

Russia and the Near Abroad: Applying a Risk Barometer for War

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Abstract

The steps-to-war theory (Vasquez 1993, 2009) has made important strides in uncovering the causes of interstate armed conflict. Scholars now have a reliable way to delineate the path to war or towards peace. This article explores the relationship between Russia and its “Near Abroad” neighbors Estonia, Ukraine, and Georgia to investigate the probability of war and conflict in the region during the post-Cold War era. Here, we create a risk barometer for war by combining recent empirical findings with qualitative foreign policy analysis. The uncovered findings demonstrate Estonia’s probable successful path out of war with Russia, while the Ukraine’s growing risk for coming conflict increases as the variables of interest add up. Georgia and Russia have already had a war that followed the path outlined in the theory and might battle again in the future based on our findings. This article demonstrates how an empirical theory of international relations behavior can be used to explore the potential for future conflict in the region so as to inform policy analysis.

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War in 1991, Russia's government has been deluged with internal problems that have denied it the imperial reach of old. The issues centered on the economy, ethnic conflict, and democratic stability combined together to diminish the power of Russia and restrict its ability to support the aggressive foreign policy doctrines of its Soviet past (Roberts and Taylor 1999). Expanding the new Russian state seemed to be an idea of a distant history. However, with the turn of the century, a reemergence of Russian power has come about. Russia has rebuilt alliances and economic ties between former Soviet states. The ascendancy of Vladimir Putin to the Russian presidency in 2000 has made the delicate order of the region more complicated and problematic due to desire of some to reassert Russian interests. Putin has consolidated power and rebuilt the state industrial complex based on natural resources such as oil and gas; these moves have stabilized the country's economy. Russia now has the economic might to project a strong military outwards. It seems that Russian foreign policy is reverting back to the aggressive Soviet-style brinksmanship (Diuk 2009). The contested invasion of Georgia in 2008 (Nichol 2008) only served notice that internal ambitions have been translated into actual aggressive maneuvers externally.

The question we ask in this research is what is the probability of war or conflict between Russia and its former vassal states after 2010? Will the future on the Russian frontiers be peaceful or one fraught with the constant potential of violence? The reemergence of Russia as a powerful actor in the region could have important consequences for regional and global action. By constructing a risk barometer for war, based on tested empirical theories, we can both examine the probability of future conflict and suggest policy avenues away from conflict.

What theory can be used to derive a probability of war for modern states? There are many potential contenders yet few theories have gathered as much empirical support as the steps-to-war model (Vasquez 1993, 2009, Senese and Vasquez 2008, Vasquez and Valeriano 2010). This theory suggests that power politics moves and behaviors are the causes of large scale interstate violence. Variables such as alliances, arms races, rivalries, territorial disputes, permissive systemic norms, and domestic hardliners all can push a state to war by escalating tensions within a dyad. The use of power politics strategies is an important path to war, not out of it.

This paper intends to utilize the steps-to-war theory to examine the conflict dynamics in the Russian Near Abroad region. Does the theory predict a certain class of power politics wars (Vasquez and Valeriano 2010) between dyadic competitors? We will look at the three cases of Russian foreign policy relations with Near Abroad states: Estonia, Ukraine, and Georgia. All three countries have had fraught relations with Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union, yet Russia has only had outright conflict with Georgia at this point.¹ The goal here is to examine the stability of relations between these states and Russia. If we can determine the likelihood war, what then can be done to curb the aggressive impulses of these states and prevent violence in the future? The entire enterprise of international relations scholarship has led to the goal of examining the probability of war and reducing its impact on the international system; this article represents a return to this project. We will proceed with an explanation of our theory and the utility of a risk barometer for war. We will then conduct a specific case based examination of Russian foreign policy relations and suggest future policy avenues.

¹ It is unclear if the Russia-Georgia conflict of 2008 will be classified as an interstate war since 1000 battle deaths are required for a war to be observed.

A Risk Barometer for War

International relations scholars have consistently failed to combine empirical analysis with actual policy relevant examinations of current processes. Few have attempted to construct any sort of risk indicator that might predict war or conflict. Here we take off from where Senese and Vasquez (2008: 270) started and apply their model to Russia and its surrounding states in the Near Aboard.

The overall goal is to be able to suggest within five years what the risk for war or high level conflict might be under a certain set of conditions. Of course there are other factors that might predict war, but our only concern is to test the barometer under construction based on tested empirical theories (Vasquez 2005, Senese and Vasquez 2008). Flowing from large N statistical studies on the probability of war, Senese and Vasquez (2008: 272) create a simple risk barometer for war.² We will conduct a risk analysis and suggest what level of risk each pair of states is at as of 2011. Each independent variable will simply take on a value of one. The scale is additive, following along with other work that considers the steps-to-war theory additive and not multiplicative. The original suggestion (Senese and Vasquez 2008) was a risk level that reaches four, including four factors (territorial disputes, alliances, arms races, and rivalry). Our risk level goes up to five since it adds the factor of hardliners to the analysis. This barometer is not deterministic, in that we see the course of world politics playing out exactly as theorized, there are alternative paths out of war.

Post-Soviet Space and Conflict Dynamics

The application of peace to regions of post-Soviet space is a critical question in the international community. There likely is a greater danger of war in this region than any other region in the world. The threat to regional and international stability can be acutely felt in this area due to its connection to large military power and the dynamics of the international energy market. Yet, what exactly is the concept of the post-Soviet space and the Near Aboard? How do these concepts feed into testable theories regarding the likelihood of violence in the Russia sphere of influence?

Since the end of the Cold War, much has been written regarding the domestic and international relations climate of Russia, Estonia, Ukraine, and Georgia. We can do little justice to this vast area of scholarship in the brief space here. Svedberg (2007) and Goldman (2008) look at Russia and its policy toward its neighboring Near Abroad countries. They see Russian foreign policy as a product of the Putin regime and its growing confidence. Putin has made Russia more authoritarian in nature yet has popular support (Svedberg 2007). The growing coffers of the Russian budget has given the state the means to “throw its weight” around the region as well as the means to be more assertive with the West (Goldman 2008).

Many scholars (Aron, Diuk, Illarionov, Piontkovsky 2009) see Russian foreign policy as a product of the Putin regime and its growing confidence. Putin has managed to succeed at being both loved and feared. Some scholars (Brown, Nodia, Silitski 2009) describe Russia as run by gangsters who control the media and disallow political competition. This political makeup may lead to an assertive and dangerous foreign policy the Putin and Medvedev regimes have administered lately

² The more precise barometer suggested based on predict probabilistic cannot be used because Senese and Vasquez (2008) did not study the impact of hardliners on the probability of war.

