

Vegard Fuglaas Andersen

New dogs, old tricks?

Are Soviet views and perceptions still influencing Russian foreign policy? A case-study of the intervention in Czechoslovakia, 1968, and the intervention in Georgia, 2008

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Executive summary

As the world's eyes were on Beijing and the opening ceremony of the 2008 Summer Olympics, Russian and Georgian forces were fighting fiercely over two minor breakaway regions: South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Western commentators quickly drew comparisons to the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia 40 years earlier. This thesis shows that such a comparison perhaps is not as far-fetched as one might assume, and that Soviet views and perceptions of the world still influence modern-day Russia's foreign policy. To show this it will analyze the reasons behind the Czechoslovak intervention and the Georgian intervention in search of similarities. Balance of power considerations, a fear of encirclement, a fear of unwanted political systems spreading to Moscow, and the idea that the United States still is the main enemy are all similarities which the two cases share. The Soviet Union might be a relic of the past, but its views and perceptions are not.

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Vegard Fuglaas Andersen

Acronyms

BTC – Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline

BTE – Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline

CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States

CST – Collective Security Treaty

CSTO – Collective Security Treaty Organization

EU – European Union

FRG – Federal Republic of Germany

GDR – German Democratic Republic

GUAM – Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova

KSČ – Komunistická strana Československa

MAP – Membership Action Plan

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NEM – New Economic Management

SCO – Shanghai Cooperation Organization

SED – Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland

UN – United Nations

US – The United States

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WTO – Warsaw Treaty Organization

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 General introduction, aim of the thesis and background for the thesis

Russia is back on the international stage, and with a vengeance. The bear wasn't exactly roaring in the first decade after the break-up of the Soviet Union (USSR), struggling with economic problems and not really being taken seriously by the international community. Concessions made by 1990 Nobel Peace Prize-laureate Mikhail Gorbachev left the world's largest state humiliated and subject to Western dictates, making many Russians yearn for a return to its status as a world superpower.¹

Now, it seems, Russia is regaining its status both internationally and domestically, even though President Vladimir Putin is having his hands full with protests from groups clamoring for democratic reforms and those wanting to free the rock group *Pussy Riot*. But internationally we can definitely say that Russia is back, challenging the West in general and America in particular in areas of special importance. The turning point in that respect can be said to be the intervention in Georgia and South Ossetia in August 2008.

The fact that Russia is reemerging as a power to be reckoned with is interesting in its own right, but perhaps even more interesting is to investigate *how* Russia is reemerging. Which principles is Moscow following in its quest for international respect and glory? Could it be so that Soviet perceptions and world views are still influencing the inner circles of the Kremlin, despite the USSR being defunct for over 20 years? To determine this is the main purpose of this master's thesis.

In order to do this one needs to limit the scope of the research to avoid biting off too much, and this thesis will specifically use Soviet and Russian intervention policy to find out if the Soviet heritage has been confined to the pages of history or not. The interventions I will take a closer look at are the Warsaw Pact-invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and the aforementioned invasion of South Ossetia and Georgia in 2008. I will compare these two and try to find similarities in the reasoning behind each invasion, thus indicating whether the perceptions of yesteryear are still

operative today. Since the aim of the thesis is to say something about Russian foreign policy in general, the research question will be as follows:

Are Soviet ideas, views and perceptions still influencing Russian foreign policy today?

Some commentators may argue that since post-Communist Russia has taken a markedly more authoritarian path² than Western governments had hoped for, a possibly Soviet-influenced foreign policy should not come as a surprise. I share this view, despite the fact that the global situation has changed massively in the relatively short time since the Soviet era, and that to harbor the same ideas and perceptions of the world in our time could potentially be dangerous, even for a powerhouse such as Russia. Given Russia's rise in international stature, I would say that the answer to this question isn't as straightforward as one might think, and thus poses an interesting field of research. My hypothesis accompanying this question will therefore be that yes, Soviet perceptions are indeed influencing Russian foreign policy today.

Knowledge about its policies is essential for all states wishing to trade, negotiate, or otherwise maintain some sort of relationship with Russia. Given the energy resources available in the Caspian basin, which is shipped to Europe through a huge network of mostly Russian-controlled pipelines, the ability to predict Russian behavior in these areas is essential. Russia is not unfamiliar with using energy supply as a weapon, as it did with Ukraine in the infamous "gas war", and with a reliable energy supply high on the EU's list of priorities, Russian foreign policy is a factor with which other powers must reckon.³

My interest in this subject was sparked after I took a course in Soviet and Russian history at NTNU, and realized that I did not know the slightest bit about the current situation in Russia. Even more embarrassing was the fact that I did not know anything about one of the most recent conflicts in Europe, involving the most important Norwegian neighbor. Therefore I decided to focus on the 2008 war in Georgia, at least partially, for my master's thesis.

1.2 Methodology – comparative case studies

When deciding which research design and method to use, there are some options to consider. Should you do a quantitative or a qualitative study? In this case, where the research question demands a certain “closeness”, a qualitative design looks like the best choice since closeness is a general feature for such designs.⁴ Most methods within the qualitative research school also build on rich information about the few phenomena in question, while quantitative research often has a broader span. While a qualitative research design quite easily proved to fit my research best, this brought about another set of considerations: which design within the qualitative school to use.

1.2.1 Comparative studies

The method used in this master’s thesis is a comparative case study; a format I think fits the thesis very well, for reasons to be explained in the following section. The comparative method is regarded by Lijphart as “a method of discovering empirical relationships between variables”⁵. The goal of this thesis is to establish similarities between Soviet and Russian intervention policy, and a comparative aspect is therefore essential. The theory is that a social phenomenon can best be explained in relation to other cases, either contrasting or similar.⁶

The comparative method is mainly modeled on the scientific experiment, but rather than maintaining control through a control group, the comparativist exercises control through the selection of his cases.⁷ In this thesis, the two cases are chosen on the basis of them being 40 years apart and yet sharing many characteristics. The theory is, to put it very simply, that the oldest case, the invasion of Czechoslovakia, could help explain the newest case, the invasion of Georgia.

A case-oriented comparative study such as this, tries to explain and account for single or multiple historical events, often also wanting to generalize, at least with a limited scope, to other cases.⁸ The purpose of this thesis is precisely that, to offer a limited generalization of Russian foreign policy based on the evidence from the two military interventions. Yet there are some problems connected to the generalization of the results from comparative studies. The limited number of cases which is a general feature for comparative research does not make for very strong generalizations. Too few observations simply make generalizations less assertive.⁹

In order to correct for this problem one can “increase n ”, that is increase the number of cases. In this study, however, this is not a very viable option due to the fact that the only other cases that could be included are other historical cases, and the historical aspect is not the most important in itself. Aside from the war in Georgia, modern day Russia has not taken military action against any other sovereign post-Soviet state, making an increased n near impossible. Another aspect to consider is of course the timeframe and the extent of this thesis, both of which are limited, thus making the two-case option the most natural choice.

Another possible pitfall in comparative research is the one regarding sampling bias. An obvious trap here is to only choose cases which fit the theory and thus end up with a completely different, and perhaps wrong, conclusion.¹⁰ The thesis will provide justification for the choice of cases later in this chapter, but as a general remark it can be noted that there were few cases to choose from, making sampling bias as such a rather minuscule problem. One might even say that it was not “sampling” as such, but rather a question of picking what was available.

1.2.2 Case studies

Now, what is it about the case study method which makes it suitable for this thesis? Kristen Ringdal states that a case study is an intensive study of one to a few cases, which can be anything from individuals, via families and corporations, to states, events, or decisions.¹¹ Doing a case study also seems appropriate, given the nature of the research conducted. Even though the actual research question itself does not fulfill Yin’s criteria for using case studies, what I’m doing to answer the question does. He states that when the research question is concerned with *how* or *why*, then a case study is the most appropriate method to use.¹² Since I will investigate the reasons for intervention in the two cases, the *why* is definitely in place and since the purpose of case studies is to obtain a greater understanding of the cases or phenomena, it certainly suits this thesis very well.¹³ My thesis will be a theory-confirming, or theory-infirming, case study, despite these notions originally being applied to case studies with a single case. I am not looking to generate new, ground-breaking theories, nor am I looking to generalize the finds to other cases.¹⁴ Instead I have a more descriptive approach, attempting to show that the ghosts of yesteryear are still haunting the policies of today. I have a clearly defined hypothesis, and the aim is to confirm or falsify it through the analysis. Actually, according to Yin,

the term case studies itself was devoted to single-case investigations, but is now also applicable to multiple-case studies.¹⁵

A case study seemed like the appropriate method to use bearing in mind that a case study is “a history with a point” and that the phenomenon or event looked at is scrutinized for a larger theoretical concern.¹⁶ Case studies, as is the case with this one, seek to utilize the empirical evidence to move further, into the field of generalization.¹⁷ This thesis aims to say something about Russian foreign policy perceptions in general, using an in-depth analysis of a portion of the foreign policy as its instrument. The notion “in-depth” is also vital here, since a case study requires extensive knowledge about the cases in order to be able to say something meaningful about them.¹⁸ For these reasons a case study is the method that fits my thesis best.

However, there are certain problems connected to the field of case studies in general, and even in this one in particular. One of the strengths of the case study is that data can be collected in many ways. Archival records and written documents, interviews, direct observation and participant-observation are all methods for collecting data that case studies could, and perhaps should use, according to Yin.¹⁹ In my thesis, I have not been able to triangulate, that is use more than one source of data. Given the recent nature of the Georgian case, and its international controversy, interviews with relevant actors are near impossible to get, thus making secondary literature the main source of data for my analysis. Further scrutiny of the data collected for this thesis will be offered in chapter two.

Despite some potential traps, a case-oriented comparative study is best suited for my purpose in this thesis. First of all, a case study demands intimate knowledge and understanding of the cases, and I need that in order to do a meaningful analysis. Secondly, the comparative element helps connecting the empirical evidence from the two cases, while also making it possible to draw, albeit limited, generalizations from the data. This is one of the strengths of case studies as well, which should ensure that there are no methodological constraints surrounding generalizations and taking the empirical data further.

1.3 Case selection

A central question in such an extensive project as this is why one would choose these particular cases for comparison? Why not use the intervention in Hungary in 1956, or the non-intervention in Poland in 1981, instead? On the face of it, the intervention in Czechoslovakia and the war in Georgia seem to share few characteristics, which might not bode well for a viable comparison between the two. What is the rationale for choosing these cases? As noted in the section on comparative case studies above, the comparativist keeps control over his research through his selection of cases, so obviously one has to be careful when choosing.

However, after studying them more closely I found them to be more similar than one might assume at first glance. We can point to the fact that Czechoslovakia was never an integrated part of the Soviet empire in the way Georgia was, but in my book this is not a major difference between the two. Soviet influence in Prague stemmed from the Soviet-backed Communist coup d'état in 1948. Georgia, on the other hand, had been a part of Russian and Soviet territory for much of its existence so one might argue that the claim for influence in Georgia was better founded than the claim for influence in Czechoslovakia. Despite this, both Czechoslovakia and Georgia were seen as important for Soviet and Russian interests. This may seem like a trivial similarity, but it gives us an indication of both Soviet and Russian ideas and strategies, namely that when push comes to shove, military action was, and is, a realistic option.

As for the aspect of spheres of influence, this is a notion that is well-known when discussing the Cold War, but maybe not used as frequently these days. It is, as already noted, nonetheless applicable for the 2008 war in Georgia as well, considering statements made by different Russian politicians at different times. Current Prime Minister, but president at the time of the war, Dmitri Medvedev claimed that Russia had a “zone of privileged interests” in the Caucasus area, while defense minister Sergei Ivanov explicitly stated that Russia would not hesitate to use force in the CIS countries, if all other measures had been exhausted, due to these countries’ importance to Russia.²⁰ These statements show that Russia still sees a zone of influence as a vital national interest, much in the same way that the Soviet Union did.

Secondly, after extensive reading on both cases I found that both interventions can be understood in terms of realist perspectives. The need for national security, the considerations of national interest, and the concept of spheres of influence are all central in both conflicts. In the Czechoslovak case, the fear of defection to the West was great, and such an upset in the balance of power needed to be avoided at all costs. Moscow viewed the world as a playground where zero-sum games were dominant, and thus the Soviet leaders would not want to see the West gain a “member”, and definitely not one on the Soviet border. It was much the same in the Georgian case, where Russia wanted to avoid further Western encroachment and Georgia becoming a full NATO-member. Both Georgia and Ukraine had obtained Membership Action Plans (MAPs)²¹, paving the way for full membership, and Georgia had initiated the creation of an informal bloc within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to counter Russian pressures²², making Moscow extremely suspicious.

Both Czechoslovakia and Georgia were also strategically important geographically speaking. Czechoslovakia was viewed as the gateway between the west and the east²³, and being situated in the heart of continental Europe it was an important link in the Warsaw Pact’s military chain.²⁴ Losing the grip on Czechoslovakia would therefore not be a very enticing option for the leaders in Moscow. Georgia, on the other hand, holds a prominent position as a significant transit hub for Caspian oil and gas, with vital pipelines going through the country.²⁵ Therefore, we can say that the strategic importance of both countries at the time of invasion was high.

We can also identify certain similarities in Czechoslovak and Georgian behavior in the time leading up to the invasions. In both instances we see flirting and a gradual improvement of relations with the West, much to the dismay of the rulers in Moscow. Czechoslovakia attempted to reform communism and create socialism with a human face. Most of the reforms were to take place in the economic sector, where the centrally planned economy and five-year plans were to be scrapped in favor of a more market-based approach.²⁶ More worrying for the Soviet Union, however, was the fact that the supremacy of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSC̣) was challenged. Censorship was abolished and political culture was again allowed to blossom, seriously scaring the Soviets.

Georgia had also moved steadily away from the post-Soviet shadow by trying to integrate more into the Western camp. This culminated in the already mentioned MAP for accession to NATO, whilst also including Georgian support for the US-led invasion of Iraq. Both cases therefore have the element of the “victim” of the invasion acting in a way Moscow didn’t approve of.

All these similarities bode well for a viable analysis of the two, and they also provides a more contemporary focus than an analysis of for instance the invasion of Hungary in 1956 or the non-intervention in Poland following the crisis of 1980-81. Considering that the duo in charge in August 2008 still are in charge, although their roles are nominally reversed, an analysis of their perceptions of the world and Russia’s position in it is highly relevant. This is especially true since Russia still, at least on paper, is a democracy, while the Soviet Union definitely was not. Even though many observers are already complaining about a return to authoritarianism²⁷, these complaints have mostly been directed at domestic events. The adoption of authoritarian perceptions in foreign policy matters does not follow automatically, making a contemporary dimension particularly important.

1.4 Overview of the thesis

The second chapter will deal with the theoretical approach, giving a brief overview of Robert Jervis’ theories on perceptions in foreign policy. Chapter three will provide an understanding of the historical context of the two cases in question. Following this will be a chapter on Moscow’s allies and their behavior in both the Czechoslovak and the Georgian case, while chapters five and six contain the main analysis of the reasons for intervention in Czechoslovakia and Georgia respectively. The seventh chapter is dedicated to a comparative analysis of the data, and in chapter eight I bring the thesis together and draw some conclusions.

2.0 Theoretical approach

2.1 Perceptions

The central theme of my thesis is in the end the relationship between Soviet perceptions and Russian perceptions, and whether the former are influencing the latter. Because of this, the main theoretical foundation will be some of the arguments set forth by Robert Jervis in his *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* from 1976. Furthermore I will examine three important reasons why perceptions can change, and thus ultimately be able to explain if they have indeed changed in this case. These three reasons are (i) change in ideology, (ii) change in leadership, and (iii) change in interests.

Soviet views and perceptions during the Cold War were in many ways founded on realist theory. All variants of realist theory focus on the state as a main unitary actor in international politics, and that for instance NGOs (non-governmental organizations) have no significant leverage on foreign policy. Another defining feature of realist theory is the constant drive for security. The survival of the state is the main goal of every state, and since there is no supranational authority to ensure it, the state has to take measures on its own and help itself.²⁸ These three main features of realism, the focus on states, the quest for survival, and the notion of self-help, were all important cornerstones in Soviet perceptions. Realism will therefore be a core concept for my thesis in that respect; however I will not focus on it in this section nor specifically in the main analysis. That makes for a different thesis, and Jervis' perception theories are well suited for my purpose. It is in my view sufficient to keep in mind that realism is at the core of Soviet perceptions, but that it is the perceptions themselves that are to be examined in this thesis.

In his book, Jervis points to the way perceptions, both correct and faulty ones, influence foreign policy. The way world leaders see the world have the function of a framework with which they justify their own foreign policy actions, and interpret those of other actors. However, perceptions are not a fixed set of views that are immune against new information and actions. Rather, they evolve as the actor obtains fresh knowledge, and become more elaborate, thus providing him with an even better framework.

