took the form of the protection of ethnic Russian nationalism in the "Near Abroad." Having vowed to defend Russian speakers and citizens – both within and outside of the borders of the Russian Federation – Putin has employed this passion of ethnic nationalism throughout both Russia and the Near Abroad to justify its military intervention in Georgia in 2008.

When Clausewitz writes of violence and hostility as a component of the Trinitarian theory towards the nature of war, he does not mean solely *physical* violence. On the contrary, as Christopher Bassford points out, Clausewitz implies the "motivating force that can change the course of war, or even drive it on when it no longer displays any rational purpose."¹¹¹ This element of passion and hostility is what drives war and its belligerents forward; it is what gives war its violent and forceful nature and makes it truly a competition of wills between two or more parties. Clausewitz spoke of two forms of hostility that can take shape in war. First are hostile feelings, which may or may not always be present, and are manifested in general animosity or shared cultural connections between warring parties. The second form is known as hostile intentions,

¹¹⁰ Sibylle Scheipers, "Moral force in war: Clausewitz and hybrid warfare," in *After 'Hybrid' Warfare, What Next? Understanding and Responding to Contemporary Russia*, eds. B. Renz and H. Smith, 2, Helsinki, Finland: Publications of the Government's analysis, assessment and research activities, Prime Minister's Office, 2016, accessed October 16, 2017, <http://www.helsinki.fi/aleksanteri/english/projects/VNK-report%20longerpieces.pdf>.

¹¹¹ Christopher Bassford, "Tip-Toe Through the Trinity, or The Strange Persistence of Trinitarian Warfare," Clausewitz.com, last modified January 5, 2017, accessed March 18, 2018, <http://www.clausewitz.com/mobile/trinity8.htm>.

and as Fleming writes, they may “inevitably provoke a cause-and-effect relationship that is reciprocal and can push each belligerent to the extremes, exacerbating hostility still further.”¹¹² These two elements of hostility were exactly what Putin and the Russian Federation were able to channel and exploit before and during the invasion of Georgia. Exploiting the already-present tensions between the two nations and separatist republics, Russia was able to capitalize off of the narrative of foreign national protection and maximize the passion and hostility of the Georgian government to the point where they were forced to attack in South Ossetia in early August.

Vital to this understanding of the role of ethnic nationalism is the manner in which Russia views its relationship with former Soviet Republics, most notably those in the Caucasus and Baltic regions. Essentially, the persistent and continual trend throughout Russian history is that it “perceives itself as a country surrounded by enemies... [and this] was an important driver of its westward territorial expansion into Central Europe... in search of strategic depth.”¹¹³ Paired with this territorial expansion is the notion that the Russian people and their government have constantly attributed cultural and military significance to territory, and that a true sense of national identity is among the most important foundation beliefs for Russians all around the world. The demonstration of this sense of national identity and ethnic nationalism took the form of Russia’s “Passportization” policy in South Ossetia and Abkhazia prior to the war with Georgia in 2008. By providing a physical and identifiable notion of citizenship, Putin and the Kremlin in a sense created a target of opportunity that allowed them to justify, to both

¹¹² Fleming, *Clausewitz’s Timeless Trinity*, 62.

¹¹³ Martin N. Murphy, “Understanding Russia’s Concept for Total War in Europe,” *The Heritage Foundation* Special Report, no. 184 (September 2016): 1, <http://report.heritage.org/sr184>.

domestic and international observers, military intervention in the North Caucasus. As Clausewitz argues in his generalized “Consequences for Theory,” the various elements of passion, violence, and enmity “that are to be kindled in war must already be inherent in the people.”¹¹⁴ The Modern War Institute’s (MWI) battle analysis of the 2008 war explains how Russia utilizes this sense of nationalism as a means of justifying intervention:

Under the guise of protecting *sootchestvennikii*, or so-called “compatriots,” Russia utilizes these populations as proxies to justify humanitarian intervention and then maintain “frozen conflicts” to create new facts on the ground that cement favorable political outcomes. ... Russia capitalized on early post-Soviet nativist Georgian politics to establish the breakaway provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as protected areas to thwart Georgia’s accession into NATO.¹¹⁵

In short, Putin and the Russian government was able to effectively and efficiently exploit this increased passion in the form of ethnic nationalism; it gave greater cause and justifiability to the Russian citizenry as troops began to surge through the Roki Tunnel and into Ossetian territory on August 8, 2008. By taking necessary measures and precautions to create this desire and passion for protection of Russian nationals, the Russian government set the conditions for success long before the first Russian soldier set foot on Georgian soil.