The Baltic region is of particular importance due to the violent past between these states and Russia. Estonia alone is an important case to review. About one third of the population of Estonia is either ethnically Russian or speaks Russian primarily. They are immigrants who were once at the top of the societal “food chain”, and this created a lot of resentment by native Estonians at the beginnings of Estonian independence. Strict Estonian citizenship laws were passed which excluded ethnic Russians from the political processes. Furthermore, native Estonians saw their nation as “held captive” or occupied by the Soviet Union and that independence was merely restored, not attained, by the USSR’s demise (Kuus 2002). Finally, Estonia began the road to European integration early, as it quickly strove to meet the standards for membership in the EU and NATO. Estonians see themselves as more Western than Eastern (Berg and Oras 2000). Counterintuitively, Russia has allowed Estonia to integrate into the West and has never threatened armed conflict since 1991. Why?

Various authors suggest the main source of conflict between Russia and the Ukraine is natural gas (Mancevic 2006, Stern 2006, Tymoshenko 2008). Ukraine is heavily dependent on Russian gas but is also the main corridor for transport of Russian gas to EU customers. There are also a high number of ethnic Russians with Ukraine. Moreover, Ukraine controls the territory of Crimea, which harbors Russia’s Black Sea naval fleet. The country has also been striving for EU and NATO membership. With the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008, it seems that Ukraine could very well be the next victim of Russian aggression due to the various outstanding and unresolved issues at stake.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Georgia became independent for the first time in centuries. However, two regions within the newly independent country, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, also strove for independence from Georgia. Civil war broke out in Georgia in 1991-1992 between the country and these separatist regions, with Russia siding with the separatist rebels. Russia sees it as its responsibility to protect ethnic Russians in the region (Popescu 2006). Peace was attained in 1992 with permanent Russian troops defending the territories for the foreseeable future. Skirmishes have been fought between the states with the August 2008 full-blown armed conflict being the high point of tensions (Nichol 2008). Will they dyad experience a new conflict due to the unresolved issues from the first conflict?

The goal of this paper is to apply recent social science findings regarding the probability of war and conflict in a region in danger of falling into conflict. The importance of this region cannot be understated. Post-Soviet space is important due to the issues at stake: energy, security, and stability. Energy is important as Russia is the main exporter of natural gas to Europe, which means that it needs its former Soviet satellites to be compliant transporters of this important commodity. Influence by outsiders such as the United States and the European Union makes Russia less secure in the eyes of the Kremlin. Therefore, stable, Kremlin-friendly regimes in post-Soviet states are a must for Putin and his government (Woehrel 2009). These issues are the crux of Post-Cold War diplomatic politics. When these issues are present and conflate with other variables, what is the probability of future conflict?

Russia, the Transition, and the Future

Despite predictions, the Soviet Union collapsed with relatively little internal and external violence (Roberts and Sherlock 1999). Many republics of the former Soviet Union declared their independence almost in unison. Russia at the time was powerless to prevent any of this from happening. Its government was going through great transitions of its own, and decision-making

power was yet to be clarified. The 1990s saw a turbulent economy and a fragile democratic regime under Yeltsin further hamper the ability of Russia to assert its foreign policy prerogative (Roberts and Sherlock 1999). Russia was seen as incapable of dealing with its own security problems due to its ineffective campaigns in Chechnya.

Even with internal difficulties, Russia has consistently been aggressive in dealing with its breakaway republics. Asserting a strong external presence leaves little room for compromise on national interests as they relate to the Near Abroad. The transition from hardliner actors to accommodationist policies during the Gorbachev years and then back to hardline policies under Putin has been dramatic. It is frequently asserted that Russia has no friends but its army and navy and these central tenets of foreign policy remain to this day. There is little room to trust the West, the United States, and most importantly, former Soviet states who have abandoned Slavic principles as interpreted by the Russian state. In the context of action after the Cold War, the transition towards a system of democratic authoritarianism, and the increased importance of regional energy politics, what is the future probability of war between Russia and its neighbors?

A recent cable given to the controversial whistle-blowing website *WikiLeaks* in December 2010 backed up claims that Russia under Putin has transitioned from a fledgling democracy to what is known as a “mafia state” (Harding 2010). The cable, which was leaked from the US Embassy in Moscow, declares that organized crime in Russia is under the control of Russian intelligence agencies such as the Federal Security Service (FSB), Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) and Military Intelligence (GRU). Furthermore, this leak declares that various syndicates throughout Russia and the Near Abroad work together and share information in the interests of the Russian government. This implies that organized crime may be working behind the scenes to prop up Russian-friendly governments in post-Soviet space. An example is the recent controversial election of pro-Russia Viktor Yanukovich to the Ukrainian presidency; the possibly rigged election has now brought the country back under Moscow's sway.

This information made public by *WikiLeaks* shows some “inconvenient truths” about the Russian government and the regimes under Moscow’s sway in the Near Abroad. Estonia has escaped Russian influence as it integrated with the EU before the reign of Putin. Ukraine’s “Orange Revolution” has been nullified with the election of pro-Russia Yanukovich to the presidency. Ukraine may be on its way back to autocracy and corruption so rampant that a legitimate economy may be a thing of the past. Georgia has cracked down on its mafia problems, but its presence is still felt regardless of President Mikheil Saakashvili’s anti-corruption and anti-Russian policies. However, these domestic factors create issues that may contribute to the steps toward or away from war.

Theory and Research Design

The steps-to-war theory (Vasquez 1993, 2009) is a behavioral explanation of the onset of war in the international system since the Napoleonic wars, with power politics tactics at the heart of the explanation. Instead of ensuring security in an anarchic world (Waltz 1979), power politics tactics such as alliances, arms races, and escalatory bargaining strategies all make it more likely that a pair of states will enter into war rather than achieve peaceful stability (Vasquez 2009, Senese and Vasquez 2008).