The actor has to process this information and knowledge and interpret it in order to understand the domestic processes of the other actor. In many situations we need to separate the extraordinary factors inherent in the situation from the domestic factors that determine state behavior.²⁹ This is easy to exemplify if we look at Soviet behavior when allies were under threat. If we are to fully understand Soviet behavior we need to ascertain which situational factors set the Korean conflict apart from the Czechoslovak crisis, as well as examine the internal factors. Only in this way can we understand why the Soviet Union chose to intervene in the Czechoslovak case but not in the Korean conflict.

However, the interpretation of new information can sometimes be flawed, as decision-makers have a propensity to see dangers where there aren't any.³⁰ This makes figuring out other states' intentions more difficult than it perhaps needs to be, since the actor has to take into account the possibility that his opponent is trying to trick him.³¹ Thus it is easy to fall into the already established perception patterns and sticking with the view of the other as an enemy with hostile intentions, something which will be explained further later in this section. The Cold War fits this description quite well, especially the initial stages of it. After World War II the US, under the auspices of Secretary of State George Marshall, instigated a recovery program designed to help Europe back on its feet. The program was made open for all European countries, including the Soviet Union,³² but because of massive suspicion, American intentions were interpreted in the worst way possible. This view is neatly summarized by Jervis: "The real purpose of the Marshall Plan was to create large standing armies that could threaten Russia [...]".³³ Whether or not this was the case, this interpretation certainly didn't improve the relationship between the US and the USSR.

Another possible pitfall connected to misinterpretation of information is that states don't understand that their actions can be perceived as threatening. As a result of this misperception, actors naturally believe that a harmful action was intentional, when it really was not.³⁴ The sense of danger is therefore compounded and you can easily face a spiral of harmful actions, just because one side does not understand that its actions are indeed harmful.

We must also consider how an actor believes other actors perceive him, and what images they have of him. How would defeat in a conflict alter the image of a state?³⁵ If other actors then perceive him as weak, he may be inclined to be even more suspicious than before and see malign intentions in every possible action. An actor's perception of other actors' perceptions is therefore also something which can greatly influence international politics.

2.2 Changes in perceptions

In foreign policy, being able to predict what an actor will do in a given situation is a very valuable skill to possess. With this in mind, to uncover the perceptions or world views of other actors is vital. But what about if state perceptions change? Which factors contribute to this? I have identified three main reasons for perception change: ideology, leadership, and interests.

A problem during the Cold War, according to Herrmann, was that one could never be quite sure just what Soviet perceptions were, since words and action were not always saying the same thing.³⁶ This of course stems from the fact that spoken words, for example in speeches or official statements, were directed just as much towards the domestic audience for propaganda purposes as it was directed towards the world.³⁷ The role of this propaganda brings us neatly to the subject of ideology, which is the center of the first reason for change in perception.

2.2.1 Change in ideology

Jervis mentions ideology as one of the major determinants of perception of the world, which one would say is quite logical.³⁸ A Communist government was not going to perceive the world in the same way as a capitalist one, as the US and the Soviet Union so aptly proved during the Cold War. A change in ideology would therefore, at least in theory, be a step on the way to a new world view. It is no exaggeration to say that Communist ideology was vital to the Soviet leaders. Marxism-Leninism was incorporated in every aspect of daily life, with millions of people involved in ideological work, and millions of Rubles spent on consolidating its hold on the people.³⁹

We must also consider the fact that ideology provides a fixed framework for viewing the world. In the Soviet Union, decision-making concepts were wedded to Marxist-Leninist ideology, serving as a reliable reference for conducting foreign

policy.⁴⁰ Because of the fact that the Soviet Union at first was intent on world communism, we can safely say that ideology laid the foundations of their foreign policy. We can also take into account the Brezhnev Doctrine, which stated that the USSR reserved the right to intervene in countries where socialism was threatened.⁴¹

We must not, however, think that only Communist ideology influenced foreign policy making; the capitalist countries also let their beliefs color their actions. During the Cold War, American policy-makers viewed Communist regimes as inherently expansionist and “bad”, setting the tune for how the US should act in relation to the USSR.⁴² The US was insistent on keeping non-Communist states precisely that, non-Communist that is, whether this implied democratic or authoritarian state systems.

A change in state ideology which Russia experienced as Communism collapsed, brought with it different perceptions of the world. These perceptions had been in the making for some time before the final breakdown in 1991, but they were nonetheless different from those perceptions harbored by the Communist leaders of for instance the 1970s. In the aftermath of the Communist collapse, Russia suffered an economic crisis.⁴³ The shock therapy applied to the Russian economy left the Russian state weak, and the changed domestic economic situation eventually changed their perceptions of the world. Boris Yeltsin pursued two avenues in the early 90s – stabilization and privatization.⁴⁴ This privatization led to the accumulation of much of Russia’s assets on the hands of few wealthy people: the oligarchs. This development was not advantageous for Russia, and Putin took steps to do something about the oligarchs’ power. In the wake of this amassing of power and a subsequent economic crisis, Putin took the reins in Russia and started to assert state control.⁴⁵ Russian perceptions about capitalism and private business changed as Communism was thrown out, which is natural, but we can also argue that the reassertion of state power was a part of Putin’s notion of “sovereign democracy”, which is a distinctly Russian take on democracy.⁴⁶ The new ideology changed Russia’s views on a full-fledged market economy, and so the role of ideology on views and perceptions should not be underestimated.

2.2.2 Change in leadership

The second factor to be considered here is change in leadership. Different leaders have different views on the global situation, which in a state where the leader

is almost all-powerful usually means at least a slight shift in state perception. For instance, Soviet foreign policy took a new course after Stalin's death. Stalin viewed the relationship between the Communist bloc and the non-Communist bloc as "that of a besieged camp, with Europe as its citadel".⁴⁷ Even though there are some disagreements within the scholarly community about whether this is actually true, there is general agreement that Khrushchev's entry onto the stage brought with it foreign policy changes.⁴⁸ That changes in leadership can affect perceptions is evident if we look at some of the examples presented by Jervis. Previous experiences greatly influence how an actor perceives the world, as exemplified in the run-up to World War II where research has found that appeasers didn't have the level of experience with foreign affairs that the anti-appeasers had.⁴⁹ This experience enabled those opposed to the appeasement policy to understand more clearly the developments in Europe, and how to best deal with them.

Previous experiences also come into play when the actors receive new bits of information. They don't check if this information fits all possible explanations; rather, they automatically interpret the information in the light of their own hypotheses.⁵⁰ An example of this is the way the Warsaw Pact-members instinctively interpreted the developments in Czechoslovakia as counter-revolutionary forces overrunning Dubček's government, since in their world it was inconceivable that Communist leaders voluntarily would implement such reforms.⁵¹ Their experience dictated how they perceived the situation, and subsequently how they dealt with it.

Graham Allison also sheds light on this factor, stressing the importance of personal characteristics in foreign policy making. In a leadership structure similar to the one we find in Brezhnev's era, where Brezhnev was a *primus inter pares*, the personalities of leading figures can define policy actions. Allison exemplifies this with American involvement in Vietnam, which he describes as "a natural consequence of the Kennedy-Johnson Administration's axioms of foreign policy". He also mentions the so-called *hawks* and *doves*, where people with a more hawkish personality are more aggressive, while doves are less aggressive.⁵² An aggressive leader would certainly be more inclined to make rash decisions, and resort to the use of force, than would a less aggressive leader. Thus we can say that a change in the personality of the leader can have a significant effect on that state's policy.

2.2.3 Change in interests

The third factor that can facilitate perception changes is changes in interests. Every state has its set of interests which determine how it conducts its foreign policy, and these interests also influence how the state perceives the world around it. USSR's desire for a sphere of influence in East Central Europe made them wary of any uncontrolled developments within the sphere.⁵³ This wariness made the Soviet Union more susceptible to intervene in situations where a "fraternal ally" was under threat, than in situations concerning non-allied states.⁵⁴

A state's interests significantly influence its perception of other actors, and we find examples of this both in the Soviet Union, as already shown, and the United States. The belief that Communist regimes needed to expand in order to survive shaped American perceptions of the Soviet Union, and ultimately also shaped its foreign policy, for nearly half a century.⁵⁵ The US' interests thus lay in rolling back, and later containing, Communism, providing the policy-makers in Washington, DC with a set of perceptions that viewed every Soviet action, or reaction, as evidence of Communist expansion. This is closely connected to the impact of previous experiences of state leaders, where new information instantly is fitted to already existing beliefs.⁵⁶ Moscow, on the other hand, defined its interests as purely defensive and peace-loving, where its only concern was to fight "counter-revolutions" in other Communist states.⁵⁷ Therefore, the Kremlin spent a lot of time combating imperialism, which was interpreted as aggressive behavior in Washington.

We can also look at the situation from another angle where the Kremlin viewed the West, and especially the US, as imperialists and neocolonialists, in which case it explained every US action according to this view.⁵⁸ Moscow's interests therefore lay in protecting socialism and shielding other states from the Western counter-revolution. This makes it evident that interests affect perception, as Soviet global interests made the Soviets very suspicious of American intentions. We see that the question of interest in relation to perception is central, and a change in interest can thus very much affect a state's perceptions.

A state's interests are also connected to its capabilities and its standing in the global hierarchy. For instance, when the prices on oil and natural gas skyrocketed in the mid-00s Russia profited massively, emerging as a leading power in the energy

market. This gave them the courage to stand up to foreign, mostly Western, involvement in areas Russia felt was of special importance.⁵⁹ Their newfound confidence also meant that using energy as a weapon became a foreign policy option, and a method they have used more than once.⁶⁰ Russian perceptions about Western involvement changed as their interests and capabilities changed, making Moscow more vocal in its opposition to outside meddling in Russian interest zones. So even if the influence of perceptions on interests perhaps is more usual, the other way around is not all that uncommon.

These three factors are all linked together, as a change in state ideology often brings with it a change in leadership, and a new leader with a new ideology will often have a different set of interests than his predecessors. Adolf Hitler's Nazism had a set of interests which was very different from those held by the Weimar Republic. We can also say that Hitler's ideology was in some ways formed by his experience of World War I and its aftermath. Thus his personality influenced the ideology, which again influenced interests, and all these elements together shaped Nazi Germany's perceptions of the world. The tight connection between perceptions and ideology, personality and interests makes the former just as important a concept as the latter three. Perceptions matter, but have they in this case changed as much as they theoretically can? That is what the following analysis intends to examine.

3.0 Historical background – threats to Moscow?

Neither of the two interventions in question happened completely out of the blue, although Alexander Dubček himself stated that «at no point between January and August 20 did I imagine this [an invasion] happening». ⁶¹ In both instances, however, there were tensions and occasional quarreling in the run-up to the interventions, so one could say that open conflict was long in the making. It is therefore necessary to explain the events leading up to the actual intervention, both in Czechoslovakia and in Georgia. This way we get a historical framework with which to explain Soviet and Russian actions. We also get a first glimpse at what threats Moscow saw in the two cases.

3.1 Czechoslovakia

In Czechoslovakia, the Communists had taken control over one of the few countries in the Soviet bloc with a democratic political tradition. This meant that a transfer to a rigid Stalinist society without real political competition could potentially spark quite a bit of unrest. Despite this the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSC) enjoyed a fair bit of support, mainly due to its role in liberating Czechoslovakia from the Nazis and rebuilding the country. ⁶² The Communists gradually squandered this support; however, after the coup in 1948 and they consolidated of the Czechoslovak regime as one of the most brutal Soviet satellites. ⁶³

In addition to being extremely repressive and very loyal to Stalinist principles, the regime in Prague was starting to see the contours of an economic crisis. For the first time in many years Czechoslovakia experienced stagnation, and even decline, in overall Gross National Product (GNP). ⁶⁴ A situation like this is of course not ideal, but the Novotný leadership could perhaps have avoided pressures for economic reforms had the people been better off than they were. ⁶⁵ This was not the case, unfortunately, as Czechs and Slovaks had to deal with both long-lasting shortages and consumer goods of at best dubious quality. ⁶⁶ This eventually led to a growing dissatisfaction with the current economic management, and intellectuals as well as regular working men and even dedicated Communists started to notice the fairly obvious discrepancy between the official statements and aims, and the experiences of the real world. ⁶⁷

A bit of popular murmur would have been possible to cope with, but the sudden doubts within the KSC itself made the situation a bit more difficult. Economic

analysts were starting to seriously doubt the viability of the five-year plans, and seemed to think that the centralized planned economy needed extensive reforms in order to reverse the stagnation.⁶⁸ The focus on heavy industry was thought to be what was causing the shortages, not the remedy to solve these problems.⁶⁹ Ota Šik was to become the main architect of the economic reforms, and one of his principal goals was to tie planning to market mechanisms. The use of central directives was to be limited to instances where “planned objectives could not be ensured by the use of economic stimuli”.⁷⁰

An economic crisis and a subsequent deviation from the strict command economy would have been more than enough to handle for any Communist government in the sixties, but sadly for Novotný and his companions the crisis happened around the same time as the cries for de-Stalinization became louder. The notion brought forward by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in his “secret speech” in 1956, where he denounced the deeds and the personality cult of Stalin didn’t get a foothold in Czechoslovakia at first. It wasn’t until Khrushchev repeated the denunciation at the 22nd Party Congress in 1961 and removed Stalin’s embalmed body from the mausoleum that the process started in earnest in Czechoslovakia.⁷¹ It was during the early stages of this process that Alexander Dubček would make his entry.

At first the regime in Prague had only made token gestures of de-Stalinization, quietly releasing thousands of victims of show-trials from prison, but suddenly it was decided to speed up the process. The body of the one of the fathers of Czechoslovak Communism, Klement Gottwald, was removed from display and cremated, and the ashes buried in a small ceremony. Furthermore, the enormous monument of Stalin, the largest of its kind in the world, was demolished, and a commission was appointed to investigate the aforementioned show-trials.⁷²

At this point, Dubček was starting to clash with Novotný for the first time. Dubček became a member of the investigative commission, and while his colleagues in the commission focused on the Czech victims of the purges, Dubček chose to focus on the Slovak victims. When Novotný, now both First Secretary of the KSČ and President of the Republic, refused the Slovak victims full rehabilitation, Dubček had an ace up his sleeve: the Slovak nationalist card.⁷³ Suddenly, journals in Slovakia

were pushing the limits of censorship in their cries for rehabilitation, and when confronted with this, Dubček simply replied that “the Party felt that rehabilitation in Czechoslovakia was going too slowly”.⁷⁴

With the Novotný regime deeply involved in the same trials they were urged to investigate, the First Secretary was being forced into a corner.⁷⁵ The criticism in the Slovakian press continued unabated, Dubček claiming that he could do nothing to stop it, and some of Novotný’s friends were in danger of having their dirty deeds exposed. Finally, in 1963, Novotný caved in and accepted full rehabilitation of the Slovak purge victims, as well as sacrificing his own Prime Minister, Viliam Široký.⁷⁶

The leadership struggle at the top of the KSČ continued, with Novotný continuously attacking Dubček, albeit with varying strength, up until around 1967.⁷⁷ In the meantime, Khrushchev was ousted from his position at the top of the Soviet hierarchy, something that surprised the regime in Prague. The reform-minded Communists in Prague explicitly showed their preference for the reformists in Moscow by refusing to engage in anti-Chinese rhetoric, while simultaneously making “friendly gestures” towards Romania and Yugoslavia.⁷⁸ This probably didn’t make Novotný the most popular Communist leader in Khrushchev’s successor, Leonid Brezhnev’s, eyes. The fight for the position as leader of Czechoslovakia soon became so heated that a final showdown was not far away.

Dubček was pushing for a separation of the offices of First Secretary of the KSČ and President of the Republic.⁷⁹ Eventually he succeeded in acquiring the necessary majority in the Central Committee to push through this change; mainly by seducing one of the members into thinking he would get the post as First Secretary.⁸⁰ Novotný now started to feel his support withering away, and invited Brezhnev to Prague, ostensibly to secure the endorsement of the Soviets.⁸¹ When Brezhnev departed Czechoslovakia, the situation had calmed somewhat, but this was only temporary. As the Central Committee convened on the 19th of December 1967 the topic was to be the economic situation, and Brezhnev’s advice of “not quarreling” seemed to be heeded. However, it was not to be, and, after a couple of weeks of heated discussion about the political situation, Novotný stepped down as leader of the Party, and Dubček took the reins.⁸²

Almost immediately after assuming leadership, Dubček in practice lifted the strict censorship. This was done mostly in order to gain goodwill in the media, which could be important both to secure Dubček's own position and to justify further reforms.⁸³ Another consideration early on in Dubček's tenure was the leading role of the Party, also a concern viewed with great interest by other members of the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO). It was already clear that the KSČ should not interfere in day to day economic management, but how about the day to day lives of the citizens?⁸⁴ The Party's role was to be "broad and programmatic", facilitating the exchange of differing views, while also having to renew its mandate from the people, since "[the] position of our Party is not established or maintained on the basis of power but on the basis of correct policy".⁸⁵

The developments in Czechoslovakia started to make its comrades in the WTO anxious, and a meeting in Sofia, Bulgaria, was hastily convened. Here Dubček tried to reassure the other Communist leaders that no undesirable events would be permitted to occur.⁸⁶ The situation continued to escalate, however, and another meeting, this time in Dresden, was arranged. Here the attacks became more severe, and in the following months Dubček again tried to appease his Communist comrades, but it proved not to be enough.⁸⁷ On the 20th of August 1968, Warsaw Pact forces poured into Czechoslovakia, signaling the beginning of the end for Dubček's reform project.