Information and Cyber Operations – Utilizing Friction and Chance in the Modern Age

Transitioning from the geopolitical and strategic points of view to one of an operational and tactical vantage, Russia’s novel utilization and combination of cyber warfare with information operations in Georgia illustrates how the Clausewitzian

¹¹⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, 89.

¹¹⁵ Beehner et al., “Analyzing the Russian Way of War,” 32.

concepts of friction and chance only exacerbate the complex nature of 21st-century warfare. The 2008 Russo-Georgian War marked the first direct use of cyber operations in support of a conventional conflict, and much can be gleaned from an analysis of its impact on the character of the war itself. At the outset of the conflict, Russian cyber forces attacked numerous Georgian government installations and key online websites, including those of the Georgian President, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Georgian embassies of the United States and United Kingdom.¹¹⁶ These distributed denial of service (DDOS) attacks overwhelmed and crashed government websites in Georgia, and were directed specifically at those of the parliament, president, news agencies, and central banks.¹¹⁷ While not especially effective and long-lasting (most Georgian websites were soon reestablished after the attack), the demonstration of the ability to attack online security and infrastructure showcased Russia's emphasis on maximizing confusion and ambiguity against its enemy. Of great importance is the experience gained by Russian armed forces with respect to cyber-attacks; for the first time on the battlefield, Russian troops attempted to link cyber and conventional operations together to produce desired effects and greater confusion on the side of the enemy.¹¹⁸ This valuable experience that the Russians took from its war with Georgia would aid in reforms and advancements to the foundation of cyber operations within Russian military strategy.

¹¹⁶ Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military and the Georgia War*, 44.

¹¹⁷ Donovan, *Russian Operational Art in the Russo-Georgian War of 2008*, 13.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

Congruent with its cyber-attacks against the Georgian government, the Russian government aimed to seize, maintain, and exploit the operational initiative when it came to information spread and narrative structuring. As Ariel Cohen writes, the Russian narrative centered around three primary aspects:

First, Georgia in general and President Saakashvili in particular were the aggressors; second, Russia was forced to intervene in defense of its citizens and to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe; and finally, the United States and the West had no basis on which to criticize Russia because of Western actions in Kosovo and elsewhere.¹¹⁹

The ability to manipulate and exploit narratives of questionable accuracy and truth afforded Russia a greater realm of maneuverability and freedom from which to combat Georgian political and military defenses. Confusion and a lack of general understanding of the truth is a defined and “deliberate Russian method to erode local resistance,” and the Russian government utilizes this to directly control the narrative on and off the battlefield, enhancing their chance of tactical and strategic success.¹²⁰ This comparatively new method of waging war against an enemy force in the 21st century revealed the extent to which overall confusion and lack of truth can play upon the perspective and image of belligerent’s actions.

Russia’s emphasis on information and narrative dominance exhibits the modern conceptualization of Clausewitzian friction and the role of information in war. Clausewitz wrote that war continually exists within the realm of uncertainty and confusion, and that it is this uncertainty that leads to war’s imperfect and ambiguous nature.¹²¹ Reflecting on

¹¹⁹ Cohen and Hamilton, *The Russian Military and the Georgian War*, 46.

¹²⁰ Beehner et al., “Analyzing the Russian Way of War,” 33.