The theory suggests there are typical pathways to war that begin with the contestation over some critical issue, usually of a territorial nature. Territorial issues are likely to lead to war (Vasquez and Henahan 2011) because of their salience and intractability (Vasquez and Valeriano

2009). These issues start the process towards conflict with both contextual and action-reaction variables increasing the probability of war occurrence (Senese and Vasquez 2008). It is how issues are handled once they arise as sources of disagreement that pushes states towards war. Huth (2000) discusses reasons why territorial disputes have been a recurring issue in the international scene for centuries. A dispute over territory exists when 1) two countries disagree over where the current borders of the homeland are drawn and 2) one country contests the right of another to exercise sovereign rights some of its territorial homeland (Huth 2000, 86). Furthermore, territory is important to governments because of the possible natural resource composition, religious or ethnic population importance, or its military and strategic location (Huth 2000, 87). These issues are present in all three cases analyzed in this article.

The contextual variables that are of interest here are rivalries, systemic norms, and leadership tendencies. Rivals (Vasquez 1996, Diehl and Goertz 2000) are long-standing enemies who have experienced several disputes and crises raising threat perceptions in the dyadic relationship. Rivals tend to operate under a decision calculus that assumes the world operates in a system of zero sum games. If the enemy wins, we lose. This simple calculus eventually leads to conflictual foreign policy actions and the tendency to do anything to deny a benefit to an enemy, even harming one's own long term security interests (Valeriano 2011) in favor of denying a gain to a rival. Senese and Vasquez (2008) use Diehl and Goertz's (2000) definition of rivalries. A rivalry is a long standing conflict between two states in which both use, with some regularity, military threats and force as well as one in which both sides formulate foreign policy in military terms (Diehl and Goertz 2000). Rivals want to keep the other side from attaining something.

Diehl and Goertz (2000) argue that there must be mutual recognition of the rivalry by both sides; however, Senese and Vasquez (2008) refute this. Rivalries come in three types: enduring, proto, or isolated conflicts. Enduring rivalries have a minimum threshold of six militarized interstate disputes (MIDs) within a time period of twenty years. A MID is defined as "united historical cases of conflict in which the threat, display or use of military force short of war by one member state is explicitly directed towards the government, official representatives, official forces, property, or territory of another state." (Jones, Bremer, and Singer 1996, 163) Proto rivalries experience between 3-5 disputes in a time period usually less than 20 years and isolated conflicts are just those non-recurring disputes between non-rival states.

Diehl and Goertz (2000) and Thompson (2001) operationalize the term rivalry based either on the number of disputes experienced or perceptions of threat. Because the states in the Near Abroad have only been independent since 1991, none of the dyads in this analysis can be considered enduring rivalries under the Diehl and Goertz (2000) twenty year coding rule, since we do not have enough yearly data. To see if a rivalry exists between Russia and Estonia, Ukraine, and Georgia we will have to analyze Gary King's (2006) "Ten Million International Dyadic Events." This database looks at events between states from 1991 to 2004. The events dataset includes disputes among dyads from anything from informal agreements to full-scale invasion. Therefore, it is very important that we sifted through King's dispute codes and determine which ones are considered power politics moves.³

³ The variables included in the tables below were meticulously chosen as power politics words or actions and therefore are adequate measures of rivalry for the three dyads of this study. By going through King's codebook on dyadic disputes, only the codes denoting power politics words or actions were chosen. Only codes that indicated military action were counted as MIDs. This gives us a more complete data set in this case study that would have been missed in Diehl and Goertz's (2000) or Thompson's (2001).

Domestic variables are also important for context. A hardline actor is someone who rejects compromise and bargaining to settle issue disagreements (Vasquez 1993). An accommodationist is more likely to use diplomacy, and his or her positions on disputes can change more easily, thus allowing for a decreased probability for war (Valeriano and Marin 2010). All three Russian presidents since the fall of the Soviet Union - Yeltsin, Putin, and Medvedev - have been hardliners. The presidents/prime ministers of the three near abroad countries since 1991 vary according to type. Some are pro-Russia and accommodationists; while others are pro-West and would rather bargain and work with the West than Russia. The addition of domestic factors in the steps-to-war theory is found to have great relevance in this analysis and will aid in predictive value of future conflict.

The action-reaction variables of interest are arms races and the use of politically relevant alliances. Alliances are formalized, enduring, and written treaties that coordinate actions to accomplish some ends (Gibler and Sarkees 2001). Utilizing a new variable called politically relevant alliances; Senese and Vasquez (2008) find strong support for the proposition that alliances increase the chances of war. Following on research by many others through the years (Levy 1980, Maoz 1990, Gibler and Vasquez 1998), alliances are sources of conflict rather than factors that can promote peace (although alliances can promote peace among members of the same alliance).

Alliances are utilized to add to the power of a state, especially minor power states. Alliances are supposed to deter attacks; they are supposed to settle disputes before they become violent. Typical Realist predictions suggest that alliances can be a path towards stability (Waltz 1979). This analysis considers alliances' negative signals in international diplomacy. Alliances increase the hostility in a dyad and can lead to coercive actions. This analysis will see how alliances play a negative role with Russia and its three near abroad countries. The European Union (EU), NATO, and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) will be the relevant alliances. Most of the former Soviet satellite states are members of the CIS which includes the Ukraine. Estonia and Georgia are not members of this post-Soviet space alliance. Estonia has membership in the EU and NATO, while Georgia is not a member of any of the three alliances pertinent to this study. This lack of protection for Georgia may be a significant factor as to why Russia has resorted to war with its less powerful Caucasus neighbor.

The final step of power politics in the steps to war theory according to Senese and Vasquez (2008) is the presence of arms races. This step usually manifests itself when states see no other course in conflict resolution except war. Arms races are the escalations of military capabilities by states, or the runaway production of weapons on both sides (Senese and Vasquez 2008). Arms races or mutual military buildups are also action-reaction processes that can increase the probability of war. While internal military buildups typical actions taken to increase the security of a state when threatened by an external actor, in reality military buildups only increase tensions and reduce the ability of actors to respond to issue disagreements in a diplomatic manner (Sample 1998, 2002).

Arms races are usually found in major-major or minor-minor dyadic relationships (Sample 2002). For major-minor dyads it is less common, as the arms race is usually not reciprocal. The minor state cannot compete with the major state and thus never engages in an arms race in the first place. Estonia, Ukraine, and Georgia theoretically cannot compete with Russia militarily, but this has not prevented the states from trying. Therefore, it is important to

look at arms imports, exports, and military expenditures for the four countries to supplement our arms data. Data is collected from SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) database.