3.2 Georgia

The relationship between Georgia and Russia has been filled with trouble and animosity, almost since the dawn of time. Given its strategically important location in the Caucasus, several peoples have dominated the territory today known as Georgia.⁸⁸ There were repeated Mongol invasions, as well as Persian, Turkish, and eventually Russian domination, shaping the borders so that Georgian territory in August 2008 also comprised non-Georgian peoples.⁸⁹ This became a problematic issue, since a prospective "reinvention" of Georgian identity would come at the expense of the historic diversity Georgia has experienced.⁹⁰

Georgia was first incorporated into the Russian empire in the early 1800s, originally in order to secure the position of the royal family at the time. However, since the Georgian king and the Russian tsar died before this agreement could be

fulfilled, the tsar's successor used Napoleon's assertiveness as a pretext for annexation.⁹¹ In all the commotion surrounding the end of the First World War and the Bolshevik revolution, Georgia became part of the Democratic Federative Republic of Transcaucasia. It was a short-lived project, though, and after only a couple of months the federation broke up and Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan became independent.⁹² In Georgia, it was the Mensheviks who assumed control, but Menshevik Georgia was not to last, either, it existed a mere three years. The Bolsheviks in Moscow had no intention of keeping their hands out of the Caucasus, especially not since many of the leading figures hailed from the region and dreamt of "spreading the revolution to their homelands".⁹³

Georgia was then integrated into the Soviet Union, and thus it took 70 years until the next time the Georgians could call themselves independent. Caucasia mostly escaped the harshest part of Soviet rule, and experienced a sort of "cultural renaissance" after Stalin died.⁹⁴ Despite this, Georgia was the second Soviet republic to secede from the Union, only beaten to the line by Lithuania.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Georgia was eager to cement its territorial integrity once and for all and thus fought a fairly large war against breakaway republics Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Simultaneously, Russia wanted to maintain its influence in the region in general and in Georgia in particular.⁹⁵ This Moscow manifested by supporting the ousting of Georgian president Zviad Gamsakhurdia during the winter 1991-92, and perhaps even more telling was its commitment of troops to the defense of the largely Russian population in the breakaway republics.⁹⁶ As the conflict wore on, Russia also assumed the role of peacemaker and eventually managed to broker a peace agreement. This marked the beginning of a very close relationship between Russia and South Ossetia and Abkhazia, a development viewed with some concern by the Georgian government.⁹⁷ It also marked a sort of restart of Russo-Georgian animosity.

The developments from the turn of the century did little to ease the Georgian fears, as for instance Eduard Kokoity, a Russian citizen, albeit of South Ossetian origin, became South Ossetian president in 2001. Furthermore, Russian security personnel were steadily being fed into the South Ossetian government, and in April 2008 diplomatic relations were established between Russia and the two breakaway

republics.⁹⁸ Referenda in South Ossetia showed that nearly 99 % of South Ossetians rejected Georgian supremacy and wanted to join North Ossetia in the Russian Federation.⁹⁹ In addition to ethnic motives there was also an economic motive concerning the pensions in Georgia and Russia. By holding a Russian passport, which Moscow distributed in large quantities, South Ossetians were entitled to a pension three times higher as that in Georgia.¹⁰⁰

During the period from approximately 2003 to the outbreak of the war in 2008 there were numerous incidents adding fuel to the fire. For one, Georgian authorities arrested four Russian intelligence officers on account of spying, to which Russia replied by completely closing of all land, sea, and air transport routes to Georgia.¹⁰¹ A second important factor was the ever deepening relationship with the US and Georgia's ambitions to become a member of NATO. Thirdly, Moscow frequently clashed with Tbilisi over issues concerning Chechnya. Russia wanted to use Georgian airspace in operations in Chechnya, and claimed that border areas were becoming safe havens for Chechen terrorists.¹⁰² A fourth event that made friendly Russo-Georgian relations difficult was Mikheil Saakashvili's ascension to power. In one of his first speeches after becoming Europe's youngest president, he stated quite unequivocally that "Georgia's territorial integrity is the goal of my life".¹⁰³ A more assertive Russian foreign policy adopted under Putin didn't help either.¹⁰⁴

Russia and Georgia continued to provoke each other, with only a brief period of rapprochement when Putin and Saakashvili discussed resuming trade relations.¹⁰⁵ However, the friendly discussions didn't last for long. Georgia eventually withdrew from the Joint Control Commission for South Ossetia set up as part of the aforementioned peace treaty, a move of which Moscow didn't approve. The Georgians also set up an alternative government in South Ossetia, headed by a defector from the secessionist government.¹⁰⁶ Russia then shot down a Georgian drone well inside Georgian airspace, and used supposed Georgian military build-up as a pretext for increasing the number of peacekeepers in Abkhazia.¹⁰⁷

The provocations eventually escalated into a full-scale war. Several Georgian policemen were wounded by South Ossetian forces on August 1, 2008 and the following morning the South Ossetians started evacuating civilians. The following days more confrontations took place and Georgia started shelling the South Ossetian

capital, Tskhinvali.¹⁰⁸ After the initial exchange of artillery fire, Georgian and South Ossetian forces clashed in open combat.¹⁰⁹ The conflict soon turned into a battle between Georgian and Russian forces, and as the world watched the opening ceremony of the 29th Summer Olympic Games, the Caucasus had erupted into armed conflict. The conflict only lasted five days, and ended with a resounding Georgian military defeat as Russian troops entered Georgia proper. A ceasefire was agreed upon, negotiated with the mediation of French president Nicolas Sarkozy.¹¹⁰

4.0 Moscow's allies

In order to better understand the reasons behind the interventions in Czechoslovakia and Georgia, it is necessary to look at what allies USSR and Russia had in these respective cases. In my thesis I will use the term “friendly partners” to describe Moscow’s friends. This notion encompasses both subordinates, allies, and other support mechanisms. The question of friendly partners is important because they can greatly influence decision-making, and thus steer policies in the desired direction. Moreover, if Moscow’s friends are kept in the dark about important policy decisions the friendship may well turn sour. In both cases we should examine how Moscow’s allies influenced the decision-making process.

4.1 Czechoslovakia 1968 – the Warsaw Pact

In the period around the Czechoslovak crisis, the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO), or the Warsaw Pact, was one of the two main military alliances in the world, and in it we find most of the Soviet Union’s allies. At the time of invasion, the Pact included eight members: the Soviet Union, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany (GDR), Hungary, Poland, and Romania. Only two of the members did not participate in the eventual intervention, and that was Albania and Romania. These were very critical to the Soviet polemics against China, and opted out of the intervention. Albania later left the Warsaw Pact altogether on the 13th of September 1968.

4.1.1 East Germany

Each member-state played a different role in the run-up to the events in August 1968, but they all played important roles. Already in the early stages of Dubček’s reform regime, the Warsaw Pact members were starting to become anxious as to what repercussions the reforms would have in their own states. Brezhnev summoned Dubček to an urgent meeting in Dresden in March 1968, where further economic cooperation was to be discussed. However, East German leader Walter Ulbricht caught the Czechoslovak delegation off guard by bringing up the reforms across the border and expressing deep concerns about said reforms.¹¹¹

Ulbricht’s East German regime was one of the most vocal of Moscow’s allies during the Czechoslovak crisis, and thus one of the most negative towards Czechoslovakia.¹¹² The GDR was concerned with Dubček’s economic overtures towards West Germany (FRG). He feared that economic dependence would

eventually lead to political dependence, a fear that was connected to his distrust of Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik*.¹¹³ According to Ulbricht, the *Ostpolitik* initiative was designed to isolate GDR by offering its allies both economic and political advantages. When Romania concluded diplomatic relations with FRG, the Ulbricht Doctrine was established, which effectively prevented Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Bulgaria from normalizing relations with West Germany until it had recognized the GDR.¹¹⁴ East Germany did not like that Czechoslovakia was destroying the GDR's picture of West Germany as Nazi-dominated and revenge-seeking, thus undermining Ulbricht's vulnerable regime.¹¹⁵

East Germany spent a lot of time convincing Moscow that the situation in Czechoslovakia needed to be dealt with, and that the counter-revolution had to be stopped by any means necessary.¹¹⁶ Ulbricht also immediately seconded a proposition from Bulgaria that a new multilateral conference be convened due to the "dangerous developments of events" in Prague.¹¹⁷ The GDR stood side by side with its Soviet ally, and reiterated Soviet criticism, making it more forceful.¹¹⁸

As we can see, the German Democratic Republic considered it vital to deal with the Czechoslovak question, and given that in many cases it repeated Soviet criticism it was able to act as a loyal ally rather than as a warmonger. East Germany was most definitely a close Soviet ally during the Czechoslovak crisis, and played a vital role in the final outcome of the situation. The fear that the events in Prague, coupled with Bonn's *Ostpolitik*, would lead to the downfall of Ulbricht's own regime was strong, and made East Germany very active in the discussions about Czechoslovakia in the time before the intervention.¹¹⁹

4.1.2 Poland

This fear was also prominent in Władysław Gomułka's Poland, and the Polish Communist leaders were also agitating for a swift response to the situation.¹²⁰ Poland's stance was initially not hostile, but rather a bit reserved, and in the first stages of Dubček's rule Polish media were relatively silent.¹²¹ What little coverage there was of Czechoslovak affairs concerned matters of little importance for Poland, though some liberal sentiments did show, albeit as a one-time affair only.¹²² Gomułka, once in a position similar to Dubček, had become a Communist hardliner, and was viewing the Czechoslovak reforms with great suspicion. Liberal tendencies

in Czechoslovakia could threaten “the cohesion of the system”, which was already under pressure from China.¹²³

Moreover, Czechoslovak media covered the Polish university riots and allegedly had a journalist expelled. Czechoslovak students were denied visas and thus could not travel to Poland, perhaps because they had publicly defended their Polish counterparts. A series of small and in itself insignificant events were combined with a general concern about the developments in its southern neighbor and the result was a sudden hostility in media coverage.¹²⁴ The hostility shown in the media was replicated by Gomułka and Polish officials. After the hastily convened meeting in Dresden, Poland was asked to commit troops to an upcoming war-game which was to be played out in Czechoslovakia. Gomułka was happy to oblige, claiming that unrest within his own borders stemmed from the liberal reforms in Prague.¹²⁵

The Polish stance on Dubček and his reforms can therefore be said to have changed from reserved wariness to outright hostility. At least from around the Dresden meeting in March 1968, Gomułka actively lobbied for an intervention in Czechoslovakia.¹²⁶ He also used the Prague Spring to fuel anti-German sentiment at home. Since many people actually believed that the reforms in Czechoslovakia had been initiated by West Germany, and Gomułka himself believed that changes in Czechoslovakia would strengthen the FRG and weaken Poland, Gomułka used the situation for propaganda purposes. Furthermore, he wanted to appear as a close ally of Moscow and together with GDR “the main partner in the management of Central European affairs”.¹²⁷

4.1.3 Hungary

If the East Germans and the Poles were almost vitriolic in their criticism of the Czechoslovak reform project, Hungary’s János Kádár was more cautious. Kádár was just starting to implement domestic economic reform himself, introducing market elements and decentralizing planning, and at first hoped that the events in Prague would reinforce his own reforms.¹²⁸ Hungary had after all trodden down a similar path some 13 years prior and got burnt, so a parallel reform project could make Hungary and Czechoslovakia leading examples of reforms in East Central Europe.

But there was also a fear that the Czechoslovak reforms would go too far, and that they could derail the Hungarian “New Economic Mechanism” (NEM). It must be

noted that even Kádár proclaimed that a strengthening of socialist democracy would follow in the wake of the economic reforms, instantly making the project more risky.¹²⁹ The Hungarians, however, were not vehemently opposed to an intervention in order to save Czechoslovakia, because as Kádár stated at a Central Committee session in June 1968

*If we conclude that this is a counterrevolution and that the counterrevolution is gaining the upper hand, then, quite frankly and if truth be told here among us, one has to go to the limit, and I would raise both my hands in favour of those Warsaw Pact countries that are prepared to do so occupying Czechoslovakia. This is what has to be done because the socialist world cannot afford to lose Czechoslovakia.*¹³⁰

The main question in Kádár's mind was not what was to be done in the event of a counter-revolution, but whether the events in Czechoslovakia could be considered to be a counter-revolution. He took on the role of broker and tried to negotiate with the Czechoslovak leadership, in a hope that a non-military solution would prevent further disunity and split in the communist movement.¹³¹

Hungary showed great patience with Czechoslovakia, but by May it was wearing thin. Continued obstruction and dallying provoked the international department of the Hungarian Communist Party to warn that Czechoslovakia was in the hands of rightists who ultimately wanted to restore capitalism.¹³² Even so, Kádár kept hoping to the last days for a peaceful solution to the crisis, and as late as August 17 he secretly met with Dubček on the Czechoslovak-Hungarian border in a last-ditch attempt to prevent military intervention.¹³³ The Hungarian position can therefore be said to have been quite ambivalent, as Kádár wanted both to show his loyalty to the Soviet Union and to keep some of the reforms alive in order to support his own reforms.

4.1.4 Bulgaria

Bulgaria initially made polite and courteous responses to Dubček's accession to the top position in Czechoslovakia. Todor Zhivkov used the standard niceties in his congratulatory letter to Dubček, and the Bulgarian media reported only uncontroversial events in a very factual way.¹³⁴ Over time though, as with Hungary and partly Poland, the mood changed. Zhivkov, who enjoyed a good relationship with Brezhnev, was more and more supporting the original Soviet hard line.¹³⁵

Characteristically for Zhivkov's behavior, when the Soviet leaders started really expressing their concern about the events in Prague, he chimed in and confirmed that there were dangerous developments in Czechoslovakia. Furthermore, when Kádár tried a more conciliatory approach, blaming Novotný more than Dubček, Zhivkov immediately dismissed this and recommended full military intervention and occupation.¹³⁶

The Bulgarian recommendation for a military solution to the Czechoslovak crisis was the first of its kind documented in this situation. Zhivkov was eager to show that Bulgaria was a staunch and loyal ally of the USSR, and did this by backing Brezhnev's position.¹³⁷ Loyalty was a defining concept of Todor Zhivkov's personality. He had been extremely loyal to Khrushchev, and when Brezhnev took the reins he shifted his loyalty to the new leader. Despite this blind loyalty, Zhivkov started undertaking economic reforms, just as Kádár and Dubček had done. These were quickly scrapped, however, and the Bulgarian Communist Party learned the lesson after the intervention and tightened its hold on society.¹³⁸

Bulgaria was not the most hostile Warsaw Pact-member, despite the fact that it suggested the military option early on, but it did support the Soviet hard line, mainly out of loyalty to the USSR. Zhivkov was very keen on maintaining a good relationship with Brezhnev, and used the situation in Czechoslovakia to show that Bulgaria was a reliable friend.

4.2 Georgia 2008 – CSTO, SCO and Belarus

Although Russia undertook the military action in Georgia and South Ossetia by itself and without outside assistance, we can identify mainly two organizations which released statements in support of the intervention: the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).¹³⁹ This is perhaps not surprising, due to the fact that Russia is one of the leading factors in both organizations and thus enjoys considerable influence over the other member states, especially in the CSTO. In the SCO we also find China, a state over which is not as easy to gain leverage as the members in the CSTO. In the particular case it is difficult to defend the use of the word "ally", but the CSTO and the SCO were definitely regional support mechanisms, and are worthy of a mention here.