¹²¹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 117.

the lack of truly accurate and actionable information, he generally disdained intelligence, arguing that most reports in war are contradictory, false, and uncertain; and that this in turn creates a sense of fear which states can use to “multiply lies and inaccuracies” against the enemy.¹²² The basis of Clausewitz’s general distrust and suspicion of intelligence in war stemmed from five primary factors: chance, an increase in complexity due to force size, limitations in collection, a lack of a scientific approach to analysis, and the dominance of preconception over fact.¹²³ These factors, summed together, amalgamate into the essence of *friction* – “countless minor incidents... [that] combine to lower the general level of performance, so that one always falls far short of the intended goal.”¹²⁴ This aim of lowering the level of performance was the foundation behind Russia’s information operations against Georgia at the outset of its invasion in 2008. Although the specific tactical gains of the Russian cyberattacks were limited and not as successful as intended, the attacks still had substantial strategic and psychological ramifications:

The plausibly deniable nature of the cyber side of conflict should not be understated and adds a new dimension to hybrid warfare that once required state resources to accomplish. ...Arguably, the inclusion of cyber means into a kinetic battle, not as a standalone effect but rather as a force multiplier, constitutes a logical progression to the natural evolution of conflict and demonstrates the value of information operations during conflict.¹²⁵

The Russian government and armed forces were able to capitalize off its weakening of Georgian cyber infrastructure security and overall narrative dominance to

¹²² Clausewitz, *On War*, 117.

¹²³ David Kahn, “Clausewitz and Intelligence,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* no. 9 (1986): 118-120.

¹²⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, 119.

¹²⁵ Beehner et al., “Analyzing the Russian Way of War,” 3-4.

create an environment more susceptible to military and political success. Specific DDOS attacks on Georgian government websites were successful in preventing the Saakashvili administration from maintaining a flow of information and truth out to the Georgian people and armed forces, creating a heightened sense of confusion and overall lack of command and control during the war's initial stages. In a sense, Russia was able to weaponize or operationalize elements of Clausewitzian friction, transforming it into an offensive capability that could be utilized in the form of specific cyber-attacks and information warfare that sought to degrade an enemy's ability to maintain control both on the battlefield and in cyberspace.

Putin, the General Staff, and Russian Foresight – Genius for 21st-Century War?

As this paper has stated previously, even before setting foot in Georgian territory the Russian government and armed forces had taken steps and set the conditions for operational and strategic success. Much of this stemmed largely from a thorough analysis and planning process concerning what was necessary to achieve Russian military and political goals. Both Putin and Medvedev, along with the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia, were able to identify early on the weaknesses in the foreign policy structure and relations between Georgia and NATO. Exploiting these, Russia caused a severe degradation in the Georgian government's decision-making ability, and created a rift in policy goals between Saakashvili's administration and the NATO alliance.

In identifying this vulnerability and target of opportunity against Georgia, the key leaders in the Russian government and armed forces demonstrated elements, attributes, and characteristics of what Clausewitz considered *military genius*. Through

years of professional education and development, the Russian General Staff have achieved the qualities of both coup d'oeil and determination, which Clausewitz deemed necessary for successful leaders in war.¹²⁶ The General Staff and Putin's government were able to quickly recognize the advantages that Russia possessed against NATO and Western Europe in relation to maintaining influence over Georgia, and acted quickly with both accurate and rapid decision-making. With the planning process for armed conflict against Georgia having started as early as 2003, Russia situated itself in such a manner that, at a moment's notice, it could provoke a so-called "frozen conflict" and decisively maneuver forces to seize territory in the North Caucasus. Putin and his General Staff have become able to instantly recognize opportunities as they arise on the geopolitical stage. Moreover, with this ability to recognize also comes an ability to act decisively, while still understanding the inherent risks and boundaries in doing so. Putin has illustrated his willingness and resolution to commit to operations of incredible risk, but this is because calculated measures were taken to either mitigate risk or act in such a way that it no longer exists as a determining factor of success or failure. In his roles as president, prime minister, and commander-in-chief of the armed forces over the past 18 years, Putin has been able to combine the roles of both political and military leader in order to obtain full control over the national policy and military actions of the Russian Federation. He has, as Alex Deep writes, "displayed characteristics of a leader that Clausewitz equated to 'genius' such as decisiveness, political awareness, and determination, in the execution of a nuanced strategy to expand Russian influence."¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, 102.