The research design in this article is a structured and focused case examinations conducted on the relevant dyads in question (Bennett and Smoke 2005). Our case selection methodology is of the most dangerous dyads in the post-Soviet system. If the steps-to-war theory were expected to hold or fail, it would be demonstrated through an examination of these crucial cases. A more robust empirical analysis is impossible at this time since datasets rarely extend beyond 2001 and fail to capture the most important periods of turbulence for these states.

Russia and Estonia

Estonia became independent of the Soviet Union on August 20, 1991. Independence was simply restored after over fifty years of illegal Soviet occupation according to Estonian views. In response to these views, the restoration of Estonian culture was a high priority. Strict citizenship laws meant ethnic Russians would have a difficult time attempting to gain any political and social rights in Estonia. Proficiency in the Estonian language, knowledge of Estonian history, and ethnic ties to the motherland were among the initial requirements in the early years of Estonian independence (Berg and Oras 2000).

Due to these moves, Estonia is a source of ethnic tensions as it deals with its new independent identity. Estonians see themselves historically as more Western-oriented than Eastern-oriented. They are Nordic-Germanic Protestants rather than Slavic Orthodox in their view. The treatment of the Russian ethnic peoples in the state has given Russia much to complain about. Kinship ties are important in international relations (Saideman and Ayers 2008). By building a state that included ethnic Russians and Slavs, but also excluding these groups from the process of state building, the Estonian state set the grounds for future conflict along ethnic lines. On top of all these problems, there is a long-standing territorial dispute between Russian and Estonia.

Estonia's original territory was 2000 square kilometers bigger than the current state boundaries. When the Soviet Union invaded and occupied the tiny nation, Joseph Stalin pushed the borders westward and southward. When Estonia became independent again in 1991, it made demands that the borders go back to the pre-invasion lines (Berg and Oras 2000, 602). Russia refuted this claim and the stage seemed set for war except the path was interrupted. Despite the territorial issues and the treatment of ethnic Russians in the state, the state leadership managed to prevent a full scale rivalry from brewing.

Estonia's first four prime ministers, Edgar Savisaar, Tiit Vahi, Mart Laar, and Andres Tarand could be considered hardliners based on a surface view of their rhetoric. They all belonged to more conservative and nationalistic political parties that were anti-Russia and pro-West (Morozov 2004). They wanted the original Estonian border and pushed forth the pro-ethnic Estonian citizenship laws. However, pressures from the West, especially the EU, convinced these actors to become more accommodating towards their neighbor. The realities of power and regional systems often constrain the ability of actors to put forth extreme and expansionist policies.

Vahi and Laar became prime ministers in the late 1990s when Estonia was attempting to meet EU and NATO standards for membership. Some of these standards required that Estonia relax its citizenship laws and that it resolve its border dispute with Russia. In 1999, Estonia

declared to Russia that its present borders were the borders of the new Estonian state, although Russia did not reply or acknowledge this (Morozov 2004). However, because Estonia no longer disputed its borders, the territorial dispute between Russia and Estonia lay dormant for the time being.

Data in Table 1 extracted from Gary King’s (2006) database backs up the claim that a rivalry has not manifested between Russia and Estonia. The power politics moves between the two countries have been minimal at best. Estonia has formally complained about Russian policy from time to time, and Russia has warned or threatened with unspecified sanctions the Baltic nations. No MIDs have occurred between the countries; therefore the probability of a rivalry manifesting is slim. The absence of a rivalry is a step out of war.

Table 1: Power Politics Dyadic Disputes between Estonia and Russia

Direction of Dispute	Date	Dispute code	Description
Estonia-Russia	3/25/1992	FCOM	Formal complaint
Russia-Estonia	10/23/1992	TUNS	Threats without specific negative sanctions
Estonia-Russia	11/19/1992	FCOM	Formal complaint
Estonia-Russia	3/12/1993	FCOM	Formal complaint
Russia-Estonia	6/28/1993	WARN	Warning
Russia-Estonia	3/18/1994	POAR	Political arrests
Estonia-Russia	6/22/1994	FCOM	Formal complaints
Estonia-Russia	12/9/1997	TUNS	Threats without specific negative sanctions
Estonia-Russia	8/31/2000	BREL	Break relations
Russia-Estonia	3/20/2004	BREL	Break relations
Estonia-Russia	3/22/2004	BREL	Break relations

Source: Gary King’s (2006) “Ten Million International Dyadic Events”

Table 2 shows the military expenditures of Estonia and Russia. Estonia’s expenditures are minimal and do not represent a military buildup. Therefore, the lack of an arms race between Russia and Estonia is an important step-out-of war. Russia’s expenditures dwarf those of the former Soviet satellite. This may be because Russia is a former world superpower which can afford relatively high defense expenditures. However, its expenditures have actually dropped as a percentage of GDP.

Table 2: Military Expenditures of Estonia and Russia (in Constant (2005) US \$ million)

Year	Estonia	% Change	% of GDP	Russia	% Change	% GDP
1992	36.7	-	0.5	42,521	-	5.5
1993	49.5	34.9	0.8	37,563	-11.7	5.3
1994	62.9	27.1	1.0	36,608	-2.5	5.9
1995	62.4	-1.0	1.0	21,680	-40.7	4.4
1996	60.7	-3.0	0.9	19,145	-11.7	4.1
1997	81	33.4	1.1	21,242	10.9	4.5
1998	85.7	5.8	1.1	13,555	-36.2	3.3
1999	107	24.9	1.3	14,042	3.6	3.4
2000	126	17.8	1.4	19,138	36.3	3.7
2001	147	16.7	1.5	21,242	10.9	4.1
2002	175	19.0	1.7	23,601	11.1	4.3
2003	203	16.0	1.7	25,107	6.4	4.3
2004	214	5.4	1.7	26,120	4.0	3.8
2005	266	24.3	1.9	28,488	9.1	3.7
2006	299	12.4	1.9	31,176	9.4	3.6
2007	375	25.4	2.2	33,821	8.5	3.5

Source: SIPRI Website: <http://milexdata.sipri.org/>.

The presence of accommodationists in the Estonian governments of the late 1990s was an important step out of war. These prime ministers struck a balance between pleasing the West in hopes of EU and NATO membership as well as appeasing Russia with less-strict citizenship laws for ethnic Russians. The rivalry that could have been, never developed.

