



Duelling Honors: Power, Identity and the Russia–Georgia Divide

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The paper explores a shift from engagement to confrontation in Russia's policy toward Georgia since the Rose Revolution. In addition to emphasizing power and security as explanations of Russia's behavior, the paper focuses on considerations of honor and prestige. The latter are relational and a product of Russia's perception of its ties with Western nations. Honor also plays a crucial role in Georgia's attitude toward its northern neighbor, and the entire Caucasus area emerges as a battleground for symbolic attributes of power among larger states with capabilities to influence the region. The case of Russia–Georgia divide is important for demonstrating benefits and limitations of traditional foreign policy explanations and for learning possible ways to de-escalate dangerous bilateral conflicts.

“A nation forgives injury to its interests, but not injury to its honor”

Max Weber

Since the Rose Revolution of 2003 that swept Mikhail Saakashvili to power in Georgia, Russia's relationship with its Caucasian neighbor has evolved through four clearly delineated, increasingly unhappy stages. The first, more hopeful stage came during Saakashvili's first months in office, when elites of both nations seemed genuinely interested in cooperating to raise relations above their theretofore post-Soviet nadir toward the end of the Eduard Shevardnadze era. Persistent disagreements, including Russia's reluctance to reduce its military presence in Georgia, Georgia's increasingly Western leanings and apparent ingratitude for Russian assistance in solving the Adjara crisis, and ultimately Georgian bellicosity toward South Ossetia, found the relationship moving away from cooperation to an atmosphere of “passive containment” by Russia. Persistent tensions combined with the spy scandal of 2007 moved the environment into the third stage of “active containment,” wherein Russia recalled its ambassador and cut off almost all links between the countries. Finally, in August 2008, the small-scale post-Soviet cold war escalated into a military confrontation that lasted for five days and may be repeated in the future.

This article attempts to make sense of the Russia–Georgia escalation by applying both realist and constructivist frameworks. We find realism useful, but insufficient and—in some of its versions—even potentially misleading for understanding the conflict. Realism is useful because at the heart of Russia–Georgia interactions are considerations of power and security. Russia does not want to lose influence. Georgia wants to be an independent country. The West wants to expand its democratic reach. But preoccupied with states' maximization of power and security in

the international system, realism tends to abstract from social and emotional contexts of state behavior. Yet without studying these contexts, we are in danger of misunderstanding the *meaning* of a conflict, its sources and political dynamics of threat formation. Without uncovering meanings and emotions behind international relations, we are unlikely to adequately explain and predict state actions. A closer look at Russia and Georgia challenges the notion that Russia seeks to reestablish its hegemony and imperial control in the Caucasus. The claims that Russia's security is challenged by the tiny Georgia are also hard to understand unless a broader context of relationships between Russia, Georgia and Western nations is scrutinized. Even if anarchy is out there somewhere shaping state behavior on some level, power and security interests must be contextualized, and everyday interactions must be paid attention to if we are to correctly interpret what anarchy means to individual states.

The Russia–Georgia case shows that what “anarchy” meant to the two sides sharply differed, and the difference widened over time, as they sought to convince each other of validity of their definition. The discursive struggle was primarily about (mis) perceiving each other and recognizing legitimacy of each other interests and status. For example, regardless of whether Russia is acting with imperialist intentions or not, it could be argued vis-à-vis the West and some of the former Soviet republics that Russia has an external imperial identity.¹ Therefore, behaviors that Russia does not consider imperialist but which could have a potentially imperialist interpretation by outsiders reinforce Russia's imperial identity. Indeed, in conjunction with specific behaviors—for example, troops on Georgian soil, energy policy—that could reinforce this identity, perceptions of Russia's view of Georgia and of itself also contribute. The pseudo-Freudian slip of Sergei Ivanov, when he declared that “...we border...Afghanistan and Iran” (Bagden 2006) when the USSR, not present-day Russia, had such a border, reinforces the casual prerogative Russia is believed to have over its neighbors' affairs.

Georgia, for its part, has an external identity of capriciousness and foolhardy aggression—“cock-eyed Caucasian machismo,” as *The Economist* (2005) put it. Ghia Nodia (1995), writing about Georgian national identity, long noted Georgia's, “disdain for compromise, its lack of interest in solutions to economic or other mundane problems, its disregard for political reality and attachment to historical revivalism and fantasies regarding ‘international law,’ its ejection of gradualism, and its admiration for heroic-aesthetical gestures.” These perceptions color interpretations of Georgian behavior as well as inform the behavior of those acting vis-à-vis Georgia. For example, perhaps Russia has reacted so strongly precisely for this so-called “admiration for heroic-aesthetical gestures,” assuming a more measured response would not get Georgia's attention. Such a perception of Georgia, reinforced by its own rhetoric and behavior, gives outsiders little evidence that Georgia is eager for a peaceful settlement of the separatist problem.

Furthermore, Georgia's rejection of Russia has particular emotional consequences, reinforcing Georgia's external perception of being unreliable and unrealistic in its expectations. Not only is Georgia's rejection of Russian a humiliation to a nation which has considered itself Georgia's historic protector, but Saakashvili's schizophrenic approach to Georgian-Russian relations—denouncing Russian imperialism here, acknowledging Russia's importance there—undermines Georgia's credibility.