¹²⁷ Alex Deep, "Putin, Clausewitz, and Ukraine," *Small Wars Journal* (March 1, 2015), accessed September 03, 2017, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/putin-clausewitz-and-ukraine>.

This is a brilliant modern embodiment of the qualities of coup d'oeil and determination – being able to identify and recognize a time and space to act, and having the courage and resolution to follow through with the action.

Russian Resurgence – War as Political Tool, Instrument, and Statement

Book Eight of *On War*, entitled “War Plans,” is often regarded as one of the most important and still-relevant components of Clausewitz’s magnum opus.¹²⁸ It is in this book that Clausewitz expounds upon the most-often recited phrase of his entire work – that “war is merely the continuation of policy by other means.”¹²⁹ Countless times throughout *On War* Clausewitz reemphasizes his core argument that war does not suspend the actions of politics and diplomatic relations between state actors; they are inherently connected and are simply repurposed tools of the same act. In the section of Book Eight titled “War Is an Instrument of Policy,” he contends that:

War is simply the continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means. We deliberately use the phrase “with the addition of other means” because we also want to make it clear that war in itself does not suspend political intercourse or change it into something entirely different. ... If that is so, then war cannot be divorced from political life; and whenever this occurs in our thinking about war... we are left with something pointless and devoid of sense.¹³⁰

Russian military operations in the 21st century have largely been specific expressions of geopolitical foreign policy. Under President Putin, Russia has risen to attempt to reassert itself on the international stage, and a large proponent of this

¹²⁸ Bernard Brodie, in his “A Guide to the Reading of *On War*,” writes that Book Eight brings us back to “the realm of pure gold” (699). Together, Books One and Eight are the most complete and still-relevant pieces of *On War* – Brodie states that they are the books “which give him the unique place he continues to hold and which account for his claims on our attention today” (700).

¹²⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 87.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 605.

reassertion is territorial influence in former Soviet states. The Russian government has made it a point to both these nations and those within NATO that it intends to protect and expand its influence in the Near Abroad. Consequently, the use of armed force is a reassurance of this commitment. In 2008, Russia utilized the invasion of South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the Republic of Georgia as a signal to other former Soviet states that it would not hesitate to use military force to exert its political influence. Regardless, Ukraine continued in its escalation of diplomatic relations with NATO, spurring on the 2014 intervention and subsequent annexation of Crimea. Putin and the heads of the Russian government and armed forces have yet to disconnect geopolitical policy with military actions; thus, they have followed Clausewitz's core belief that wars are nothing but expressions of policy. Wise to his theoretical foundations of war as a political instrument, Putin and his General Staff have understood that "subordinating the political point of view to the military would be absurd, for it is policy that has created war. Policy is the guiding intelligence and war the only instrument, not vice versa."¹³¹

One often-reoccurring misconception in today's view of Russia's use of their armed forces in Ukraine deals with their reasoning behind using *military* force as opposed to other elements of national power. For many authors writing on the subject of Russia's military operations in the 21st century, the use of military force is often viewed as a "last resort" by state actors. That is, Russia "only chose to initiate hostilities after other forms of political power had failed to maintain its influence over Ukraine."¹³² This suggests that Putin and the Russian government felt as though they were "forced" into

¹³¹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 607.

¹³² Deep, "Putin, Clausewitz, and Ukraine."

armed conflict, and that war was the only remaining option to exert their national power and influence. However, within the culture of Russian strategic thought throughout much of the 20th century and into the 21st, the use of armed force and conflict by the Russian state is better viewed as the ultimate resort rather than the last¹³³. War and armed conflict to the Russian government is the utilization and manifestation of the greatest elements of its national power – not just military force, but also including economic, information, and diplomatic power. This view is much more in tune with Clausewitz's original theory concerning war's relationship and interdependence on policy. In *On War*, Clausewitz never explicitly states that war should be viewed as the last resort of a state's act of policy. Instead, he posits that "the conduct of war, in its great outlines, is therefore policy itself, which takes up the sword in place of the pen, but does not on that account cease to think according to its own laws."¹³⁴ War never suspends policy as a tipping point or last resort; it does not discontinue the components of diplomatic, economic, and political relationships between nations – rather, it extends it through military action. Russia has applied the use of armed force as a statement to other nations that they are deeply committed and resolved to maintaining their influence over specific territory, and that they will not hesitate to use the ultimate resort in international relations.