In 2004, Estonia became a member of both the EU and NATO. Here we have a paradox of Estonia's westernization. While westernization and closer alliance commitments can be seen as steps to war it must be remembered that each step only increases the probability of war and steps taken out of war such as accepting territorial boundaries are more important indicators of peaceful relations than a Western orientation. Without territorial disputes, rivalry, arms buildups, and extreme domestic actors there was little chance of conflict now or in the future.

In summary we have evidence that the Estonia and Russian dyad has reached a risk barometer factor of 1 at this current time. The factors of territorial disputes, arms races and rivalry are all negative in this case. Estonia has outside alliances in the EU and NATO while Russia is the heavyweight of the CIS. Alliances are the only positive indicator we observe and the absence of other steps makes this case unlikely to escalate. There is little likelihood of war, especially when compared to the scores achieved in the other dyads under examination.

Russia and the Ukraine

Ukraine has been part of Russian dominance in one form or another since the early nineteenth century. It was part of the Russian Empire and was a founding member of the Soviet Union. Ukraine became independent on August 24, 1991 (Van Ham 1994). Due to this long history of integration into the Soviet state and Russian Empire it was more difficult for the Ukraine to disentangle itself from Russian influence when compared to other examples. Besides the historical processes, another reason for the deep linkage to Russia is the significant percentage (17%) of the population that is ethnically Russian. Like in other conflicts discussed here, Russia asserts its rights to protect its ethnic kin (Saideman and Ayers 2008).

This case is important because of the proliferation of various disputes that could become intractable issues for each state in the foreign policy realm. The most critical disputes in search of resolution are the territorial issues between Russia and the Ukraine. The first dispute is over the Eastern border, which was resolved in 1994 with the admittance of Ukraine into the CIS group (Kubicek 2000) in exchange for Russia's acceptance of the border as the Ukraine understood it. While this dispute appears to be resolved, it was conditional on Ukraine participating in Eastern-based alliances rather than Western alliance systems.

The second territorial dispute is over the Crimean peninsula. The region is made up primarily of ethnic Russians and is also the base for the Russian Navy's Black Sea Fleet. In 1996, under Boris Yeltsin, Russia agreed to the fleet's lease expiration in 2017. With the rise of Putin and the restoration of Russian power aboard, it seems that Russia is trying to renegotiate the Black Sea Fleet issue (Goldman 2008). The response by Ukraine has been to enforce Ukrainian laws on ethnic Russia leading to direct tensions between the two countries (Goldman 2008).

The other issue at stake in this dyad is in relation to energy politics. The Ukraine is a transport country for Russian natural gas. About seventy percent of Russia's natural gas exports to Europe travel through Ukrainian pipelines (Stern 2006). Ukraine accuses Russia of inflating the price of gas and not paying enough for the rights of transport. Russia accuses the Ukraine of siphoning off gas from the pipeline. Gazprom, the Russian gas giant controlled by the Russian state, has shut off gas supplies in the midst of winter in 2006 and 2009 because of these disputes.

By once again utilizing Gary King's data, Table 3 shows that power politics disputes of the dyad are more intense than the Estonian-Russian dyad. Six MIDs are among the disputes listed in the table, which is the minimum for the categorization of an enduring rivalry (Diehl and Goertz 2001). The MIDs are indicated in italics in Table 3.

Table 3: Power Politics Dyadic Disputes between Ukraine and Russia

Direction of Dispute	Date	Dispute code	Description
Ukraine-Russia	2/11/1992	WARN	Warning
Ukraine-Russia	4/5/1992	WARN	Warning
Ukraine-Russia	5/22/1992	FCOM	Formally complain
Ukraine-Russia	2/27/1993	WARN	Warning
Russia-Ukraine	4/5/1993	WARN	Warning
Russia-Ukraine	6/4/1993	HALT	Halt negotiations
Ukraine-Russia	6/4/1993	HALT	Halt negotiations
Russia-Ukraine	7/16/1993	WARN	Warning
<i>Russia-Ukraine*</i>	9/3/1993	<i>EMAI</i>	<i>Extend military assistance, including arms</i>
Ukraine-Russia	11/5/1993	WARN	Warning

Russia-Ukraine	11/26/1993	MTHR	Threat to use armed force
<i>Ukraine-Russia</i>	<i>12/1/1993</i>	<i>CLAS</i>	<i>Armed Conflict (Initiation of hostilities)</i>
Russia-Ukraine	12/7/1993	CALL	Calls for political, social mobilization
Ukraine-Russia	2/1/1994	WARN	Warning
<i>Ukraine-Russia</i>	<i>5/20/1994</i>	<i>RAID</i>	<i>Ambiguous initiation of the use of armed forces</i>
Russia-Ukraine	12/30/1994	WARN	Warning
Russia-Ukraine	1/24/1996	REJC	Reject proposal
Ukraine-Russia	1/24/1996	REJC	Reject proposal
Russia-Ukraine	3/21/1996	HALO	Halt discussions
Ukraine-Russia	3/21/1996	HALO	Halt discussions
Ukraine-Russia	8/5/1996	FCOM	Formally complain
<i>Russia-Ukraine</i>	<i>9/11/1996</i>	<i>PEXE</i>	<i>Small arms attack</i>
Russia-Ukraine	10/24/1996	WARN	Warning
Russia-Ukraine	3/14/1997	FCOM	Formally complain
Ukraine-Russia	12/2/1997	WARN	Warning
Russia-Ukraine	12/4/1997	SANC	Impose Sanctions
Russia-Ukraine	6/2/1998	TUNS	Threats without specific negative sanctions
Ukraine-Russia	7/9/1998	SEZR	Seizures
Ukraine-Russia	7/10/1998	SEZR	Seizures
<i>Russia-Ukraine</i>	<i>4/24/2000</i>	<i>AERI</i>	<i>Missile attack</i>
<i>Ukraine-Russia</i>	<i>10/18/2003</i>	<i>PEXE</i>	<i>Small arms attack</i>
Ukraine-Russia	12/6/2003	YIEL	Yield to disputant
Ukraine-Russia	12/10/2003	YIEL	Yield to disputant

**Italics indicate the presence of an MID.*

Source: Gary King's (2006) "Ten Million International Dyadic Events"

http://dvn.iq.harvard.edu/dvn/dv/king/faces/study/StudyPage.xhtml?studyId=505&studyListingIndex=0_ee2717d5514905203fbf4ce96055.