4.2.1 CSTO

The Collective Security Treaty Organization was formed in 2003 as a supplement to the Collective Security Treaty (CST) in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Current members are, besides Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Armenia and Belarus, and the original purpose was to combat drug trafficking and terrorism in Central Asia.¹⁴⁰ Uzbekistan became a full member in 2006, but suspended its membership after only six years in the organization. For Russia, the hope was that a tighter coordination of security in Central Asia would gain Russia access to military bases in the region, and perhaps that Russian control over coordination would spill over to other issues.¹⁴¹ Moscow started the process of expanding the CST after increased American presence following September 11. Another important aspect in the formation of the CSTO was statements by Uzbek president Islam Karimov, complaining that the US had managed to quell tensions in Uzbekistan when the CST signatories had not managed to agree on a strategy. This made Moscow wary of losing influence in the region, and the Russians started working on refurbishing the treaty.¹⁴²

In the wake of the conflict in Georgia, the foreign ministers of the CSTO held a summit meeting in Moscow. In September 2008 they released a statement hailing Russia's role in "working towards peace and cooperation in the Caucasus".¹⁴³ The foreign ministers also spoke negatively about Georgia's aggression against South Ossetia, and they voiced their concern over Georgian action during the conflict. This position was supported by the members' heads of state, who referred to the loss of lives among civilians and peacekeepers as well as the severe humanitarian consequences.¹⁴⁴

The summit also promised increased military focus so the organization could better deal with security threats in its zone of responsibility. This was highlighted both by Medvedev and by the new CSTO President, Serzh Azatovich Sargsyan.¹⁴⁵ The CSTO put words into action in 2009 and established a Rapid Reaction Force with a mandate, among other issues to, fight military aggression.¹⁴⁶ In doing this, Russia made it more difficult for non-members to undertake military operations in areas deemed vital to Russian interests.

Evidence of further political cooperation and integration was also found in the wake of the war in Georgia and the subsequent CSTO summit. The CSTO has to a large extent supported the Russian stance in international matters, as General Secretary Nikolai Bordyuzha wanted the member states to be able to “count on the political, moral and psychological support of its partners and allies [...]”.¹⁴⁷ We can thus identify a certain expectation, if not pressure, on Russia’s part for almost unconditional support. This could make the statements made by the foreign ministers after the intervention a bit hollow, at least when we view them in the light of Bordyuzha’s request for loyalty.

Worth mentioning, however, is that none of the CSTO members followed Russia’s lead in recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states.¹⁴⁸ This action, or non-action, on the other hand attributes the statements following the Moscow summit with more sincerity as it stops short of Moscow’s wishes. Another possible interpretation is that the other members were pressured by Moscow to endorse Moscow’s actions, but drew the line at recognition. Still, we cannot escape from the fact that the CSTO did come out in support for Russia’s actions and condemned Georgia’s actions, and this way played the role of ally. But maybe the organization isn’t as supportive a partner as Russia would want it to be.

4.2.2 SCO

The case with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization is a bit more complicated. Formed in 2001 after an expansion of the Shanghai Five group, its goals were very ambitious, with the strengthening of good neighborly relations, and promotion of political, economic, cultural and technological cooperation as some of the main features. The list of members consists of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, making Central Asia the most interesting region for the organization.¹⁴⁹

Despite the lofty goals, there are some minor disagreements between the two major powers in the SCO, Russia and China. The latter would like to see the formation of a single economic area, but Moscow is wary of a potential Chinese hegemony and has obstructed these initiatives.¹⁵⁰ For the other members of the organization, China acts as a shield against Russia, giving them more autonomy in decisions, and the opportunity to choose which lead to follow.¹⁵¹ The Central Asian

members have become anxious about Russian punishment, and thus the Chinese presence in the organization has given them some reassurance.¹⁵²

These factors may have been crucial in prompting the SCO members to avoid offering the strong support as shown by the CSTO. As opposed to the declaration of the CSTO after its Moscow summit, the SCO, which met in Dushanbe, were moderate in its support for Russia. They praised Russia's "active role" in resolving the situation, but refrained from condemning Georgian actions, and did not recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.¹⁵³ Many of the countries in the organization have had trouble with separatist movements, including China, which continues to face uprisings in Tibet.¹⁵⁴ The principle of non-interference was violated with the intervention in Georgia, and as China and the SCO has construed Tibet as "inalienable" from China it was out of the question to recognize two separatist republics such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia.¹⁵⁵

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization was originally designed to forge good relations with the Central Asian states and China, and make them reliable allies. In the wake of the Russo-Georgian war they did not play the role of loyal allies, although they courteously praised Russia's efforts in ending the violence and stabilizing the situation. China's presence in the SCO is in this respect problematic for Russia as it provides the other members with an alternative power center which can deflect potential Russian penalties. Nonetheless, Russia no doubt appreciated, at least in official statements, a friendly counterweight to the negative Western responses.¹⁵⁶

4.2.3 Belarus

Russia and Belarus have been pretty close friends for some time, with Moscow defending Minsk from the label "Europe's last dictatorship" and Minsk, for instance, supporting Russia in its fight against a US-sponsored anti-missile system in Eastern Europe. Aleksander Lukashenko's Belarus has been touted as Moscow's closest ally in the former Soviet sphere.¹⁵⁷ Lukashenko's foreign policy has been distinctly pro-Russian, and Belarus is perhaps the country with the closest ties to Russia in terms of culture, religion and language.¹⁵⁸

With this background one might expect Belarus to stand by Russia's side in the wake of the conflict in Georgia, but that was not the case. President Lukashenko

was silent for nearly two weeks, refraining from any comments on the Georgian case.¹⁵⁹ In fact, Medvedev had to express his surprise at the “discreet silence” from Minsk in order to get a comment from Belarus. Lukashenko then stated that Russia had no other choice but to intervene, and praised the military action as done “calmly, wisely and beautifully”.¹⁶⁰ This has been interpreted by some as “arm-twisting” on Moscow’s part¹⁶¹, and while this is unconfirmed, the Belorussian silence was very surprising. Russia did put pressure on Minsk to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia’s independence, but this did not succeed.¹⁶²

Belarus, which has enjoyed a very good relationship with Russia, failed to actively support Russia’s actions in Georgia, and had to be persuaded to come out with a statement. It must be noted that Belarus has tried to better its relationship with the West and most notably the EU.¹⁶³ In the autumn following the war in Georgia, Minsk reached out to the West calling on its members to balance Russia in the former Soviet area. The rapprochement between the EU and Belarus has even led to Brussels lifting the ban on visas for over 40 Belorussian leaders, including Lukashenka himself.¹⁶⁴

Despite being considered a close and reliable Russian ally, Belarus did not act like it after the intervention in Georgia. It seemed to try to act independently of Moscow and to buy some time to figure out a strategy, and thus showed that it may be a less reliable ally than Russia had imagined. Considering the timing of the statements made by Lukashenko we can say that the support for the military adventure in Georgia was not altogether sincere, and more polite than anything else.

4.3 Findings

The Soviet Union and Russia had friends and allies in both cases, although they only participated militarily in one of them. Thus the notion *ally* may not mean the same thing today as it did in 1968, which perhaps is natural if we assess the different nature of the Warsaw Pact and the CSTO and SCO. Because of these differences a short summary of the findings in this chapter is in order.

4.3.1 Czechoslovakia 1968

During the Czechoslovak crisis in the spring of 1968, the USSR dominated the communist countries in Europe, with a few exceptions. This meant that they could count on the four other members of what was to be known as “the Warsaw Five”,

Hungary, East Germany, Poland and Bulgaria, for support in matters concerning Europe. In this period most of these states acted as loyal allies, and ultimately joining the military venture in Czechoslovakia. There were, however, different reasons for the leaders of East Central Europe to be acting the part of faithful friends, although they dutifully did so, since it was required of them.

Walter Ulbricht in East Germany was perhaps the most ferocious opponent of the Prague Spring, and a definite advocate of military intervention. He feared for what repercussions liberalization in Czechoslovakia might have in his own country, and thus how it would affect him personally. Furthermore, he feared a tightening of relations between Czechoslovakia and West Germany, since the Czechoslovak government had wanted closer ties to the Adenauer-regime.¹⁶⁵ Prague had concluded, after lengthy negotiations, a trade and consular agreement with Bonn already in 1967, and the mood was optimistic in the West German capital when Dubček became Czechoslovak leader.¹⁶⁶ This could eventually scuttle his quest for international recognition of East Germany.

In Poland there was unrest, which Władysław Gomułka attributed to the liberal reforms in Czechoslovakia. Once a reformer himself, he had turned into a more hardline Communist, who looked at the impending disunity within the Communist camp with great displeasure. So both Gomułka and Ulbricht were concerned with what the Prague reforms would do to socialism elsewhere in Europe, and therefore what it would do to their respective regimes.

Loyalty to the Soviet Union was the main ingredient in Todor Zhivkov's Bulgaria. He had enjoyed friendly relations with Khrushchev and strove to maintain a friendship with Brezhnev as well. This he did by following the Soviet lead, and supporting the Soviet stance. He also quickly dismissed propositions for a political solution and was among the first to advocate military intervention.

As for Hungary, Kádár was in the beginnings of a reform process of his own, and would want the Czechoslovak situation to be solved peacefully without the Hungarian reforms being withdrawn. A military intervention of Czechoslovakia would mean a swift end to at least the political side to his own project. In meetings and conferences Kádár therefore suggested a more conciliatory tone towards Dubček,

questioning claims of counter-revolution and hostile elements in the Czechoslovak government.

In 1968 we see that Moscow's allies acted as precisely that, allies, and that loyalty was important to them. However, we should not hide the fact that the Soviet Union still dictated the rules, although the Warsaw Pact members had their own reasons to intervene. It is difficult to say which of the countries was the closest of the Soviet Union's allies, but both East Germany and Poland worked hard to become the main partner in European affairs. The Hungarians and the Bulgarians were not so concerned with that, but they most of all wanted good relations with the leading Communist state, adapting their actions accordingly.

Another interesting point is that, perhaps due to the Warsaw Pact being a military alliance, the European socialist states had a larger say in the process leading to the invasion. East Germany and Poland lobbied for the military option, and eventually had their way, and this is something we don't see in the 2008 conflict. This may also be because the European states felt that the alliance to a larger extent went both ways and that they therefore could muster up the confidence to lobby for their cause.

4.3.2 Georgia 2008

There was not much lobbying done by Russia's allies in the period leading up to those fatal August days. Russia's main allies were members of its most important regional organizations, the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Belarus, which was perhaps Russia's closest friend at the time. Given Russia's status in the world, the behavior of these three was not as coherent as in 1968, and the leeway seems to have been much bigger.

The CSTO was the most loyal of the three, releasing statements praising Russia's efforts and condemning Georgia's aggression. However, its members stopped short of recognizing the two breakaway republics' independence, something Russia had done. The CSTO did not blindly support Russia, but rather showed a certain degree of autonomy something that would not have gone down well in 1968. Despite this, it was the strongest supporter of the intervention perhaps because Russia is the most powerful member of the organization.

This was not the case for the SCO, which was very vague in its support for Russia. There was no condemnation of Georgia's role in the conflict, nor did the members recognize Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's independence. This can be seen as a diminishing fear for Russian reprisals on the Central Asian members' part, as they use China as a shield. China was too powerful and too important to antagonize, at least over that case.

More surprising was perhaps the lukewarm reaction from Belarus, which had enjoyed a very friendly relationship with Moscow in the period before the intervention. The fact that Aleksander Lukashenko almost had to be coerced into coming out in support of the intervention shows that even close allies now have the courage to act out of self-interest, as Belarus has tried to improve its relations with the European Union. After the energy conflict between Russia and Belarus in 2007, Lukashenka praised the EU for offering assistance, and efforts were directed at developing mutually beneficial economic relations between Belarus and Europe. Minsk also took steps in the political sphere, releasing political prisoners, making small changes to the electoral procedures, and passing a new mass media law.¹⁶⁷

In the case of the intervention in Georgia, Russia's allies have been quite volatile, not acting the way Russia had perhaps expected and most certainly wished. This case has shown that when states have the backing of countries or organizations equal to Russia they are able to act in a way they see fit, and not follow Russia's lead. As we can see, there is a huge difference in how the Soviet and the Russian allies have behaved. The "Warsaw Five"-countries had more confidence in the sense that they tried to influence the decision before it was made, but then wholeheartedly supported it. The current Russian allies do not have the same possibilities to influence the decision-making process, but can to a larger extent choose their reaction to it afterwards. All in all, Moscow had tight alliance members in 1968, and could count on them to present a pretty unified front against possible opposition. In 2008, however, Russia had a few potential supporters, but no way near as secure as 40 years earlier.

5.0 Reasons for intervention – Czechoslovakia 1968

It's been nearly 45 years since Warsaw Pact troops poured into Czechoslovakia, effectively putting an end to Alexander Dubček's reformist regime, dubbed "the Prague Spring" in Western media. As the years have passed, the reasons why the Soviet Union chose to invade a socialist and presumably fraternal country have become clearer. Through for example documents and archival data we can shed some light on what reasons lay behind this on the surface rather puzzling decision.

For the Czechoslovak case, I will in this thesis present three possible reasons for why the Soviet Union would want to militarily put an end to the liberalization in Prague. First I will discuss the fear of ideological contagion to the Soviet Union itself, and the idea that socialism was something the Soviets could monopolize and contents of which they could dictate. Khrushchev had been a bit more lenient and a bit less strict than Stalin, but Brezhnev wanted to reverse this development and keep Moscow as the ideological center. Secondly I will look at the fear of ideological contagion to the Soviet Union's European allies. This section will pick up on some of the points mentioned in chapter four, and will focus on how the Warsaw Pact members viewed the situation and tried to influence Moscow. It will also bring up the familiar term "domino theory", though this time it is a Soviet version of the notion. The third and final reason to be discussed in this chapter is the aspect of geopolitics and balance of power. Czechoslovakia's geographical position was important to the Soviet Union, and if Czechoslovakia reverted to the Western camp it would tip the scales in the US' favor. This is a "zero-sum-game" perception typical for the Soviet Union, where one side's loss automatically is another side's gain.

5.1 Risk of ideological contagion and socialist monopoly – Soviet territory

One of the most well-known phrases from the Prague Spring was "socialism with a human face". Coined in the KSČ's Action Program, its meaning was that the rigidity and fear would no longer be an integral part of the socialist reality in Czechoslovakia. Naturally, to have its own political and social system by implication branded essentially "inhuman" is unpleasant, especially for a state with the status and position of the Soviet Union.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, Dubček's Action Program set forth to

find a Czechoslovak road to true socialism, thus implying that the current road, based on Soviet teachings, was not leading them in the desired direction.¹⁶⁹

This road was above all based on the leading role of the Communist Party, a principle from which Brezhnev thought it was impossible to deviate.¹⁷⁰ If the USSR allowed the reforms to continue, and thus give up the position of the Czechoslovak Communist Party, the Soviet monopoly on the socialist ideology would be relinquished.¹⁷¹ The Soviets had also over the years developed a very narrow view of what they considered to be a pro-Soviet socialist state, and any deviation from this model, be it minor or major, was immediately looked upon with great suspicion.¹⁷²

Czechoslovakia's Action Program went against everything that Brezhnev considered vital to a Communist state, from press freedom and abolishing censorship, via correcting the Stalinist crimes, to a strengthening of inner-party democracy.¹⁷³ The political ramifications could be very severe, something which will be discussed later in the thesis. However, a Czechoslovak socialism competing with the Soviet version would not do wonders for the unity of the Eastern Bloc; so a continued Soviet monopoly on Communism was considered important.

Another piece in the Soviet intervention puzzle was the fear that the Czechoslovak road to socialism would spread to the Soviet Union itself. Whether or not this fear was justified is now debatable, but it was most certainly tangible, as intellectuals, literary circles and the more liberal members of the Soviet establishment slowly started murmuring about following the Czechoslovak example. Most prominent was the later Nobel Prize winner Andrei Sakharov's manifesto urging Moscow to adopt bits of the Czechoslovak reforms.¹⁷⁴ The fact that such demands were made in the USSR showed Brezhnev that the danger of an ideological spillover even to Moscow was real enough to take seriously.¹⁷⁵ A good indication of this is that bureaucrats in the department of ideological affairs were very active in advocating the military option.¹⁷⁶ The Czechoslovak media even criticized the Soviet leaders for trying to paint a distorted picture of the situation in Prague out of a desire for ideological control and a fear for ideological spillover.¹⁷⁷

The Soviet Union did not consist of only Soviet Russia; it also incorporated other Soviet republics. If the fear of ideological spread was great in Moscow, it was perhaps even greater in Kiev in Soviet Ukraine. Leader of the Ukrainian Communist

Party, Petro Yukhymovych Shelest, was very anxious about the Czechoslovak ideas crossing the border into the western parts of Ukraine.¹⁷⁸ Western Ukraine of course bordered on the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia, and the Prešov region in Czechoslovakia was inhabited by a considerable Ukrainian minority. Such a sizeable minority naturally had its own media outlets, both radio stations, for example Radio Prešov, and newspapers such as *Nove Zhyttia* and *Duklia*.¹⁷⁹ These three were the most ardent reporters of the developments in Czechoslovakia, and also the most daring in their demands for similar reforms in Ukraine and even occasional criticism of the Ukrainian regime.¹⁸⁰ This was what made the Ukrainian communists worried about the Prague reforms.¹⁸¹

Shelest's fears thus seem to have been realized, at least to a certain extent. Most dangerous was the experiments with federalization, in addition to the restoration of the Ukrainian minority's national rights and the revival of the previously forbidden Greek-Orthodox church.¹⁸² These developments sparked nationalism, not only in Ukraine, but also in the Baltic republics.¹⁸³ One should also consider that Czechoslovakia and Ukraine enjoyed tight cultural and economic relations, and that Soviet influence in these areas might diminish if the reforms were allowed to progress. The trade relations had been relatively more important for Czechoslovakia than for Ukraine; so for Ukraine the economic loss would not have been impossible to cope with.¹⁸⁴ However, the Soviet Union had great influence over the Czechoslovak economy due to the Ukraine's position as main exporter of for example machinery, metallurgical raw materials, and food to Czechoslovakia.¹⁸⁵ A realignment of allegiances from the Soviet Union to the West on Czechoslovakia's part could possibly lead to Prague looking elsewhere for its import needs, thus inflicting a loss of income as well as influence.