¹³³ Clayton Merkley, interview by the author, October 10, 2017.

¹³⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, 610.

Chapter 7: Resurgence – Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century

The 2008 Russo-Georgian War was, at its very foundation, the defining signal to the entire world that the Russian Federation saw itself as a resurgent regional and global power. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia was viewed as an incredibly weakened nation with an all-but-dismantled military and economy. However, in the decade and a half from the Soviet Union's fall to the 2008 war, Russia revamped its military force structure, began the process of redeveloping its economy and domestic policies, and regained the overall strength and confidence that it once had before the dawn of the 21st century. The era that Russia's current foreign policy foundation harkens back to is that of the 19th and early 20th century Russian Empire. Based on its geographical disposition, long-standing culture, and historical institutions, Russia is bound for imperialistic tendencies. Jeffrey Mankoff attributes Russia's restructured foreign policy with its greater identity as a state:

For [Russia], the response has been to fall back on the tried and true – a strong state backed by a strong military, and a foreign policy that emphasizes strategic depth. ... A state's identity in the international system – whether it sees itself as a satiated or a revisionist power, a nation-state or an empire – provides the intellectual framework that shapes decisions about how power is employed.¹³⁵

The invasion of Georgia was the physical manifestation of Russia's resurgence and growing autonomy as a state actor. Because of its ingrained culture and institutional norms, as it regained its strength and vitality as a hegemonic actor the Russian government reverted to its imperialistic and expansionist tendencies. At its very core, Russia's government and its leaders desire to be powerful, autonomous, and influential

¹³⁵ Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 3.

throughout the world. Its greatest moments in history were at the height of its imperial power in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the Russian Federation today seeks to mimic that power and influence. President Putin remarked in 2005 that “the main accomplishment of recent years is Russia’s newly attained foreign policy autonomy.”¹³⁶ Russia desires to be influential and to matter on the world stage, and it will take great leaps to ensure that happens.

In addition to the constant desire to regain and *maintain* its status as a regional power in Europe, the Russian Federation in the 21st century possesses a strategic culture composed of “underlying assumptions and values that drive goal setting, interactions, capabilities, and ultimately behavior.”¹³⁷ This underlying culture shapes the actions of the Russian Armed Forces, ranging from force posturing to technological advancements in weaponry. Organizational culture exists as a hallmark of the foundational principles of military thought. As Jeffrey Legro argues, it shapes “state aims and international outcomes... produces information, plans, and capabilities which can constitute state preferences.”¹³⁸ The key to understanding Russia’s recent actions and doctrinal developments in its military strategy is to articulate a succinct understanding of its strategic culture, thus analyzing why a nation’s leaders and organizations behave the way they do.

¹³⁶ Vladimir Putin, “Poslanie Federal’nomu Sobraniyu Rossiiskoi Federatsii,” April 25, 2005, http://www.kremlin.ru/appears/2005/04/25/1223_type63372type63374type82634_87049.shtml, quoted in Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 5.

¹³⁷ Stephen R. Covington, *The Culture of Strategic Thought Behind Russia’s Modern Approaches to Warfare* (Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2016), 2.

¹³⁸ Legro, “Culture and Preferences in the International Cooperation Two-Step,” 118.