Table 4 shows that military expenditures for Ukraine are much more than those of Estonia and therefore may be more significant for the arms buildup process elaborated in the steps-to-war model. This may be more alarming to the leadership in Moscow since, along with the fact that 70 percent of all natural gas to Europe travels through Ukraine, these high military expenditures could be perceived as a threat to Russian security and national interest. However, in expenditures in terms of change in GDP, the Ukrainian growth is rather constant beginning in 2002. We therefore cannot conclude that the higher buildup in Russia during the last decade is due to a perceived Ukrainian threat.

Table 4: Military Expenditures of Ukraine and Russia (in Constant (2005) US \$ million)

Year	Ukraine	% Change	% of GDP	Russia	% Change	% GDP
1992	-	-	-	42,521	-	5.5
1993	339	-	0.5	37,563	-11.7	5.3
1994	1,492	340.1	2.5	36,608	-2.5	5.9
1995	1,606	7.6	2.8	21,680	-40.7	4.4
1996	1,549	-3.5	3.3	19,145	-11.7	4.1
1997	1,919	23.9	4.1	21,242	10.9	4.5
1998	1,551	-19.2	3.4	13,555	-36.2	3.3
1999	1,430	-7.8	3.0	14,042	3.6	3.4
2000	1,772	23.9	3.6	19,138	36.3	3.7
2001	1,497	-15.5	2.9	21,242	10.9	4.1
2002	1,592	6.3	2.8	23,601	11.1	4.3
2003	1,839	15.5	2.8	25,107	6.4	4.3
2004	1,985	7.9	2.6	26,120	4.0	3.8
2005	2,405	21.2	2.8	28,488	9.1	3.7
2006	2,697	12.1	2.8	31,176	9.4	3.6
2007	3,278	21.5	2.9	33,821	8.5	3.5

Source: SIPRI Website: <http://milexdata.sipri.org/>.

Overall, the Russian and Ukrainian dyad has a contested territorial issue and rivalry. It therefore fits the steps-to-war theory in only two steps. The key question in the future is if the Ukraine formally joins the alliance systems that exclude Russia (NATO and the EU). If it does the probably of conflict should increase. Failing to join these alliances should, counterintuitive to alliance theory, deter aggression by Russia. Any moves to speed entry into either alliance could prompt Russian aggression to force Western powers to rethink their alliance choices. Alliance membership and the timing of action on the Ukrainian side will be important variables to watch in the future.

The presence of hardliners in this dyad also increases the probability of war under the steps-to-war theory (Vasquez 1993). Before 2004, Ukraine had presidents who were tolerable to Moscow, and therefore lessened the strained relations between the countries (Stern 2006). These

presidents, Kravchuk and Kuchma, can therefore be considered accommodationists because they were willing to work with Russia and did not push the Ukraine towards Western policies too quickly. However, the “Orange Revolution” changed everything for a moment in time and is likely a sign of things to come for Ukraine. With this revolution came the ascendancy of Viktor Yushchenko, a pro-West, anti-Russian president who wishes for more autonomy from Russia (Goldman 2008). Obviously the election of the pro-Western leader was not in the interest of Russian strategic objectives. When two hardliners (in this case, Putin and Yushchenko) come into contact with shift domestic and international goals, the situation is ripe for war and conflict. Since the election of Yushchenko, the United States has given Ukraine economic aid through the IMF and other organizations (Woehrel 2009).

Internal fighting and a global economic collapse hit the pause bottom for drastic domestic reform in Ukraine. They recently elected the pro-Moscow Viktor Yanukovich, which could contribute to more favorable relations between the countries. His presence on the international stage could be the limiting factor in combat and further push the two sides to resolve their territorial disagreements.

The Russo-Ukrainian dyad is therefore a proto-rivalry which has the very real possibility of becoming an enduring rivalry in the near future if the population once again elects an aggressive actor like Yushchenko. War is a very real possibility because we observe a risk factor of 2 on our barometer for war. A territorial dispute (the Crimean), the recent anti-Russian government’s attempts at allying with the West, and the MIDs presented in Table 6 gives us this score. The Russia and Georgia case might prove to be very illustrative of future conflicting paths between the Ukraine and Russia.

Russia and Georgia

Russia invaded the territory of South Ossetia in Georgia on August 8, 2008. The next day Russian forces invaded Georgia from another region, Abkhazia (Nichol 2008). The war lasted five days after an overwhelming Russian victory. The United States was unwilling to directly aid Georgia and actually rejected the request that Georgian forces be relocated from Iraq to Georgia to prepare a defense.

First we must ask a basic question: why was Russia willing to invade Georgia and what does this mean for future relations? The explanatory power of the steps-to-war theory is put to the test in this dyad. The reason why there was a war and why war remains a constant source of danger in this region is because of unsettled territorial questions, arms buildups, alliances, and the treatment of ethnic kin.

There have been tensions between the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia within what is now Georgia since the 1920s. When the USSR dissolved in 1990-1991, South Ossetia and Abkhazia attempted to declare independence. Georgia fought to quell the rebellions but was defeated by rebel forces that were backed by Russia. Russian and CIS peacekeeping forces were permanently established in both regions after the conflict, and the conflict became “frozen” for nearly fifteen years. The international status quo was to accept that both territories were part of Georgia but also to make no mention of the fact that both territories were controlled by Russian forces.

To make the issue more complicated and intangible for Georgia, Russia along with Nicaragua and Belarus recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states after 2008. This action makes the territorial disputes between Georgia and Russia so intractable that it seems that there will be no resolution to this dispute in the near future.

Two major MIDs have already been mentioned above. During the frozen conflict, minor skirmishes between Russian and rebel troops on one side and the Georgian military on the other have occasionally happened, as noted in Table 5 under small arms attack (PEXE). Table 5 also illustrates the troubled relationship between Georgia and Russia since 1991 as determined by events data. Seventeen events are represented in the table and are indicated in italics. Data indicates that these states have been in a rivalry since Georgian independence. Thompson's (2001) data on rivalry backs these findings (1991-2000).