The question of federalism was a concern already in March, when Shelest's secretary in the western-most Ukrainian oblast of Transcarpathia, Yuri Ilnytskyi, discussed the matter with the First Secretary of the KSC's East Slovak region. Ilnytskyi urged his counterpart to take note of the reports in *Nove Zhyttia*, which was using the Czechoslovak reforms to stir up similar feelings in Transcarpathia in Ukraine.¹⁸⁶ Breaking Soviet Ukraine up would mean relinquishing power, an unpleasant prospect for Shelest and the others in Kiev. Growing unrest in Ukraine, presumably due to the situation in Czechoslovakia, made Shelest one of the main

spokesmen for military intervention.¹⁸⁷ He frequently reported to the Soviet Communist Party about the situation in Czechoslovakia and its implications for the USSR. For instance, on May 22, 1968, he submitted a report on border controls, where he stated that “ideologically pernicious literature” had been confiscated, not only from Western shipments and persons, but also from citizens of socialist countries.¹⁸⁸

It is clear from what has been presented here that the fear of ideological contagion to the Soviet Union itself was a major concern, a conclusion Mark Kramer also draws.¹⁸⁹ In Moscow there were some initial demands in certain circles, and the department of ideological affairs was a strong advocate of utilizing the Warsaw Pact forces. The most pressure, however, came from Ukraine, which was closest to the action and experienced increasing unrest and really felt the spillover effects. It was not the only reason of course, but the possible ramifications were definitely considered in the Politburo.

5.2 Risk of ideological contagion – East Central Europe

It wasn't only the spread of the Czechoslovak reformist ideas to the USSR that put the scare in the authorities in Moscow; the prospect of liberalization in the neighboring East Central European countries was equally threatening. As noted in chapter four, East Germany and Poland were the two main proponents of using military force. Kurt Hager, member of the East German Politburo warned that further progress of the Czechoslovak developments would possibly “subvert and divide the socialist alliance”.¹⁹⁰

Ulbricht in the GDR was afraid that the liberal reforms in Czechoslovakia would spread to his own country and undermine his position as the head of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany, the SED. This was the main reason why East Germany started confiscating Czechoslovak newspapers and jamming Czechoslovak radio broadcasts.¹⁹¹ Ulbricht spent a lot of time and energy condemning Dubček's reforms, trying to impose his assessment of the situation on Brezhnev and the other Warsaw Pact members. For instance, he launched a scathing attack on Kádár, who had a more conciliatory approach, claiming that the Hungarian would “be the next to go” if they didn't deal with the situation. Ulbricht also agitated Poland's Władysław

Gomułka by letting it slip that Polish-born scholar Zbigniew Brzezinski, whom Gomułka allegedly despised, had been allowed to lecture in Prague.¹⁹²

Just these two, Gomułka and Ulbricht, were the two most vocal opponents of the Prague Spring, and the two who most strongly advocated an intervention. During the Dresden summit they repeated the Soviet conspiracies about what liberalization and democratization actually meant, accusing Dubček of neither leading nor governing.¹⁹³ Poland and East Germany went to great lengths in trying to convince Brezhnev that if Czechoslovakia was allowed to liberalize, one country after the other in East Central Europe would do the same, creating a kind of Soviet domino theory.¹⁹⁴

It seems that the efforts put in by Gomułka and Ulbricht paid off, as this letter from the Central Committees of the Communist parties of the “Warsaw Five” shows.

The fate of Socialist Czechoslovakia is dear and close to the peoples of all the socialist countries. They cannot accept that our common enemies detach Czechoslovakia from the socialist way, that they imperil it by separating it from the socialist community. Our peoples have suffered too many sacrifices, they shed too much blood in the fierce battles of the past war, in the struggle for social and national liberation, to allow now the counterrevolution to tear Czechoslovakia away from the socialist states' family.

*The defense of socialism in Czechoslovakia is not only a domestic affair of that country's people, but, as you all realize, a question of safeguarding the security of our countries, of defending the positions of world socialism.*¹⁹⁵

We see from the phrase “the security of our countries” that the possibility of ideological spread had occurred to the leaders of the Warsaw Five, and that it was a decisive factor in the reasoning behind the intervention. It wasn't only the political implications themselves that scared the other Warsaw pact countries; it was also, especially in East Germany's case, the economic implications. East Berlin was worried that further liberalization would entail an expansion of the economic ties between Czechoslovakia and West Germany.¹⁹⁶ When Czechoslovakia didn't get the loans it was seeking from the USSR, and declared its intentions of turning west for economic support, Ulbricht became apprehensive. With the *Ostpolitik* of Willy Brandt in mind, which according to Ulbricht was a scheme designed to offer economic and political benefits in exchange for the establishment of diplomatic relations, economic dependence could soon turn to political dependence as well.¹⁹⁷

In a letter to Dubček from April 1968, Brezhnev clearly expressed his concerns about the reforms in Prague and what consequences they might have for the other allies. *“The party will be in the forefront, relying on the working class as the leading force of your society. All this, as well as loyalty to the Warsaw Pact, is the guarantee of national independence and the security of the Czechoslovak Republic and the entire socialist community.”*¹⁹⁸ It seems that the words of Ulbricht and Gomułka had already started to resonate in Brezhnev’s mind in April, making the Soviets fear a domino effect if the reforms in Prague were allowed to continue. This is consistent with one of Brezhnev’s main foreign policy goals, namely keeping tight control over the Soviet bloc. There was a danger that Dubček could develop into another Tito, a communist leader independent of Moscow.¹⁹⁹ Brezhnev continued to stress this fact after the intervention, for instance at a gala joint meeting of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party in 1972.²⁰⁰

Ideological concerns in the other Warsaw Pact countries, it seems, were definitely heavily discussed and considered in the inner circles in Moscow, and played a vital part in convincing the Soviet Union in intervening in Czechoslovakia. Together with the risk of contagion to Soviet areas it is evident that Czechoslovakia’s allies feared for their own existence and the survival of socialism.

5.3 Geopolitics and balance of power

Up to now we have looked at ideological reasons for intervention, but the final factor to be discussed in this chapter is the geostrategic dimensions on which the Soviet Union based its intervention. As noted in chapter two, the Soviet Union was very concerned with geopolitics and the notion balance of power; so it should come as no surprise that geopolitics mattered when the USSR discussed the pros and cons of intervention.

After the Austrian state treaty of 1955, the forces of the four major powers, the USSR, the US, Great Britain, and France, were withdrawn, increasing the geostrategic importance of Czechoslovakia. Moscow eventually decided to establish a stronger military presence in Czechoslovakia, at the expense of Austria.²⁰¹ This renewed strategic significance made its mark in 1968, when the Soviet Union concluded that if Czechoslovakia was lost, the borders of the communist world would be moved to the Elbe and the Sumava mountains.²⁰² Militarily, Czechoslovakia was

therefore very important for the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. First of all, it of course shared a long border with the West and thus played a pivotal role in the plans for an eventual war. Secondly, Czechoslovakia linked the northern and southern sectors of the Warsaw Pact, and if it was lost the forces in Hungary would be isolated from those in East Germany and Poland.²⁰³

In addition to this, Czechoslovakia had become the most important source of uranium to the Soviet Union, which made it even more necessary to keep Czechoslovakia within the Soviet sphere of influence. The thought was that physical presence meant political influence,²⁰⁴ and thus that if Czechoslovakia defected to the West the balance of power would be altered. Soviet soldiers in Czechoslovakia kept the scales carefully balanced, and even gave the Soviets the upper hand in Europe, according to American ambassador to West Germany George McGhee.²⁰⁵ Something that has to be noted is that at no point during the reform process did Dubček give any indication that he was about to shift his allegiance away from the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union.²⁰⁶

The strategic importance of Czechoslovakia was so great that foreign minister Andrei Gromyko feared a complete collapse of the Warsaw Pact if Czechoslovakia was allowed to leave.²⁰⁷ Czechoslovak General Jan Šejna's defection to the West further exacerbated Soviet fears that Czechoslovakia was becoming the weakest link in the Warsaw Pact chain.²⁰⁸ A possible alliance between the "prodigal sons" Romania, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia was also a dreaded possibility, which would mean a third Communist center and possibly the end of socialist unity.²⁰⁹

Evidence suggests that the coalition of supporters of military intervention viewed the situation in terms of a zero-sum game, implying that a Soviet loss would mean a Western gain.²¹⁰ Rumors were circulating about Western efforts at luring Czechoslovakia away from the socialist bloc in an attempt to cause a split in the Soviet-led alliance.²¹¹ The nature of the bipolar world in which the Cold War took place has to be considered when reviewing the reasons for resorting to military force against liberal reforms, and the prospect of Czechoslovakia returning to the "bourgeois fold" must have been a fairly unpleasant one for Moscow.²¹² Therefore it was best for Moscow if status quo was maintained in Europe, and that the unity, at least on paper, among the Warsaw Pact countries was preserved.²¹³

We can clearly see that geopolitical factors mattered when the Soviet Union decided to use the Warsaw Pact forces at its disposal in “the defense of socialism” in Czechoslovakia.²¹⁴ It was important for Brezhnev to consolidate the European borders and preserve the balance of power; so it was certainly not only ideological spread that was feared in the Kremlin. Even so, the intervention was carried out without any signs that the US would take action, or had taken action; so perhaps the fear was unfounded?

5.4 Preliminary findings, Czechoslovakia

In this chapter I have looked at possible reasons for why the Soviet Union chose to intervene militarily in a supposedly friendly socialist state. I have identified three factors whose importance stand out from others: the risk of ideological contagion to the Soviet Union itself, the risk of ideological contagion to the rest of the Warsaw Pact, and the risk of having the balance of power tipped in the United States' favor. Now these three are not necessarily equally important, but they are the reasons most frequently mentioned in acclaimed and peer-reviewed literature, as well as being identifiable in the few primary sources I have consulted.

The fear of the Czechoslovak reforms inciting similar demands on home turf was one of the most important reasons, if not the most important. Moscow's intelligentsia eventually began to write favorably about what was happening in Prague, and suggested implementing parts of the reforms in the Soviet Union as well. For Brezhnev, who most of all wanted to maintain ideological superiority and tight control over the Soviet satellites this was very dangerous. If the USSR got a popular demand for liberalization on its hands, or even worse a popular uprising, the Kremlin's status as leader of the communist world would be jeopardized. Soviet media were of course still under severe censorship; so it could still be controlled. But in the Czechoslovak case even loyal members of the Communist Party had started to mutter about reform. A Czechoslovak reform process left unchecked could potentially incite protests, even with a heavily controlled media.

This is consistent with Jervis' theories on perception and how these shape foreign policy actions. Brezhnev and foreign minister Kosygin perceived the Prague Spring as threatening to the Soviet Union, and for a country where national security always has been high on the list of priorities it had to be dealt with. We can also say

that Moscow was concerned with its standing in the world in general and the communist world in particular if Dubček was allowed to continue his work. A rival form of socialism in direct competition with the Soviet Union's version could be detrimental to the USSR's position as "leader of the pack", and inspire other Warsaw Pact states to undertake reforms. As a result, Moscow would lose status, and perhaps even credibility, if it was seen to be unable to control its satellites.

A second important point here is the vigorous lobbying done by Petro Shelest on the behalf of the Ukrainian Communist Party. If the threat of the Prague Spring liberalization was tangible in Moscow, it was nothing compared to what was felt in Soviet Ukraine. Bordering on the eastern part of Czechoslovakia, which conveniently enough was inhabited by a sizeable Ukrainian minority, Kiev was exposed to Ukrainian-language radio broadcasts and newspapers, such as the already mentioned *Nove Zhyttia* and *Duklia*. Shelest had considerable influence in the Soviet Politburo, and early on took the lead in the pro-intervention coalition. The fact that the threat was so visible through different media definitely made a great impact on both Shelest and Brezhnev. The latter even explicitly mentioned this in a telephone conversation with Dubček only a week before the invasion, seeking reassurances that these matters were being dealt with.²¹⁵

Reports on tourists, both Western and from socialist states, bringing "unhealthy ideas" across the porous Ukrainian-Czechoslovak borders were another sign that the Prague Spring was going too far. Shelest complained about subversive materials several times, even after the invasion, as if to justify it.²¹⁶ The Soviets' perceptions about security meant that they needed a friendly buffer zone on the country's perimeters, and if Czechoslovakia would have been lost, even to another form of socialism, then the perimeter would have been broken and the USSR itself would have been open to ideological challenges. The Ukrainian Communist Party proved this by showing that the flow of subversive materials already in the beginning of the reform process was substantial, and left it to the Kremlin's imagination to figure out how it would be like further down the line. This sounds very much like realist perspectives, in which self-interest and security are prevalent terms.

The importance of the other Warsaw Pact states should not be underestimated either. Some of Czechoslovakia's neighbors were very worried about

the effects the reforms in Prague could have in their own states, and were extremely enthusiastic in their efforts to lure the USSR into military action. This probably wasn't very difficult, though, since there was, as I have already noted, the manic need for security in the form of a buffer zone. Ulbricht of East Germany and Gomułka of Poland were adamant that unrest and stirrings in their own countries could be ascribed to the Prague Spring, and that the future of socialism in Europe was threatened. The continuous pressing of this point at every Warsaw Pact summit shows us that the countries of East Central Europe were just as concerned with national security as the Soviet Union.

Ulbricht and his Polish counterpart considered themselves as distinguished statesmen in general, and very distinguished Communists in particular, and were under the impression that they had great influence on the Soviets in European matters. In my view this is only partly true. There is no doubt that the pressures applied by the GDR and Poland were heard loud and clear in the Kremlin, but I find it unlikely that Brezhnev was very concerned with the well-being of his allies. After all, he had failed to support Dubček's predecessor Novotný only months earlier, and both Ulbricht and Gomułka were replaced within three years after the intervention, probably with Moscow's consent. Brezhnev most likely understood the possible implications just as well as his East European allies, and they most definitely played a role in determining Czechoslovakia's fate.

A total collapse of the Warsaw Pact would have given the West not only a military advantage in Europe, but a global propaganda advantage. Again we can return to the Soviet perceptions, and its perception of perceptions. If Czechoslovakia was lost, and the domino theory proved correct and all the socialist gains in Europe were lost, then the capitalist world would mark a huge psychological victory. Not only would the Soviet Union lose face as the protector of world socialism, but the West would have proven that Soviet hegemony wasn't sustainable in the long run. It would inevitably lead to collapse, even without military interference from the West. This would leave the Soviet Union with very few friends worldwide, and next to none along its vast European borders, which again would jeopardize its security.

What about the geopolitical considerations? Given that most of the sources about the Czechoslovak case mention geopolitics and the balance of power I'd say

that it seems to be of some importance. However, none of the sources dedicate nearly as much space to this reason as they do to ideological contagion, which indicates that it might have been a secondary concern, at least on its own. Even though Bismarck stated that “he who controls Bohemia controls Europe”, Brezhnev seemed to not share that opinion, at least not to the fullest.²¹⁷ Admittedly, Czechoslovakia did occupy a strategically important geographic location, but in an era of renewed détente, and with the main Soviet adversary embroiled in a Vietnamese quagmire, concerns about balance of power may have been redundant. More important than balance of power were the military implications for the Soviet Warsaw Pact forces in the neighboring countries.

The Soviets had forces stationed all across the Eastern Bloc, and these forces formed a solid chain which served as the first line of defense of the motherland. If a link in the chain was broken, and for a time Czechoslovakia did seem like the weakest link, the forces in Poland and East Germany would be isolated from the forces in Hungary. Moreover, the Soviet “Iron Triangle” consisting of the Baltic republics, western Russia, and Ukraine would be exposed.²¹⁸

It looks as if this part of the reasoning was made up of many relatively minor concerns, such as balance of power, the military implications, and also the Czechoslovak exports of uranium. The Soviet Union would be loath to see Czechoslovak uranium in the hands of the US, or even worse West Germany. Together these factors do make a meaningful contribution to the analysis, since the Kremlin definitely didn’t want to take the risk of drawing the short straw in either of the cases.