Stephen Covington has indicated that Russia's culture of strategic thought is comprised of four key assumptions and foundational pillars. What follows is an analytical breakdown of each assumption, carried out in the hopes of supporting the claims and reasons behind Russia's military actions in the 21st century. The first pillar derives itself from the notion that the Russian military believes that the country holds a unique geographic, political, economic, and strategic position across Eurasia. This uniqueness thus demands a unique and different approach to national security and defense, unlike that of any other major European power. It in turn creates the necessity for both symmetric and asymmetric capabilities, which are "united and employed simultaneously in accordance with a single strategy to achieve a single set of objectives in a hybrid military operation."¹³⁹ Vladimir Putin's framework for Russian grand strategy is comprised of three main components. First is the desire to ensure uncontested military, political, and economic security within Russia's perceived sphere of influence.¹⁴⁰ Nested within this desire is a conceptualization of the role of Russian influence in former Soviet space. Russian leaders since the early 1990s have gone so far as to characterize this element of foreign policy as a "Russian Monroe Doctrine." Andranik Migranian, a member of Yeltsin's Presidential Council, wrote in 1994 that the key idea for all Russian politicians at the time was "about the former Soviet Union's geopolitical space as Russia's vital sphere of influence. In order not to leave any-one in doubt, [he] drew a parallel to the 'Monroe Doctrine'."¹⁴¹ The second component of

¹³⁹ Covington, *The Culture of Strategic Thought*, 9.

¹⁴⁰ Beehner et al., "Analyzing the Russian Way of War," 22.

¹⁴¹ Andranik Migranian, "Rossia i blizhnee zarubezhe," *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* (1994), in Kanet, 144.

Putin's grand strategy for Russia is an attempt to gain a seat and decisive voice globally and on vital geopolitical issues. Finally, and in connection with the previous component, the final part of Russian grand strategy encompasses an incredibly ambition and goal of containing and limiting the United States' unilateral influence abroad. Essentially, in order for Russia to truly gain control of its sphere of influence the post-Soviet space, it has to directly force the United States out, reinforcing the conceptualizing of a zero-sum game when it comes to foreign policy and international influence.¹⁴²

The second pillar of Russian strategic thought, vulnerability, relates directly to Russia's acknowledgement of perceived geo-strategic and technological inferiority on the international stage. With this inability to match the West's level of technological innovation and advancement, Russia has devised a necessity for strategic mobility, escalation dominance, and surprise in order to counter its perceived strategic vulnerability.¹⁴³ Covington's third assumption, which is that the Russian Armed Forces effectively goes to war with "all of Russia", ascertains the belief that enemies and adversaries of the Russian Federation "will only be deterred and defeated by nation-wide, force-wide, integrated strategies united through strategic operations."¹⁴⁴ In an example of Russia's willingness to apply nation-wide military assets to specific regional conflicts, Minister of Defense Sergei Shoygu stated during Russia's "Caucasus 2016" exercise that the armed forces would emphasize the overall capability of Russian forces to support the Southern Military District in wartime.¹⁴⁵ It is this overall demand and

¹⁴² Beehner et al., "Analyzing the Russian Way of War," 23

¹⁴³ Covington, *The Culture of Strategic Thought*, 14; 22.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 26.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 27.

necessity for swift movement of forces across the many expansive regions of Russia that has come to define the strategic culture of the Russian armed forces in the 21st century.

The fourth and final aspect of Russia's culture of strategic thought focuses on the decisive nature of a war's initial stage of operations, and the emphasis the armed forces places on seizing and maintaining the strategic initiative against its enemies. The Russian General Staff visualizes the character of current and future conflicts as being incredibly quick, decisive, and possessing modern blitzkrieg-like tactics.¹⁴⁶ This, paired with the recollections of the disastrous and existential experience during the Great Patriotic War with Nazi Germany, demands that the Russian Armed Forces constantly maintain an aura of readiness to act with strategic speed, seize the operational initiative, and ensure that any war it fights "will be waged on the territory of another state," rather than its own.¹⁴⁷

Externally, Russian actions in the 21st century appears to border on imperialism and purposeful violence against sovereign states. But to truly understand the actions and decisions of the Russian government and its leaders, one must do as Clausewitz theorized and critically analyze events based on their context and historical background. In the mind of the Russian government, since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian culture and influence has been directly targeted by NATO and the rest of the Western Hemisphere. Former republics of the Soviet Union, like Georgia and Ukraine, have faced independence movements in which its citizens have sought new cultural identities