Table 5: Power Politics Dyadic Disputes between Georgia and Russia

Direction of Dispute	Date	Dispute code	Description
Russia-Georgia	6/4/1991	WARN	Warning
Russia-Georgia	12-26-1991	MONI	Covert monitoring, spying
Russia-Georgia	6/15/1992	WARN	Warning
<i>Russia-Georgia*</i>	<i>6/19/1992</i>	<i>PEXE</i>	<i>Small arms attack</i>
Russia-Georgia	7/14/1992	MDEM	Armed force mobilization
<i>Georgia-Russia</i>	<i>7/17/1992</i>	<i>PEXE</i>	<i>Small arms attack</i>
Georgia-Russia	10/29/1992	DEWI	Demand withdrawal from an area
<i>Russia-Georgia</i>	<i>11/18/1992</i>	<i>AERI</i>	<i>Missile attack</i>
<i>Russia-Georgia</i>	<i>2/21/1993</i>	<i>AERI</i>	<i>Missile attack</i>
Georgia-Russia	2/23/1993	CALL	Call for political, social mobilization
Georgia-Russia	2/23/1993	DEWI	Demand withdrawal from an area
<i>Georgia-Russia</i>	<i>3/19/1993</i>	<i>PASS</i>	<i>Physical assaults</i>
Georgia-Russia	4/1/1993	POAR	Political arrests
Georgia-Russia	4/2/1993	FCOM	Formally complain
Russia-Georgia	4/2/1993	FCOM	Formally complain
Russia-Georgia	5/16/1993	RWCF	Request withdrawal, ceasefire
Russia-Georgia	6/10/1993	TUNS	Threats without specific negative

Georgia-Russia	4/30/1999	BREL	Break relations
Russia-Georgia	8/30/1999	MDEM	Armed force mobilization
Georgia-Russia	7/4/1993	AERI	Missile attack
Russia-Georgia	12/17/1999	AERI	Missile attack
Georgia-Russia	7/25/1993	BREL	Break relations
Russia-Georgia	8/4/2000	DMOB	Demobilization
Russia-Georgia	9/18/1993	SANC	Impose sanctions
Russia-Georgia	3/21/2001	TUNS	Threats without specific negative
Russia-Georgia	9/20/1993	CALL	Call for political social mobilization sanctions
Russia-Georgia	10/12/1993	TUNS	Threats without specific negative sanctions
Georgia-Russia	10/30/1993	PEXE	Small arms attack
Russia-Georgia	8/2/2001	DMOB	Demobilization
Russia-Georgia	6/21/1994	MDEM	Armed force mobilization
Georgia-Russia	2/2/2002	MDEM	Armed force mobilization
Russia-Georgia	7/1/1994	BFOR	Explicit attempt to publicize force
Russia-Georgia	4/12/2002	MDEM	Armed force mobilization
Russia-Georgia	8/16/1994	YPOS	Yield position of a location
Russia-Georgia	13/26/1994	MDEM	Explicit attempt to publicize force mobilization control over a border
Georgia-Russia	8/26/2002	FCOM	Formally complain
Russia-Georgia	8/23/1995	TUNS	Threats without
Russia-Georgia	9/12/2002	WARN	Warning specific negative sanctions
Russia-Georgia	9/19/2002	TUNS	Threats without
Russia-Georgia	9/20/1995	YPOS	Yield position of a location
Russia-Georgia	12/5/2003	TUNS	Threats without specific negative
Russia-Georgia	7/30/1997	DMOB	Demobilization
Russia-Georgia	7/30/1997	WARN	Sanctions
Georgia-Russia	8/13/1994	WARN	Release persons from detention, Warning
Russia-Georgia	3/14/2004	WARN	Warning imprisonment

**Italics indicate the presence of an MID.*

hostilities)

Russia-Georgia	3/18/1998	YORD	Yield to order, surrender
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Source: Gary King's (2006) "Ten Million International Dyadic Events"
http://dvn.iq.harvard.edu/dvn/dv/king/faces/study/StudyPage.xhtml?studyId=505&studyListingIndex=0_ee2717d5514905203fbf4ce96055.

Table 6 shows that in 2006 and 2007, Georgian military expenditures jumped dramatically. This is correlated with the data in Table 11, which shows a huge jump in arms imports; these are the two years preceding the 2008 Russian invasion. As the dyad already has a territorial dispute, the presence of a rivalry with intangible issues and numerous MIDs, the possibility of outside alliances, this jump in military expenditures as well as in the import of arms could have been the last straw for Russia.

Table 6: Military Expenditures of Georgia and Russia (in Constant (2005) US \$ million)

Year	Georgia	% Change	% of GDP	Russia	% Change	% GDP
1992	-	-	-	42,521	-	5.5
1993	-	-	-	37,563	-11.7	5.3
1994	-	-	-	36,608	-2.5	5.9
1995	-	-	-	21,680	-40.7	4.4
1996	85.9	-	2.2	19,145	-11.7	4.1
1997	53.6	-37.6	1.3	21,242	10.9	4.5
1998	51.7	-3.5	1.1	13,555	-36.2	3.3
1999	39.8	-23.0	0.9	14,042	3.6	3.4
2000	27.2	-31.7	0.6	19,138	36.3	3.7
2001	34.5	26.8	0.7	21,242	10.9	4.1
2002	49.3	42.9	1.0	23,601	11.1	4.3
2003	57.7	17.0	1.1	25,107	6.4	4.3
2004	80.6	39.7	1.4	26,120	4.0	3.8
2005	214	165.5	3.3	28,488	9.1	3.7
2006	363	69.6	5.2	31,176	9.4	3.6
2007	720	98.3	9.2	33,821	8.5	3.5

Source: SIPRI Website: <http://milexdata.sipri.org/>.

As with Ukraine, Georgia is also a transport country for Russian oil and natural gas. Control of the pipelines in the Near Abroad countries would allow for Russia to throw more of its energy might around. As Georgia is smaller and less strategic than Ukraine, it can be argued that Russia believes that it can get away with a Georgian invasion, while an opportunity for a Ukrainian invasion has not presented itself yet. Furthermore, like Ukraine, Georgia is striving for EU and NATO membership. Perhaps Russia believes that a war which devastated Georgia's economy has produced setbacks that will slow EU and NATO membership demands, thus allowing for Russian dominance over Georgia and other Caspian countries. Recall that it is hypothesized that the presence of a Western alliance for Georgia may rescue the nation from Russian dominance. Perhaps Russia invaded in order to prevent such an alliance. The alliance hypothesis requires for all dyads requires further research and analysis, and cannot be confirmed as of yet.