The case of (mis) perception and lacking recognition is reinforced when the United States is brought into analysis. Although it did not fully endorse

¹ As Geoffrey Hosking wrote, “Britain *had* an empire, but Russia *was* an empire” (Zevelev 2001, 15).

Georgia's policies in its conflict with Russia, the U.S.—by virtue of serving as Georgia's patron and ally in the region—has strengthened some of Russia's suspicions and prejudices about America's intentions in the Caucasus. The trajectory of the U.S.–Russia relationship has many parallels to the Russian–Georgian one. A period of cooperation was ushered in after the September 11th attacks which gradually, almost linearly deteriorated to the present day situation which, although far from the nadir of Soviet times, is hardly an era of robust Russian–American friendship. The sticking points in that deterioration are well known: the United States' support for the “colored” revolutions, NATO expansion, missile defense, Kosovo independence, general anti-Russian rhetoric; Russia's use of energy diplomacy, the erosion of democracy, anti-American rhetoric, etc. Interpreting these events with an eye to mutual external perceptions and national self-esteem help to explain their opposition. As Dmitri Simes (2007) puts it, “great powers—particularly great powers in decline—do not appreciate such demonstrations of their irrelevance.”

To explain the Russia–Georgia relationship, we first identify and elaborate on four stages of escalation, from nascent cooperation to military confrontation. We then try several realist theories for explaining the relationships, and we compare their utility with that of social constructivism. The paper then attempts to provide a more detailed and empirically grounded explanation that emphasizes Russia–Georgia–U.S. interaction and a mutually reinforcing cycle of hostilities. As the actors are justified by their own internal logic and the other's external stereotypes, they interpret the other's actions as patently negative and suspicious, and then act righteously by dismissing the other's behavior. In doing so, they are patently denying the other a right to claim its own legitimate interests and undermining the other's sense of honor and self-esteem. Russia undermines Georgia's honor with bullying policies and support for the break away regions; Georgia undermines Russia's honor by dismissing their historical relationship and cozying up to the West; the West undermines Russia's honor by taking Russia for granted and giving no stake to Russian objections; Russia undermines the West's honor by accusing it of hypocrisy and convenient moral ambiguity. Conclusion section offers concluding thoughts and implications of our analysis.

Russia–Georgia Relations: Four Stages of Escalation

Nascent Cooperation, November 2003–June 2004

Despite its unequivocally Western orientation, Georgia's Rose Revolution of November 2003 provided the nation with an opportunity to mend fences with the behemoth to the North. Although the two countries have deeply intertwined cultural and historical ties, before the Rose Revolution the Russian–Georgian relationship had descended to its lowest ebb since the Soviet break-up. Russia routinely accused Georgia of providing haven to Chechen separatists in the remote Pankisi Gorge, and did not exclude military action as a potential course. Georgia was irritated with the Russians' reluctance to remove its military bases from Georgian soil, despite a 1999 agreement to do so. Russia's accelerated passport distribution to residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia further undermined Georgia's claims to sovereignty over the break-away republics. Shevardnadze's stated intention to join NATO (NATO official 2006), and Georgia's involvement in the Baku–Ceylon oil pipeline, which was to bypass Russia, ruffled Russian feathers.

When events in November 2003 left, the Shevardnadze administration besieged and moribund, both countries recognized an opportunity to improve relations. The first sign of cooperation was when Russian Foreign Minister

Igor Ivanov played an important role in averting potential bloodshed by convincing Shevardnadze to resign—the dour Ivanov was even met with a crowd of Georgians chanting his name adoringly. Putin guardedly expressed hope that the forthcoming Georgian election would install an administration that would work “to restore the traditions of friendship between our two countries” (Peuch 2003), but clearly indicated that the onus was on the Georgian side.

President-elect Mikhail Saakashvili made “closer, warmer and friendlier relations” (Lambroschini 2004) with Russia an immediate priority; one of his first actions was to attend a summit at the Kremlin in February 2004. Unlike Shevardnadze, who denied the presence of Chechen separatist on Georgian territory, Saakashvili acknowledged their existence and vowed to help fight them. A series of crackdowns ensued, pleasing Russia but worrying human rights’ groups. Saakashvili also campaigned to impede the spread of Islamic fundamentalism (“We are for freedom of religion, but not that religion” [RFE/RL 2004a, February]), a sop to Russia’s treatment of the Chechen problem as a struggle against Taliban-style repression.

Economic links between the two countries were strengthened as well. A Russia–Georgia economic forum in May 2004 was the largest business gathering between the two countries to date. Russia worked to restructure Georgia’s debt, provided electrical supplies and energy subsidies, and stepped up investment in Georgia. Visa regimes—a sticking point between the two nations—were relaxed, and a more open labor market policy was adopted.