¹⁴⁶ Covington, *The Culture of Strategic Thought*, 36.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 37-38.

after spending decades under the rule of Soviet communism. As Mankoff wrote, the collapse of the Soviet Union transformed Russia's borders "into a contested zone for the first time since the Russian Civil War of the early 1920s, and Russia's leaders gave the incursion of foreign forces the worst possible interpretation."¹⁴⁸

Contributors to the MWI battle analysis of the Russo-Georgian War portrayed the first decade and a half of 21st century Russian foreign policy in three distinct and progressive periods. The first period – from 2000 to 2003 – was marked by *pragmatic accommodation*, where President Putin in "recognizing the reality of a massive power imbalance between Russia and the United States... first sought to advance Russia's grand strategic objectives through [concessions] and deal making."¹⁴⁹ Following the inability to create stark opposition to the 2003 United States-led invasion of Iraq, Putin transitioned Russian foreign policy to a period of "soft balancing" between 2003 and 2007.¹⁵⁰ Understanding his nation's position of relative weakness when compared to the military, economic, and diplomatic might of the United States, Putin sought to use "actions that do not directly challenge U.S. military preponderance but that use nonmilitary tools to delay, frustrate, and undermine aggressive unilateral U.S. military policies."¹⁵¹ Incensed by the perceived American-influenced color revolutions spreading throughout Russia's sphere of influence, Putin sought to deter intervention by the United States and the rest of NATO in what he saw as ordained Russian-influenced territory.

¹⁴⁸ Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy*, 7.

¹⁴⁹ Beehner et al., "Analyzing the Russian Way of War," 26.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁵¹ Robert A. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," *International Security* 30, no. 1 (2005): 11.

Finally, following the 2007 cyber-attack on Estonia and the war with Georgia in 2008, Russia initiated a foreign policy period of “hybrid balancing”. Incumbent in this period are varying overt and covert methods that seek to influence international events in the military, political, and economic areas. The overall purpose of this form of balancing is “to counterbalance an adversary while remaining below the level of hard military alliances or open warfare.”¹⁵² After being all but powerless against NATO’s expansion into the Baltic States and Eastern Europe following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Putin stood firm against the Western alliance and no longer tolerated NATO states on its periphery.¹⁵³

Russian leaders and many of its citizens see their country as ordained by geographical distribution, cultural expansion, and history to be one of the defining powers in Europe and the world as a whole. Their nation went from being the dominant actor and competitor to American democratic liberalism to a dismembered and fractured government over the period of less than a decade in the waning years of the 20th century, and for many the shock was too great to bear. Political and military actions of the 21st century by President Putin and his government have been defined by a drive to restore the strength and influence that was once the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union.

¹⁵² Beehner et al., “Analyzing the Russian Way of War,” 28.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 29.

Conclusion: Clausewitz – A Military Philosopher for the Ages

Much of what Carl von Clausewitz wrote in the early 19th century before his death in 1831 is indeed, largely obsolete. His obsession and emphasis on decisive battles of annihilation and the means in which to achieve them have little to no relevance in the realm of modern military operations today. Likewise, his writings on river crossings, defensive fortifications, and attacking enemy convoys related directly to his own era of Napoleonic warfare, but aid little in conflicts today against incredibly mechanized and technologically advanced ground, air, and sea forces. However, what truly distinguishes Clausewitz and sets him apart from all other theorists of his profession was his ability to produce intellectual and theoretical developments that transcend time, era, and technology. He surpasses the occupation of military theorist or strategist, and upholds the title that very few have come to acquire in modern history of military *philosopher*. His insights into the continual nature and use of warfare and its inseparable connection with policy have aided statesmen and military professionals alike in utilizing armed force to achieve specific political objectives for decades.