Before 2003, Georgia had Presidents with whom Russia could deal with. They accepted the frozen conflicts for what they were and allowed them to continue. Gamsakhurdia and Shevardnadze can therefore be considered accommodationists in this context. However, in late

2003 Georgia saw what was called the “Rose Revolution,” which allowed for the election of reformer Mikheil Saakashvili, who is pro-West and vehemently anti-Russian (Yenikeyoff 2008). In fact, part of his campaign platform was to take back Abkhazia and South Ossetia into the Georgian sphere of influence. Saakashvili also built up Georgia’s military in hopes to flex more muscle with the separatist regions (Mikhelidze 2009). Saakashvili ordered troops into South Ossetia in August 2008, thus provoking a Russian reaction by fellow hardliners Medvedev and Putin.

Finally, it has been argued (Nichol 2008) that because of the uncertainty of the Black Sea Fleet’s fate in Crimea, Russia is looking for a new Black Sea port. Support of Abkhazia’s independence may get the state this new port (Nichol 2008). Furthermore, Georgian troops were receiving training from the United States, who is a staunch defender of Georgian territorial integrity against Russia. This has implications for the larger primary US-Russian rivalry.

To sum up, the Russo-Georgian dyad has a critical security-linked territorial dispute, is almost an enduring rivalry, has the threat of outside alliances (which is perhaps why Russia acted sooner rather than later), and also has the presence of an arms race. We also can see the important of the presence of hardliners in power driving the action towards a deadly conclusion. In total we observe 4 risk factors leading us to suggest there is a very high probability of a future conflict in the region.

Discussion and Assessment

The 2008 conflict with Georgia is a turning point in Russia’s relations with the rest of the world. It is a signal to the United States and the EU that Russia has returned to the world stage as a major power and will assert its rights to predominance in the near aboard region. The power politics path is back in operation for the Russian foreign policy interests. The question for us is if that path will continue.

Table 7 shows a summary of the evidence and data backing up the steps-to-war theory in the three case studies. Whereas Estonia has escaped Russia’s aggressive grasp, it seems that Ukraine is once again falling under Moscow’s control. Although the election of accommodationist (to the Kremlin) Yanukovych may have stalled animosities between the two governments, the election of a hardliner against Russia is sure to spark up conflict again. The issues between Russia and Georgia run so deep that the possibility of another war between the states is more than possible.

Table 7: Summary of the “Risk Barometer” for War

Dyad	Territorial Issue?	Outside Alliance?	Enduring Rivalry?	Arms Race?	Accommodationist Or Hardliner?	Score
Russia/Estonia	No	Yes	No	No	Mixed	1
Russia/Ukraine	Yes	No	Yes	No	Mixed (formerly both hardliners)	2
Russia/Georgia	Yes	Not Yet	Yes	Yes	Hardliners (both)	4

The invasion of Georgia also shows that Russia can throw its weight around in the Near Abroad, as long as the United States is bogged down militarily in Iraq and Afghanistan. President Obama has committed more troops to Afghanistan in hopes that the country can be stabilized and used as a counterweight against nuclear-armed Pakistan as well as nuclear

ambitious Iran. Furthermore, the United States needs Russia's help to prevent Iran from becoming nuclear-armed. Much of Iran's nuclear technology has come from the help of Russian scientists. The United States needs to be cordial to Russia in order for this process to be slowed or stopped. Russia sees this as further leverage to tighten its influence over the Near Abroad. The United States must concede on issues if it wants Russian cooperation with the Iran issue. An example of this is Obama's decision to scrap the European missile defense shield in Poland and the Czech Republic. This was a "thorn" in the Russian Bear's side, and we interpret this move as appeasement toward Putin and Medvedev. In short, the United States needs Russia more than Russia needs the United States.

Conclusions

The analysis conducted herein uses the steps-to-war theory to derive future expectations of a newly resurgent Russia as it interacts with its neighbors. Territorial disputes are found to lead to the use of power politics which make issues among states more intractable, which in turn increases the likelihood that the dispute will be resolved by armed conflict.

For the Russo-Estonian dyad, it is found that the territorial dispute has been solved, as Estonia has acknowledged its current borders. The Estonian citizenship laws which exerted a bias toward ethnic Russians have been eased, so that this minority can attain citizenship more easily and integrate itself into Estonian society. The absence of MIDs and the minimal presence of power politics between the countries have also prevented a rivalry. Arms races for the dyad are a non-factor. Furthermore, Estonia has assimilated itself into the West through EU and NATO membership in 2004. All of these issues were resolved before Vladimir Putin consolidated his power in the Russian presidency. Estonia and Russia had issues that could have become intangible and could have led to a Russian invasion. This scenario has never materialized. Thus it is found that it is possible for a Near Abroad country to find a path out of war with Russia.

The Russo-Ukrainian dyad shows the presence of a proto-rivalry that could turn enduring if relations stay on this present course. Since the election of anti-Russian Viktor Yushchenko in 2004, relations between Russia and the Ukraine have soured. The eastern border dispute solved by CIS membership in 1994 could come back if Ukraine continues its quest for EU and NATO membership. The Crimean territorial dispute is growing more complicated as the end of the Russian Black Sea Fleet's lease grows closer and Ukraine continues to enforce its laws on Russian sailors. Russia has cut off natural gas supplies to Ukraine twice, once in 2006 and once in 2009. During the time of this writing, Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko has announced that the country will be raising gas transport fees on the Russian gas giant Gazprom. This could lead to another cutoff and enhance the already heating Russo-Ukrainian rivalry. The United States has also given Ukraine billions of dollars in IMF aid. All of these factors use power politics, and according to Senese and Vasquez's theory, the probability of war between Russia and Ukraine is growing. However, the recent election of pro-Moscow Viktor Yanukovich to the presidency could take Ukraine out of the steps to war path.

Georgia's issues with Russia are even more intangible and have recently taken a turn for the worse. There is a large Russian occupying force in the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Therefore, there is the presence of a territorial dispute that seems impossible to resolve without another armed conflict. Mikheil Saakashvili is an ardent hardliner who is anti-Russian. Numerous MIDs between Russia and Georgia have put this rivalry on the brink of becoming enduring. Arms races have occurred. Georgia's wishes to become a member of the

EU and NATO are present. In short, all of the factors of the steps to war period for this dyad are present, and it seems that another conflict is inevitable.

Thus the steps-to-war theory has proven its relevance with Russia and the Near Abroad. It is now up to leaders of the West to decide on how to deal with growing Russian power and aggressiveness towards its former empire. It seems that alliance making with these countries agitates Russia, but also may quell its aggressive behavior. The United States and the EU need to take this new Russian threat seriously before Ukraine becomes its next victim.

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