The preliminary conclusion is that Soviet security was the overarching notion that determined Soviet foreign policy action in Czechoslovakia. This security was dependent on three factors, all of which contribute to understanding why 500,000 soldiers and several thousand tanks were deployed in order to halt the Prague Spring. Internal security on Soviet territory was naturally a major element, as was external security on Soviet-friendly territory. Strategy appears to have been the least important consideration, especially because of the Vietnam War which diverted attention and resources away from Eastern Europe. All in all, Soviet perceptions, rooted in realism, sealed Czechoslovakia’s fate – Moscow felt insecure.

6.0 Reasons for intervention – Georgia 2008

The August war in Caucasus not only shocked a world absorbed in the magnificent opening ceremony of the Beijing Summer Olympics, but also surprised it. What reasons could a reemerging Russia have to go to such extremes over two minor breakaway republics? In this chapter I will present four possible reasons for why Moscow decided that military action was necessary in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. There are of course problems connected with this, since the conflict's recent nature hinders the use of archival records. However, as with the Czechoslovak case, we can still use whatever material we can find and make certain deductions from them.

First I will present the official rationale for intervening against Georgia, namely the humanitarian aspect. Moscow stated that it wanted to protect its friendly neighbors in Abkhazia and South Ossetia against the Georgian aggressors. Tbilisi's rather unfortunate code-name for the operation, "Clear Field", may have triggered a Russian response, as this was interpreted by the South Ossetians as intentions of ethnic cleansing.²¹⁹ Whether this interpretation was true or not, the humanitarian perspective was strongly advocated in the Russian media, among others by Sergey Lavrov, the Foreign Minister at the time.²²⁰

The humanitarian approach is a very idealistic one, and the second reason presented will be a bit more political in its inspiration. There is some evidence that suggests that the intervention can be interpreted as a statement to other neighboring states, first and foremost in the former Soviet area, that Russia is still the dominant power in the region, despite Western intrusion. This is tightly linked to the third reason, which states that the war was waged in order to keep Georgia out of the Western camp and safely within the Russian sphere of influence. Some key points in that section will be the question of NATO-membership and "pipeline politics", that is considerations concerning oil and gas pipelines through Georgia. The fourth and final reason looks at the Russo-Georgian war as a means of subverting democracies in the region, claiming that Moscow saw the color revolutions as American intrusions onto its turf. The Russians therefore wanted to convey a message to other countries in the region that democratic revolutions may not be a particularly wise choice.

6.1 Humanitarian perspective – ethnic cleansing or protection of Russians?

An important aspect of Russian foreign policy at the time of the intervention against Georgia was the protection of “Russian citizens and compatriots” abroad.²²¹ This applied to the Georgian case due to the fact that many South Ossetians and Abkhazians held Russian passports after the mass distribution mentioned in chapter three. Moscow could therefore say that Russian citizens were under attack, and had a good reason to intervene on their behalf. Moreover, following the peace treaty signed after the previous war between Georgia and the two rebellious republics, Russia had a very visible peacekeeping force in the region, and Moscow could claim to be intervening in order to protect them.²²² Moscow did in fact insist, as a reaction to Georgian claims that said otherwise, that it only intervened when the peacekeepers were “in severe jeopardy”.²²³ We would do well to remember, though, that only two percent of the South Ossetians declared themselves to be ethnic Russians, and since South Ossetia *de jure* belonged to Georgia at the time of the intervention they were legally not members of the Russian federation either. Thus, we already see that there are some questions connected to this view.²²⁴

The distribution of passports and thus the creation of thousands of new Russians did, however, make for the bulk of the Russian post-intervention rationale. Using similar language as that of NATO during the conflict in Kosovo at the turn of the century, the Kremlin said that it only defended civilians from unwarranted military aggression. As I have noted above, accusations of genocide were made, again pointing to the fact that many South Ossetians held Russian citizenship.²²⁵ One might presume that Russia, as a staunch opponent of the NATO action in Kosovo, would refrain from using the same rhetoric. In fact, Moscow even claimed that the intervention was justifiable under international law.²²⁶ More specifically, the Kremlin referenced Article 51 of the UN Charter, which protects the “inherent right of the individual” and “collective self-defense”.²²⁷ President Medvedev’s Vice Prime Minister and the minister for emergency situations also stated that a humanitarian disaster was in the making in the Caucasus, and that the majority of the civilian casualties were Russian citizens.²²⁸

In an emergency meeting of the Russian Security Council, the president himself also asserted that “women, children and the elderly” were suffering in South

Ossetia, and that most of them were citizens of the Russian Federation. He underlined the foreign policy aim noted at the beginning of this section when he stated that he would not sit idly by and allow Russia's compatriots to be slaughtered, and he promised the Security Council that the perpetrators would be duly punished.²²⁹ Russia put a lot of effort into portraying Georgia's actions as unlawful and atrocious, immediately using the term ethnic cleansing on most of the national TV-channels.²³⁰ Four years later, speaking in connection with a Russian film being made about the events in 2008, Medvedev maintained that the intervention was carried out in order to save civilian lives.²³¹

It must be noted, however, that the number of civilians killed was much lower than first claimed by Moscow.²³² Furthermore, the independent fact-finding mission led by Swiss ambassador Heidi Tagliavini concluded in its report that despite the mass distribution of Russian passports, the recipients could not be considered Russian citizens at the time of the intervention.²³³ In response to a questionnaire from the Fact-Finding Mission, Russian authorities held that the accusations of ethnic cleansing and genocide should be viewed in the context of the information available at the time.²³⁴ This might sound a bit apologetic and defensive, but nonetheless, the humanitarian and citizen-protective perspective stands as the official reason for why Russia dispatched troops to the defense of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. To believe that it was the only reason is very naïve in my opinion, although civilians were indeed killed in the conflict. The granting of citizenship to South Ossetians may have given Moscow a suitable pretext for intervening, especially when we consider the Georgian ambitions of a unified state.²³⁵ When we then take into account that Putin, at the time Prime Minister, admitted to having authorized a plan of military action against Georgia already in 2007, the need for further scrutiny of the case definitely presents itself.²³⁶ With already existing attack plans, the humanitarian perspective loses some of its substance, and more political reasons may have to be explored.

6.2 Assertion of power towards the near abroad

Protection of Russian citizens and compatriots was one of the foreign policy goals, but of course not the only one. Moscow also wanted to maintain healthy relations with its neighboring states as well as to secure Russia's position as an influential power in the world.²³⁷ In order to achieve this, Russia has among other things created a handful of regional organizations, like the aforementioned SCO and

CSTO, but also the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Created at the Kremlin's initiative in 1991, the CIS has remained an important structure in Russian foreign policy ever since.²³⁸ The CIS has served a double purpose for Russia: it has been an instrument to maintain Russian influence in the member states, and at the same time it has been an instrument to keep Western influence at bay.²³⁹ Armenia and Azerbaijan are members of the CIS, and Georgia was a member until 2008, making the Caucasus well represented in the CIS, and since both Washington and Moscow recognize the strategic importance of the region they are both eager to establish a meaningful presence there.²⁴⁰

The CIS has also been vital to ease Russian fears of being encircled by hostile powers, and the Russians have thus viewed the formation of political blocs within the organizational framework with great caution. For instance, Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova in 1997 formed what was dubbed the GUAM group within the CIS.²⁴¹ All the four members of this group held some sort of grievance against Russia. Georgia's reasons are already explained in chapter three; Ukraine has a large Russian population, and is sharing the Black Sea with the Russian fleet and is thus being pressured by Moscow; Moldova has a difficult relationship with Moscow due to the situation in Transnistria, while Azerbaijan is a competitor in the energy sector.²⁴² Russia has frequently branded the GUAM group "pro-Western" and "anti-Russian",²⁴³ even though developments showed that the efforts at balancing Russia were lukewarm at best.²⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the fact that some previous Soviet states dared to cooperate in order to at least try to offer a counterweight to Russian power in the CIS area showed Moscow that its standing amongst its neighbors might have waned too much.

This has put keeping the near abroad in check and making sure the leash is not strained too far near the top of the list of Russian foreign policy priorities. Vladimir Putin made it explicitly clear when he repeatedly stressed the importance of the CIS, and President Medvedev has claimed that Russia is entitled a zone of privileged interests on its periphery, just to press the point further.²⁴⁵ Moscow has long sought to confirm the former Soviet states' allegiance to Russia, but has not always threatened with the use of force. As late as November 2007, Russia offered Georgia restoration of bilateral relations in exchange for nonalignment.²⁴⁶ There have been continued efforts to prevent the United States gaining permanent allies in the

Caucasus, but the war in Georgia was the first time that Russia openly showed that it would not “shy away from a possible confrontation” with Washington.²⁴⁷

The intervention in Georgia can also be traced back to the mid-1990s, when Russia developed its own version of the American Monroe Doctrine. Moscow’s version proclaimed an exclusive Russian right to intervene in former Soviet countries, especially, but not only, when Russian national interests were at stake.²⁴⁸ Some years later, in 2003, defense minister Sergei Ivanov concluded that the CIS area was instrumental to Russian security due to the more than 10 million ethnic Russians who lived there, and because Russia supplied the CIS states with energy resources at well below international rates. That Russia subsidized its former protectorate states made Moscow entitled to influence in these states. He went on to say that Moscow would not hesitate to use force in situations where all other measures had failed.²⁴⁹

In this section, as in the following, we cannot avoid the elephant in the room – NATO membership. Both Georgia and Ukraine had been warm to the prospect of being admitted into NATO, while Russia was less than enthusiastic about further Western encroachment into former Soviet territory, a feeling that has been present since Yeltsin’s days.²⁵⁰ The prospect of the two main driving forces in GUAM joining a rival military alliance was understandably disconcerting, and according to many sources it has to be seen as one of the most important reasons for intervening in Georgia.²⁵¹ Others, such as Vincent Pouliot, argue that it is impossible to examine the 2008 conflict without viewing it in the light of NATO question.²⁵²

Whether or not Russian intentions for intervention lay in conveying to its neighbors that it was still a force to be reckoned with, or killing any initiatives to join NATO, or perhaps both, that were the results. Central Asian states with a considerable amount of Russian expatriates, such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, became increasingly worried about Russia’s new aggressive way of dealing with its neighbors.²⁵³ Furthermore, military action in Georgia firstly showed those countries that perhaps were mulling over the possibility of applying for membership that their strategic importance may not be great enough for NATO. Secondly, Russia enjoyed more influence in the former Soviet states than in Eastern Europe when the latter were admitted into NATO *en masse*. The events in Georgia also highlighted the dangers of extending the Article Five guarantees to post-Soviet

republics, as none of the current NATO-members were ready to risk confrontation with Russia in its own backyard.²⁵⁴

Taking the explicit foreign policy goals and the remarks of both Putin and Medvedev – the two most powerful men in Russian politics – into consideration, showing the GUAM group and other neighbors that Russia, despite what they may think, is still a regional powerhouse does seem like a plausible reason for intervention. Moscow may have found the amount of Western influence on its periphery to have become too big, and thought that a show of force was needed to reverse the situation. On top of this comes the NATO issue, an issue that perhaps is the most important in this section. It should come as no surprise that Moscow found it useful to shut down the prospects of NATO membership for the foreseeable future, and thus saw an intervention in Georgia as well suited for this purpose.

6.3 Keeping Georgia away from the Western camp and “pipeline politics”

In the previous section I looked at the desire to remain powerful in the post-Soviet sphere in general, while this section will deal with the question of Georgia in particular. As I have already noted, Russia wants to limit Western influence in a region it views as strategically important, wedged as it is between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea.²⁵⁵ This makes Georgia a very interesting country for those seeking to move oil and gas from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea ports. Russia has long been the main energy actor in the area, but the European Union would very much like to lessen its dependence on Russian oil and gas, thus initiating several pipeline projects in the Caucasus corridor.²⁵⁶ Among these are the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC), the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE), and the Nabucco pipelines. Also touched upon in this section will be the issue of NATO enlargement, briefly mentioned in the previous part.

Whether the environmentally friendly activists like it or not, petroleum continues to be vital to the world, both as fuel and for electricity purposes. In this respect, the Caucasus is important, holding vast amounts of oil and gas reserves. The countries in the region used these resources in an effort to slide westward in their orientation, a trend started by Georgia.²⁵⁷ Azerbaijan followed Georgia’s lead, and the Azeri president publicly announced that the days when Azerbaijan was dependent on Russia to export its oil and gas were numbered.²⁵⁸ This did not go

down well in Moscow. Russia has insisted on operating the extensive pipeline network built in the Soviet era, even those outside today's Russia, thus giving Moscow substantial leverage over oil-producing neighbors.²⁵⁹ Projects such as the Nabucco pipeline, which sought to avoid Russian territory, were a thorn in the Kremlin's side as they would diminish Russian influence in a region where it claimed to have privileged interests. Such projects could very well have had a psychological effect on Russia.²⁶⁰ The construction of such pipelines should be avoided, and foreign companies' involvement should be limited to cases where they are essential and Russian interests can be secured.²⁶¹

One way to look at the 2008 war in Georgia is therefore to see it through petroleum pipelines. Russia's actions may have been designed to highlight certain dangers inherent in the region: ethnic conflicts, secessionist movements and general instability. Neither of these are positive factors when someone is thinking of constructing a vital energy pipeline somewhere.²⁶² Sowing the seeds of uncertainty amongst potential Western investors could aid in deterring them from exploring the options in the Caucasus further, thus fulfilling Russia's foreign policy aim: keeping Russia in and the West out.²⁶³

We should also remember the newfound Russian propensity to use energy supplies as a weapon, as forcefully demonstrated in Ukraine, which made the Caucasus even more attractive as a pipeline option.²⁶⁴ The EU, the US, but also the Central Asian states, were eager to end the Russian monopoly on transport of hydrocarbons and secure a steady supply of energy regardless of what actions Moscow might take.²⁶⁵ American energy analyst Lucian Pugliaresi stated that the US would very much like a "diversification of supplies", for instance from the Caucasus. This would mean a reduction in oil prices which, no matter how small, would make a healthy contribution to an oil-importing country like the United States.²⁶⁶ Russia, on the other hand, would face serious consequences should their monopoly on petro-transport end. The Russian economy turned very one-sided under Putin, and Moscow became almost utterly dependent on high oil-prices to keep it afloat.²⁶⁷

Worries about losing privileges in the energy sector may have been an underlying reason for the Russian intervention, and it is underlined by the ease with which Russian troops accessed the pipelines transiting Georgia. The military action

showed the West that even an army equipped with US weapons could not secure the flow of oil through conflict-ridden Georgia. The fact that Russian pipelines were operating at full capacity probably also contributed to diminishing the desirability of new pipelines avoiding Russia.²⁶⁸ Just to add further evidence to this explanation, Moscow has been apprehensive about having foreign military stationed in states along its borders, even if they only were there to protect pipelines traversing through conflict zones.²⁶⁹ Pipeline politics was not the only reason why Russia found it necessary to keep Georgia in its sphere of influence; Georgia's ambitions to join NATO must also be considered.

Georgia and Ukraine were the two former Soviet states most intent on obtaining NATO membership, with the former's overtures beginning under Eduard Shevardnadze's rule.²⁷⁰ Both countries went through the necessary steps on the way, but several European NATO-members blocked the decision to award them Membership Action Plans at the Bucharest summit in 2008. Nevertheless, both Georgia and Ukraine were promised accession at some point, a prospect welcomed especially by US president George W. Bush.²⁷¹ NATO enlargement eastwards has never been a particularly popular issue with the authorities in Moscow. The long-standing fears of encirclement have not been eased by NATO moving into former Soviet-dominated areas. This has been seen as definite signs of American attempts to roll back Russian influence in these regions.²⁷² NATO-expansion into the post-Soviet space has been branded one of the main threats to Russian national security, which only serves to highlight the desperate need for a secure and friendly buffer zone around Russia.²⁷³

Foreign minister Lavrov said in the aftermath of the war that Russia would do anything to prevent Georgia and Ukraine from joining the Alliance, and that if it was to happen it would definitely lead to a worsening of relations between Russia and the West.²⁷⁴ Putin was also very clear on what being a friend of Russia meant when Saakashvili visited him: it meant abandoning the Western course in general and the NATO aspirations in particular.²⁷⁵ That Russia still views the world as a zero-sum game also most likely plays a role for this factor.²⁷⁶ The two rounds of EU-enlargement along with NATO-enlargements have caused Russia to consider the countries included in these enlargements as "lost territories", since most of them were part of the Soviet sphere of influence during the Cold War.²⁷⁷

With this in mind, the Russo-Georgian conflict in 2008 gets a new angle to it. It may have been a very forceful way to show Georgia that it would maybe be better to align more with Moscow than with Washington, and at the same time it was a signal to the US that it needed to be prepared to put its words into action in the Caucasus, since Russia would no longer be mere pushovers in the region.²⁷⁸ Russia has for long been opposed NATO expanding into former Soviet areas, and with Georgia's rash actions in August 2008 Moscow perhaps found the pretext it sought in order to punish Saakashvili for inviting a Western military alliance into Russia's backyard.²⁷⁹ Although there are disagreements on just how important the NATO question was for the intervention, the general increase in Western influence in the region gives us a clue.²⁸⁰ If we, in addition, remember the words of several prominent Russian politicians over the years, as well as the foreign policy strategies, to reverse Western influence and keep Georgia on a tighter leash at least is a reason worthy of considerable mention.