When applied to the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 – largely seen as the manifestation of Russia's attempted resurgence as a regional hegemon and the return of Great Power Politics – principles of Clausewitzian thought help to characterize Russian military strategy and thought in the 21st century. Guided by a restructured imperialistic culture under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, his political administration, and his General Staff, the Russian Federation has sought to expand its influence throughout its perceived sphere of influence and counter NATO expansion into former republics of the Soviet Union. By applying Clausewitzian principles to the actions and

decisions taken during the 2008 war, one can begin to see the manner in which Russia hopes to accomplish this geopolitical ambition. The invasion of Georgia was a direct political statement to both NATO *and* any eastern European country with hopes of joining the alliance that an attempt at escalation of diplomatic influence will be met with armed conflict and intervention. This charge was carried out in Crimea in 2014, as Russia carried through with its threat against what they perceive as Western aggression in former Russian lands. This has expanded into Syrian lands, as Putin and the Russian government attempt to salvage and maintain the relationship and partnership with the Assad regime that has connected the two nations for over 40 years. Russia's characterization of war is in perfect harmony with Clausewitz's dictum that it exist as an instrument of policy, and must always remain subordinate to political goals and objectives.

With advancements in cyber and information operations, the Russian government and armed forces of the 21st century have been able to operationalize the Clausewitzian concept of friction, causing physical and non-physical damage to its enemies' governments and military structures even before the first shots of a conflict have been fired. Even though Clausewitz's original opinions on intelligence and confusion in war were birthed from the literal "fog" of smoke and limited visibility on the battlefields of Jena and Auerstedt, these theoretical developments have continued into the present day with the role that intelligence (both accurate and inaccurate) has in military operations. Russia's nascent cyber operations in Georgia (as well as Estonia a year earlier) served as a prelude to several attacks that the Putin administration has

launched against other eastern European governments organizations, and even the United States.

While it is unlikely that in the near future we will bear witness to battles that compare to Jena, Borodino, Waterloo, or any of the conflicts that inspired Clausewitz's thoughts on war, the role of the commander that descended from these experiences that Clausewitz had still ring true today. Political and military leadership will always strive for the level of military genius that Clausewitz articulated. War by its very nature is the most complex of human interactions imaginable. It pits opposing wills, beliefs, cultures, institutions, and passions against one another across all domains and realms of national power. Thus, any commander must possess the trained and ingrained qualities that allow them to act quickly and decisively on the battlefields of both military and diplomatic conflict. The foresight that President Putin has tried to ingrain within the General Staff and the administration of the Russian Federation mirrors what Clausewitz deemed absolutely necessary for political and military success. The coup d'oeil and determination of a nation's leaders manifest themselves in logic-based decisions that are in support of achievable geopolitical goals. The assertion that Putin is a "military genius" is a lofty one – many of his actions have spurred counter-reactions that have negatively impacted his country's economic and diplomatic stature on the international stage. But in 2008, he and his administration made an incredibly well-calculated decision that led to the first major conventional conflict between European states of the 21st century, with little to no direct military response from the rest of the world powers. Russia saw the advantages that were present in 2008, and acted upon those

advantages to gain the operational and strategic initiative that furthered their ingrained cultural ambitions to once again return as a regional hegemon.

Clausewitz was above all else a soldier. He wrote not for the politician, or from the realm of expertise of the experienced diplomat or political scientist. *On War* was meant to guide the individual in the profession of arms to try to understand why humans fight and why war exists. War is an inherent part of human nature; one of the many things that define humanity is our gravitation towards conflict and trying to assert our will and desire over that of another. Clausewitz believed that the soldier and military leader who better understood the underlying character and nature of war's existence would be far more successful in developing a strategy and plan for utilizing it. War was never to be waged for war's own sake – there is always to be an underlying subordination to policy and a reasoned objective for going to war. By conducting historical analyses of wars and armed conflicts, one can discern belief from behavior and action. This was the purpose of this paper: to elucidate the beliefs and objectives of the Russian Federation through an examination of its decisions and actions in the 2008 Russo-Georgian War through the lens of Clausewitzian thought. Doing so will hopefully give insight into the reasoning behind Russia's current and future actions as it strives to regain its status in the game of Great Power Politics.

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