6.4 Subvert democracy

A fourth factor that has been touted by among others Thomas Ambrosio and Ronald D. Asmus as a possible reason for the Russian intervention on the behalf of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is the subversion of democracy in the former Soviet areas. Several of the Soviet successor states underwent so-called "colored revolutions", for instance the Orange revolution in Ukraine and the Rose revolution in Georgia, both of which were hailed by the West for their democratic credentials. Ironically, these political upheavals may have contributed to the Russian decision to use force in the Georgian case. In Moscow's eyes, the sudden flourishing of Western-style democracies along its periphery was seen as both a symbolic and a real threat. Because Russia sought to limit foreign, specifically American, influence in their borderlands, democratic revolutions were perceived as overt US intrusions.²⁸¹ Admittedly, the regime changes brought with them changes in foreign policy and in light of this a strategy of democracy subversion makes sense. If the new regime could be portrayed as worse than the old, the democratic trend could be halted and possibly reversed.²⁸²

Subverting democracy and limiting foreign influence in its closest neighbors are tightly linked together. Russia has sought security through stable political conditions and Russia-friendly regimes along its borders, and maintaining both is a

primary foreign policy goal. Russian authorities have therefore been on guard for any signs of encirclement, whether military or political, and perceived the strong US support for regime changes in Georgia and Ukraine as a stepping stone towards such a development.²⁸³ Explicit US support of the new regimes also made the Russians all the more suspicious.²⁸⁴ One of Saakashvili's goals was to create a democratic, pro-Western corridor through the South Caucasus which, being situated between what he perceived as an unstable Russia and an explosive Middle East, could generate much-needed investments and provide a steady flow of oil and gas.²⁸⁵

Such a development was not exactly music to the Kremlin's ears, since the authorities didn't outright believe George W. Bush's claim that Russia would benefit from having democracies on its borders.²⁸⁶ Rather than go with the democratic traditions of the West, Putin coined his own version of democracy: sovereign democracy. Emphasis here was definitely on the sovereign part, indicating that foreign meddling in domestic affairs was highly unpopular.²⁸⁷ However, Russia hasn't stayed with the principle of non-interference in cases where it has felt that regimes have had the wrong orientation.²⁸⁸ In Georgia's case Moscow has supported the secessionist movements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia in order to curb the strong nationalist sentiments in Tbilisi.²⁸⁹ Add to this the attempt to make Viktor Yanukovich president in Ukraine using both legal and illegal measures, and we see a pattern that tells us that Russia is trying hard to prevent regime change that could mean less influence there.²⁹⁰

One might argue that if Russia really wanted to depose the Georgian government they would have done so, since Russian troops at one point only were a few miles away from the capital.²⁹¹ However, the Kremlin may have thought disunity and insecurity were as good as anything. A united Georgia would mean a Georgia fully independent of Russia, which again would mean a foreign policy fully independent of Russia. This is something Russia has opposed rather vigorously.²⁹² Military intervention to further destabilize the government and deepen the ethnic schism could have been seen as necessary to keep the Western-style democracies at arm's length, and avoid the fulfillment of Saakashvili's dream of a belt of democratic Caucasian states from the Caspian to the Black sea.

6.5 Preliminary findings, Georgia

This chapter has looked at four possible reasons for why Russia chose to intervene on the behalf of two minor secessionist republics, and ultimately enter Georgia proper. Those four were firstly the humanitarian dimension, held by Russian authorities as the sole reason for the intervention. Second it might have been a move to assert power towards the near abroad, showing them what would happen if other states strayed too far from Russia. The third factor followed in the same path, but concentrated on Georgia, and Russia's desire to keep Georgia away from the Western camp. Fourth and last I looked at the possibility that the intervention was designed to subvert democratic stirrings in Russia's neighboring countries.

The official Russian explanation was that the intervention was warranted due to ethnic cleansing on Georgia's part and that the Russian troops were needed to protect Russian civilians. We should of course not dismiss this explanation as bogus, but under closer scrutiny there is some evidence that suggests that the official statements have more to them than pure humanitarianism. The distribution of passports to Abkhazians and South Ossetians gave Russia a good cause for action on paper, but the Tagliavini Report concluded that neither the Abkhaz nor the South Ossetian population could be considered Russian citizens. However, it looks certain that Moscow wanted this explanation to be accepted as a valid one, given the time they used repeating it. Roy Allison also doubts this explanation, as he claims that "In August 2008, Russia lacked any domestic legal right to send its forces into Georgia, since its territorial integrity was not under threat and it had no defence treaties with the then unrecognized South Ossetia or Abkhazia."²⁹³

It is difficult to apply Jervis' theories on perceptions to this possible reason, and to do so will be very speculative. We can speculate, though, and here Russian perceptions seemed to be determined by previous experiences of those in charge. The authorities used much of the same rhetoric as the West did during the war in Kosovo, and Moscow perhaps thought that it would shield itself from some of the worst criticism. Time proved that it did not, partly because reports of ethnic cleansing were unfounded. It is also possible, if the realist mind-set still exists within the walls of the Kremlin, that Russia wanted to create the basis for its own encirclement of Georgia by making friends in the area by supporting the two breakaway republics. This would serve the purpose of both helping ensure Russian national security as

well as being negative for Georgia's national unity and Saakashvili's dream of uniting his country.

Russia might have thought that action against foreign aggressors and the protection of civilians would make Moscow more attractive to the international community. Putin and Medvedev may also have perceived an increase in Russia's status in the world, maybe as a protector of ethnic minorities. This is consistent with what Jervis says about a state's perception of how it is perceived by other states. The humanitarian approach to the Russo-Georgian war has more to it than meets the eye, and it is difficult to explain by theories on perceptions. What seems a likely possibility is that the "passportization" of South Ossetia was a preparation for a future confrontation, and if so the philanthropic motives can be discarded in favor of more security-related motives.

A second explanation, although not an official one, is that Russia wanted to assert power over what Russians call the near abroad, and maintain Russia's status as a regional powerhouse. Moscow has tried to maintain a sphere of influence through various regional organizations, such as the CIS, but the neighboring states have become increasingly independent of Russia, warming more and more to the West. A bloc within the CIS was perceived to be anti-Russian, and Georgia and Ukraine edging ever closer to full-fledged NATO-membership looked perilous from Moscow's point of view. Statements made by several prominent Russian politicians since the break-up of the Soviet Union pointed to the fact that the new Russia wanted to keep its neighbors' allegiances firmly directed towards Moscow. National security is the alpha and omega for the Russian authorities, and because of this desire for a zone of influence, they perceived any development that could affect their influence as negative. President Medvedev even restated this claim after the Caucasian conflict, further demonstrating that the ambitions of influence over its neighbors had not diminished.

Assertion of power is at the center of the third possibility as well, but this is more connected with the particular case of Georgia, and its importance for Russian security. Georgia's flirt with the West and its possible accession to NATO was perceived as very dangerous for Russian interests in the region, and something that had to be dealt with. If Georgia became member of NATO, Russia feared that other

countries might join them, for instance Ukraine which was already in advanced talks. This would give the US not only considerable influence through military bases, military advisers, and maybe the stationing of its own troops, but also make the countries affected more friendly towards the West in economic and political matters. For a state which has been adamant that it will not be encircled by hostile powers this was an extremely unwelcome idea.

Both the assertion of power towards the region and the assertion of power toward Georgia can be explained by the realist notions of self-interest and security, which again is connected to how the Russian authorities perceived the global situation. Russia feared unfriendly regimes in its border regions, a fear intensified by the idea of a zero-sum game, and that if American influence increased Russian influence would automatically diminish. Keeping the West out of Georgia and Georgia out of the West was perceived as beneficial to Russian interests, and it is plausible that these perceptions determined how Russia would act in the Caucasus. Previous experiences could also have been said to affect the Russian perceptions, as NATO, according to Moscow, violated an oral promise made by Secretary of State James Baker to not expand into Eastern Europe if the USSR agreed to German reunification in NATO.²⁹⁴ This promise was delivered to Gorbachev, but was undoubtedly well-known to many Russian politicians, and they may have felt that the West exploited their country when it was at its weakest. If weakness in the 1990's led to NATO enlargement into Eastern Europe, then weakness in the 2000's could lead to NATO creeping into the Caucasus. It could therefore have been important for the Kremlin to display strength and resolve and avoid having NATO show up in its backyard.

Security, realism, and influence permeate the fourth and final possible explanation as well – subversion of democracy. The notions are the same as before, but with a long-term goal of keeping Saakashvili from achieving his ambition of a democratic corridor from the Caspian to the Black Sea. Russian attempts at easing “the wrong” candidate into the Ukrainian presidency display a certain unease with the formation of Western-style democratic regimes close to home. Again we find that Russian perceptions are distinctly black and white, implying that a democracy will instinctively turn west, and more or less shut Russia out. An autonomous foreign

policy in more and more neighboring countries could mean that Russian privileges would be revoked.

From the sources examined for the Georgian case, it looks certain that there is more to the conflict than mere philanthropy and the protection of civilians. The history of Russo-Georgian relations and the relationship between Moscow and the two secessionist republics point in the direction of a more elaborate explanation to the intervention. The mass distribution of passports a few years prior to the conflict did nothing to remove the impression of a carefully planned operation. Keeping Georgia away from the Western camp, and more importantly away from NATO, stands out as the most important reason of the four. Russian security was sufficiently threatened by the prospect of NATO not only gaining access to bases that close to Russia, but also including a former Soviet republic in the Article V of collective defense. Pipeline politics and the flow of hydrocarbons from the Caspian oilfields also mattered heavily here, and the confrontation highlighted the dangers of constructing pipelines in conflict-ridden areas.

Maintaining its influence in the region as a whole, it seems, was second on Russia's priority list. Work in the regional organizations had not led to any significant results; on the contrary Moscow experienced the formation of a "pro-Western" faction within the Commonwealth of Independent States. Russia therefore needed to show strength and determination, and prove that it still had the upper hand over the US in its own neighborhood. Both of these explanations point to geopolitics, balance of power, realism, all rooted in perceptions of insecurity, as does the democracy factor, although this looks to have played only a secondary role in explaining the invasion. For a preliminary conclusion we can therefore say that Russian perceptions of its own insecurity sealed Georgia's fate in August 2008.

7.0 Comparative analysis – have perceptions changed?

The previous two chapters have dealt with the possible reasons why the Soviet Union and Russia chose to intervene in Czechoslovakia and Georgia respectively, and how these interventions may be interpreted with the help of perception theories and realist traditions. This chapter will compare the reasoning in the two conflicts in order to establish whether the reasoning, and therefore the perceptions, have changed. First, however, it will discuss the impact of Moscow's friends in the respective cases.

7.1 Impact of Moscow's friendly partners

Moscow's friendly partners in the Czechoslovak and the Georgian case behaved very differently from one another. In the former case, most of the closest Soviet friends participated in the military operation against Czechoslovakia and the USSR was the leading light in the socialist world. This gave Moscow considerable leverage, both over foreign and domestic affairs in its allies. They frequently used this leverage, and most major changes in personnel had to be approved, or at least not disapproved by the Soviets. A good example of this was the leadership struggle between Novotný and Dubček, where Brezhnev refused to back Novotný openly and thus indirectly facilitated change. Moscow's influence was of course enhanced by the ideological polarization between the United States and the USSR, but nonetheless the Soviets kept the Warsaw Pact members on a tight leash.

Then, when one of the members started to strain the leash more than Moscow liked, the authorities immediately became suspicious. That a Soviet ally and Warsaw Pact member would stray from the socialist path was, if not unheard of, then at least a rare occurrence, especially when it concerned a vital stone in the Soviet wall against the West. The Prague Spring and the reforms that came with it had a great impact on Czechoslovakia's neighbors, and it threatened to have even greater impact further down the line. Also, through the Warsaw Pact the Soviet allies had a forum for lobbying for their interests to the Soviet leaders, which put them in a position where they could make their voices heard, at least to a certain extent.

However, Moscow still had the most power in the relationship with its allies, something which is reflected in the fact that the four other countries in the Warsaw Five participated in the intervention. Their reaction afterwards also shows this, as the

Communist Parties of all participants drafted a common statement explaining the intervention. Such unity was a characteristic of Moscow's allies, and also highlights the influence the Soviet Union had on its fraternal countries.

This stands in stark contrast to the situation in 2008, when Russia was a lot weaker than it had been in 1968, and unable to keep its neighbors and friends on as tight a leash as 40 years earlier. In the Georgian case it is best reflected in the lack of outright and unconditional support for the intervention in the regional organizations where Russia was a member. The CSTO was the most supportive, although that does not say much about the nature of the support. Vague praise for Russian efforts to solve the conflict and condemnation of Georgian aggression was good for Moscow, but the other members of the organization stopped well short of recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia. China's membership in the SCO exposed Russia's weakness in the face of other strong regional actors, as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was even vaguer in its support for the intervention, did not condemn Georgia for its actions, and did not recognize the two new republics.

Moscow's allies did not exert the same kind of pressure before the Georgian intervention as before the Czechoslovak intervention, nor were they subject to the same kind of pressure from Moscow, mainly because their status as allies no longer implied an obligation to support Moscow. The lukewarm support for the intervention and the lack of results from pre-war pressures highlights the decline in Russian influence over its neighbors, and can give us an indication as to why Russian authorities decided to intervene militarily in Georgia. The main difference of the allied behavior in the two cases is that in 2008 the ruling elites in the allied states were not totally alien to the prospect of further Western influence, as most of them were in 1968, and that in 1968 Moscow's allies were basically subordinates rather than partners.

7.2 Similarities – changes in ideology, leadership, and interests

What similarities can we identify in our selected interventions? According to the theory presented in chapter two, one could expect a state's perceptions to change if it experienced change in ideology, leadership, or interests. The Soviet Union and Russia are different in many ways, and there have undoubtedly been changes in both ideology and leadership, but have these changes altered Russian

perceptions, or are the Soviet world views still in effect? And what about interests – were they the same in 2008 as they were in 1968?

Ideologically, the Soviet Union and Russia are worlds apart. Communism was abandoned as a state ideology more than 20 years ago in favor of a capitalist quasi-pluralist system, and one should expect such a radical difference in political conviction to bring about changes in perceptions. This, however, may be a view which does not hold water. The evidence presented in the previous chapters suggests that the collapse of Communism has not meant the complete eradication of Soviet views from the Russian government. The Soviet Union perceived the US as its main adversary and that it was locked in an eternal struggle with the capitalist countries, and the reasoning behind the Czechoslovak intervention stemmed from this struggle. The Soviets could only be safe from the aggressive West if their zone of influence was preserved. With the end of the Cold War one might think that the perceptions of a bipolar world would have ceased to exist, but the intervention in Georgia showed that despite the collapse of Communism the US is still Russia's main antagonist.

When Ukraine and Georgia started flirting more openly with the US and eventually went through democratic revolutions, Russia became worried that Washington would use its presence in Kiev and Tbilisi to influence the opposition in Russia as well, and instigate similar revolutions there. Russia still felt threatened by US presence near its borders, and what effects it could possibly have on its national security. While the struggle is no longer ideological in the sense of Communism versus capitalism and democracy, Russia still perceives the United States and Western-style democracies as threats. The replacement of Communist leaders with non-Communist leaders has thus not affected the Russian view of the US.

What then about the changes in leadership that have occurred from the end of the Cold War until today? Important factors here were previous experiences of the leaders, how they used these experiences to process new bits of information, and whether they have aggressive or unaggressive personalities. Brezhnev was an ardent Communist, thoroughly indoctrinated with Marxist-Leninist theories, and used this background to analyze information on for instance US foreign policy. Putin and Medvedev, on the other hand, had no such ideological ballast, but they had

experienced NATO's expansion into former Soviet-dominated territory and the way in which this expansion was performed. Both Brezhnev and the 2008 Russian duumvirate had previous experiences which affected their interpretation of the developments leading up to the two interventions.

Secondly, we need to look at their personalities – were they “hawks” or “doves”, which is to say aggressive or unaggressive? Brezhnev was perhaps less lenient than his predecessor Khrushchev, despite the latter authorizing invasions in both the GDR and Hungary, and perhaps more likely to view the situation in Prague as dangerous. Brezhnev was perhaps also more intent on defending the Soviet position in Europe and the political orthodoxy connected to this position.²⁹⁵ Putin, who has been said to have still been in charge in August 2008, was also decidedly less pro-Western than the president he succeeded, Boris Yeltsin. As noted in chapter two, an aggressive leader would be more inclined to use military force than a less aggressive leader, and in both cases we are dealing with leaders who were more aggressive than their predecessors. We therefore see that both in 1968 and in 2008, the leaders of the Soviet Union and Russia respectively had much of the same inclination to resort to the use of force to achieve their goals.

The third way in which perceptions could change was through a change in interests, which of course is tightly woven together with the previous two factors. It is therefore easy to presume that a change in one of these would mean a change in interests as well. We have seen that there perhaps have not been that many significant changes after all, something which is reflected in the current Russian interests. Moscow still wanted a sphere of influence, just as it did in 1968 despite having shed Communism and replaced its leaders with someone from a younger generation. In addition to this the Soviets wanted to be a powerful actor, at least on the regional stage. The Soviet Union wanted to be seen as the leading light in the Communist bloc and thus be a dominating force globally as well as regionally. Georgia fell into this sphere that Russia wanted, and it seems that all the factors discussed previously, came together in this situation. Russia's concept of sovereign democracy seemed to be at odds with Western-style democracies, and thus despite the collapse of Communism there was still ideological discrepancies between Russia and the US, making the latter seem threatening to the former. In combination with a

more aggressive leader and a set of interests which included a sphere of influence this led to the Russian intervention in Georgia.

The Czechoslovak intervention and the Georgian intervention have in common the fact that the states conducting them – the Soviet Union and Russia respectively – let many of the same perceptions influence the decision to intervene. These perceptions also appear to come from the same theoretical tradition, namely realism. The Soviet Union put many realist considerations high on its list of priorities, and the reasons for intervention set forth in chapter five can all be attributed to one of them: security. In both the two cases Moscow felt that the West, led by the US, could gain too big of an advantage if the respective situations were allowed to develop further. In the Czechoslovak case this meant that further reforms and possibly Czechoslovak realignment could disrupt the European balance of power and thus harm Soviet security interests in East Central Europe. In Georgia it meant that possible entry into NATO could damage Russian control over energy pipelines in particular and Russian influence in the region in general. This highlights a second realist feature: the zero-sum mentality. Both interventions show this mentality that if the Soviet Union or Russia did not take action, someone else would replace their influence in Czechoslovakia and Georgia.

If we compare the interventions reason by reason this fact becomes even clearer. The fear of ideological contagion to the Soviet homeland and the other Warsaw Pact countries can be compared with the fear of Western-style democracies spreading to Georgia's, and by implication Russia's neighbors. Both these possible developments were viewed as potential harbingers of instability in Moscow itself, which again makes us return to the notion of national security. Moscow has been adamant that it demands friendly regimes on its borders, and the kind of democracies sponsored by the West were seen as anything but friendly, despite George W. Bush's words. Keeping Georgia within the Russian zone of influence was a factor ridden with geopolitical and geostrategic considerations, much like those we found in the Czechoslovak case. In the latter there were military concerns and worries about the supply of uranium, which were of great importance at the time. The geostrategic concerns in Georgia were more concerned with energy supply, which one could say has become more important than nuclear capabilities, at least in the West. For Russia it was therefore important to retain control over pipelines and the flow of oil

and gas, just as it in 1968 was important to retain a steady supply of uranium, and keep the military chain in Europe unbroken.

To summarize, the Soviet and Russian perceptions affecting decision-making in Czechoslovakia and Georgia appear very similar. Perceptions about regional developments and the West's role, both actual and potential, in them in relation to national security dominated the reasoning in both cases. Realism seems to have been the prevailing theoretical tradition influencing perceptions both in the Czechoslovakian intervention and the Georgian intervention. Despite the collapse of Communist rule, the introduction of a market economy and democracy, and the shift in leadership, Russian perceptions do not seem to have changed as much as the theory predicted. Perceptions still influence foreign policy, but instead of being replaced as the times changed they have remained the same – or so it seems. But which features separate the two conflicts – surely the 40-year gap between them should make a tangible difference?

7.3 Differences

The main differences between the two cases can be found in the international climate and Russia's standing in it, and how these factors affected the reasoning. The Soviet Union was one of two global superpowers during the Cold War, with a vast conventional army and a large stock of nuclear weapons. It was the ideological birthplace of international socialism, the leader of a military alliance, and guarantor of East Central Europe's safety. Russia anno 2008 was demoted to merely a fairly important regional power, despite its nuclear arsenal. Its neighbors had noticed this decline in power and status, and had begun looking elsewhere for support, both economic, militarily and politically. Russia's diminished global status meant that they could no longer act as it wanted to in its sphere of influence, immune to global criticism. In Georgia's case this is most visible through the claims of the intervention being a humanitarian effort undertaken to protect Russian citizens. In 2008 Russia had a stronger desire to justify its actions than it had in 1968, when the US quietly agreed that the Soviet Union could marshal its sphere of influence as it wished.

Immediately after the conflict in the Caucasus escalated, Russia released statements indicating that Georgia had been conducting ethnic cleansing of South Ossetians, who held Russian passports and were considered Russian citizens by

Moscow. Russia had been overruled by the Western powers over the issue of Kosovo, both the military action and the recognition of its independence, and used that to warrant its own intervention in the Caucasus. The Soviet Union did not spend a lot of energy on trying to justify its actions in Czechoslovakia in the wake of the intervention in August 1968, since it in a sense did not need to. Eastern Europe was controlled by the Soviet Union, and it operated there as it saw fit. There was no need for feeble and lame excuses or explanations to try and convince the Western public. Perhaps Russia wanted the same to be true in 2008, given the amount of time its government spent trying to convince the Western media that the intervention was justifiable according to international law. Russia wants a place in the center of international relations, and it looks as if they wanted to project both strength and compassion in order to achieve it. During the Cold War a show of strength would have sufficed, but the decline in Russia's global stature forced it to use both. The Kremlin has to have known that there would be an independent investigative report and the Russian leaders must have known that the passport scheme would be seen through, thus making the humanitarian explanation lose much of its credibility. One can of course argue that this was only propaganda meant for its own population, but the claims have been reiterated by Medvedev years after the confrontation. This could indicate that Russia does not want to have a reputation in the West of using excess force and interfering in other sovereign states, thus undermining its own principles of sovereign democracy.

As we can see there were differences between the two cases mainly connected with the Soviet Union's and Russia's international position, rather than the reasoning behind the interventions. In 1968, the Soviet Union was one of two global superpowers, whereas in 2008 Russia was one of several regional powers on the shelf below the US. This affected the two cases in different ways, as Russia was more intent on justifying its actions than the Soviet Union was. In Czechoslovakia the Soviet Union had a sphere of influence which was tacitly accepted by the West, and thus did not see the need to warrant an intervention there. In Georgia, however, Russia *wanted* a sphere of influence, but given the international situation felt the need to provide some sort of justification of its leaders' actions.

8.0 Conclusion

8.1 Brief summary

The aim of this thesis was to examine the interventions in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Georgia in 2008, in order to establish whether or not Soviet perceptions still influenced Russian foreign policy today. This chapter will provide a brief summary of the findings of the analysis and thus laying the foundations on which the conclusion will be built. Finally, the chapter will identify some lessons and challenges which we can draw from the thesis.

Firstly, I will start by summarizing the differences between the interventions in question. In 1968, the Soviet Union was a global superpower, while in 2008 its main successor state, Russia, was more of a regional power. This made for some of the main differences between the interventions in Czechoslovakia and Georgia. In the former, the Soviets really did not bother justifying the intervention to the West, and the official explanation was that the Warsaw Pact was duty-bound to save the socialist gains in Czechoslovakia.²⁹⁶ Because of the international climate, Moscow cannot have expected this to be accepted in the West and the justification was more likely intended for the domestic and bloc audience. In 2008, however, Russia claimed, and still claims, that the action in Georgia was as humanitarian intervention undertaken to save the South Ossetian population from ethnic cleansing by the Georgian troops.

Moreover, Czechoslovakia was a country in which the Soviet Union had great influence, an influence silently accepted by the international community. It was also a member of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact military alliance. The West had not intervened in East Germany in 1953 or in Hungary in 1956, thus indicating that the Soviet Union almost had *carte blanche* in its sphere of influence. Georgia, on the other hand, was not a country within an accepted sphere of influence, despite its membership in the CIS and its status as a former Soviet republic. Not only was there a difference in Russia's position in the world, but there was also a difference in the position of the victims of the interventions.

However, there were also numerous similarities between the two interventions in question. First of all, Moscow's motivations seem to have emanated from the same realist source. Concerns over the balance of power both in Czechoslovakia and

Georgia played important roles in making the decisions to intervene. Both the Soviet Union and Russia wanted to limit Western influence in areas it deemed vital, and if they failed to limit Western influence then they would have lost their presence there. We can therefore say that both in 1968 and in 2008 the world was perceived as a zero-sum playing field. These concerns were linked to the sense of threat that Moscow felt, both in 1968 and 2008. The fear of being encircled by states and regimes not entirely pro-Russia has persisted since the Cold War, and was a contributing factor for both interventions.

This fear of losing its foothold in areas previously deemed exclusively Soviet or Russian becomes even clearer when we consider the events leading up to the interventions. The Dubček regime's liberalization and attempt at creating "socialism with a human face" in Czechoslovakia was perceived as threatening to Soviet interests and presence, and could have seriously disrupted the European balance of power. Moscow dreaded the possibility of NATO getting a foothold within the Soviet sphere, and feared that the Czechoslovak ideas would spread to other states, even the Soviet Union itself. It seems that Moscow thought that if Prague was allowed to liberalize, it would almost automatically mean diminishing Soviet influence, and Dubček and his supporters thus had to be stopped.

In Georgia, Russia found the government in Tbilisi to be moving closer and closer to the West, even vying for membership in NATO. This exacerbated the Russian fears of the United States creeping into former Soviet states and eventually pushing Russia out. The zero-sum thinking we found in the 1968 intervention appears to have continued into the 21st century. If the US had been allowed a foothold in the Caucasus, it might have spread its influence to Russia's other neighbor states, thus fulfilling the most negative of Russian prophecies: encirclement.

We can also identify similarities in the way Moscow perceives a state or region as vital to its interests. These interests are in both our cases determined by realist perceptions of the world. In Czechoslovakia, the Soviets worried about the ideological aspect, and what potential damage the spreading of the Czechoslovak ideas could do to the Soviet image. As documented by Karen Dawisha, Moscow also worried about the military coherence of the Warsaw Pact, and the fact that the northern and southern Warsaw Pact forces would be isolated from one another if

Czechoslovakia was lost.²⁹⁷ There were also concerns about the supply of Czechoslovak uranium, and the fear of a complete collapse of the Soviet bloc. In Georgia, Russia most of all feared the expansion of NATO onto former Soviet territory, since this, as previously mentioned, could have led to full encirclement. Furthermore, to restate Ziegler and De Haas' claims, the Russian government did not want to lose its near monopoly on transporting oil and gas from Central Asia to Europe.²⁹⁸

All these similarities, which can be summarized as fears of losing influence in areas considered vital to Soviet and Russian security, outrank the differences between the two interventions. This is because the similarities concern the views and perceptions on which the interventions were based, while the differences concern the international standing of the parties involved in the interventions. Thus, I will contend that, although the standing and the perceptions are connected, the latter carried greater weight than the former.

8.2 Lessons and concluding remarks

As this thesis has shown, there were both certain differences and certain similarities between the interventions in Czechoslovakia and Georgia. Based on the evidence and analysis provided above, however, I contend that Soviet-style views and perceptions still influence Russian foreign policy. The hypothesis set forth in the introductory chapter has been confirmed. Despite the differences highlighted throughout the thesis, they are subordinate to the similarities, which indicate that the Soviet legacy still casts its shadow over the Kremlin.

The fact that the differences are of a more technical nature, that is concerning the international position of the Soviet Union, Russia, Czechoslovakia, and Georgia, further emphasizes the importance of the findings in this thesis. Despite two completely different domestic and global situations, modern day Russia still behaves in the international arena much as the Soviet Union did.

What knowledge can we draw from this thesis? The conclusion presented above confirms the initial hypothesis, which in itself is interesting, but can we go further? This analysis has shown that many of the same considerations and fears held by Soviet leaders in 1968 were still prevalent 40 years later. It has also shown that Russian leaders are no longer afraid to put force behind their rhetoric, and

basically act in a way which previously during the post-Cold War era has been reserved for the US. Interventions in regions deemed a part of its desired sphere of influence, or interventions intended to save a population from genocide, ethnic cleansing or oppression has been, with some exceptions, the *modus operandi* during the late 20th and early 21st century. The world after the fall of the Iron Curtain has been described as unipolar, where the US has had the status as the world's only superpower. The development now, however, is perhaps more in the direction of a multipolar world, where we will experience several great powers competing for influence around the globe. Despite this, the US has still enjoyed almost a monopoly on military interventions abroad, but the war in Georgia may have signaled an end to this. It was a definite challenge to American hegemony, and showed that Moscow would no longer tolerate American monopoly on unsanctioned military action.

The Russian confidence shown in the Georgian case was very high, and Moscow proved to the world that its leaders would not shy away from a confrontational approach, at least not in its own backyard. This does not mean that such confrontations necessarily will become more frequent all over the globe, but the Georgian intervention may have set a precedent for Russian behavior in its near abroad. If this is the case, NATO and the US would have a hard time gaining support for NATO-membership in the remaining post-Soviet states. Ukraine has already removed the goal of accession to NATO from the national security strategy, although not excluded possible cooperation with the Alliance.²⁹⁹

Although Russia is in many ways from its Communist predecessor, and the world in general is a long way from being as polarized as it was during the Cold War, the development of a more assertive and aggressive Russian foreign policy is worrisome. Russian fears of encirclement may at first glance seem a bit paranoid, but under closer scrutiny we find that they may not be completely unfounded. Every state wants secure borders and, if possible, friendly neighbor states. Russia is surrounded by NATO- and EU-members in the west, the US in the east, and China in the south east. The desire for areas where it can be certain that its voice is heard and interests taken care of is perhaps not outrageous. However, there is a considerable gap between wanting a zone of privileged interests and violating a state's sovereignty, a gap which Russia bridged with its intervention in 2008. One might argue that with the authoritarian upsurge Russia has experienced since Putin's entry onto the political

stage, the return of geopolitical ambitions and harsh rhetoric was expected. But the intervention in 1968 concerned a state in which the Soviet Union had considerable leverage and was a member of a Soviet-dominated military alliance. After the Rose Revolution in 2003, Georgia had received overt US support, and military action there was difficult to imagine.

There is no evidence to support any claims of a new Cold War, but we should be wary for any further polarization of the world. The newfound Russian assertiveness and its willing to resort to military force to achieve its goals and disregard for international norms could very well lead to Russia being isolated from the international community. US Senator John McCain stated that Russia's presence in Transnistria and Georgia was a clear violation of one of the fundamental norms of international behavior.³⁰⁰ Although Russia has stayed out of any major armed conflicts since August 2008, it has shown that it is now in the driver's seat in the Caucasus, exemplified by its actions in the summer of 2009. A large Russian military exercise in the North Caucasus, strikingly similar to the one held prior to the intervention a year before, sparked tensions in the area which only abated after a strong show of US commitment to Georgian sovereignty by President Barack Obama. In the wake of these supportive statements, the Russian military command reassured Washington that it was not looking to disarm anyone in Georgia "today".³⁰¹ This goes to show that Moscow feels it is the leading power in the Caucasus, displaying to its neighbors that force is not out of the question.

The international community's reluctance to react against Russia in the wake of the intervention just served as reassurance to Moscow that in these times, and in these regions, the Russian authorities can pretty much act as they please. Ironically, Russia's behavior toward its neighbors could result in these neighbors moving further away from Moscow, rather than closer to it. If the intervention in Georgia scared the states in the near abroad away instead of scaring them closer, Russia may find that its security has not been improved at all. It will therefore be important for the global community to convince Russia that it has nothing to fear and thus does not need to turn to military action, or else we could experience similar conflicts in the future.

In any case, the world needs to acknowledge that Russia is a power to be reckoned with, again, and that it will take great care to guard its interests, whether at

home, in the near abroad, or in the “far abroad”. This is something the other major powers have to take into account when dealing with Russia, although the Russian challenges do not necessarily have to be of a military nature. The Kremlin is now more assertive than post-Soviet Russia has ever been, and since the current leading duumvirate is set to stay for the foreseeable future, the rest of the world had better figure out how to treat it.

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