Perhaps the greatest indicator of Russo-Georgian cooperation during this period was Russia’s assistance in diffusing the Adjara uprising in May and bringing about a peaceful result. Rather than allow Georgia to endure the humiliation and possible bloodshed of another separatist quagmire, Russia intervened, removing the Moscow-backed Adjaran leader Aslan Abashidze by helicopter and paving the way for a triumphant and face-saving consolidation of sovereignty by Saakashvili (*The Economist* 2004). This gesture provided a brief window of hope that Russia and Georgia would be able to work together on the separatist issues of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Yet despite all of this ostensible cooperation, there were several issues undermining the Russian-Georgia relationship during this period. Throughout this time, Russia and Georgia were at odds over the issue of Russia’s military bases: Georgia wanted them out a.s.a.p. and pushed this point strenuously, while Russia, in apparent foot-dragging, continued to provide variable and considerably lengthy estimates for the time it would take to do so. Georgia’s westward course continued unabated—one need only contrast Saakashvili’s sober Kremlin summit with his chummy visit to America later that month to judge the relative strengths of Georgia’s respective alliances. The Georgian president announced in April 2004 that he wanted eventually to join the EU; the NATO–Georgian courtship continued; the Baku–Ceyhan pipeline was proceeding according to plan. Abkhazia and South Ossetia were still intractable problems.

The cooperative period ended with Georgia’s bellicose response to crises in South Ossetia in August 2004 (Chivers 2004; Peuch 2004a; Hahn 2008). By August Russia too changed its tactics in relation to its southern neighbor.

Passive Containment, August 2004–September 2006

When Georgia chose to use force vis-à-vis South Ossetia, Russia balked. In August 2004, Russia suspended talks between the two countries and stopped issuing visas to Georgians, the latter an oft-repeated tactic throughout the current relationship. The two candidates in Abkhazia’s disputed election met in

Moscow in November with Russia as mediator, highlighting Russia's de facto preeminence in a territory theoretically Georgia's. In February 2005, Russia reiterated that it reserved the right to use preventative strikes into Georgian territory against potential terrorists (*RIA Novosti* 2005)—a chilly regression to the rhetoric of the Shevardnadze era. It had also revealed intentions to raise the price of gas, just in time for winter.

Georgia, meanwhile, began to see a nefarious Russian hand behind most developments. The Georgians were quick to point out the “double standard” of Russia's behavior: opposing separatists at home yet evidently supporting separatism in Georgia (*RFE/RL* 2004b, November). When a mysterious pipeline explosion cut off gas delivery to Georgia in the winter of 2006, followed by delays to its repair, Georgia's instinct was to see Russian sabotage behind it, which it expressed vociferously (Giragosian 2006; Saakashvili 2006a). Russia was accused of violating Georgian airspace, Russian officials were accused of complicity in a serious of bombings, and Russian peacekeepers in the breakaway regions were characterized as threatening rather than neutral. To Russia's great annoyance, Georgia made several noises, including a parliamentary resolution in February 2006, to the effect that Russian peacekeepers were no longer welcome in the break-away regions (*Kommersant* 2006, July).

Shortly after the February resolution, Russia again stopped issuing visas. Georgian wine, a national symbol 90% of whose export market went to Russia, was banned in March 2006, ostensibly for health reasons, as was Georgian mineral water. In July, with little warning Russia temporarily closed its only overland border with Georgia for “construction,” disrupting Georgian exports amid cries of unfriendliness and provocation.

There were some moments of cooperation, however exceptional, during this period. In early 2005, a Russian-Georgian railway ferry link was opened. After much discussion, Russia agreed to pull out its two military bases in Batumi and Akhalkalaki on an accelerated time frame. Saakashvili claimed to be offering Russia a hand off friendship, though he lamented that his hand was “hanging in the air” (*EurasiaNet* 2005).

What little hope there was of renewed cooperation was destroyed by Georgia's actions and Russia's response in the spy scandal of September 2006, which initiated the third stage of corrosion in Russia–Georgia relations.

Active Containment, September 2006–March 2008

When Georgia arrested four Russian intelligence officers and prepared to put them on trial for spying, a tipping point was evidently reached. Although international pressure persuaded Georgia to release the officers to the OSCE after only few days' captivity, Russia did not temper its response. The troop pullout was temporarily suspended, all transport and postal links between the countries were severed, Georgian-run businesses inside Russia were scrutinized and harassed, and many Georgians in Russia were rounded up and deported. Gazprom discussed doubling the price of gas, and threatened (at the onset of winter, of course) to shut off supplies if they were not paid for.

Georgia responded with accusations of Russian “blackmail” and of its policies being racist and xenophobic (Saakashvili 2006b; Tchourikova and Moore 2006). Appealing to the international community, it sued Russia at the European Court of Human Rights in April 2007 over the deportations. Saakashvili spun the standoff as an opportunity to wean Georgia off of its dependence on Russia and deepen economic and energy partnerships with other nations. The NATO membership process continued apace.

In October 2007, Georgia declared its intention to try to formally end Russia's peacekeeping mandate in Abkhazia after soldiers allegedly apprehended and beat

a group of Georgian police officers. Georgia also continued to accuse Russia of routine violations of its airspace. A bizarre mini-scandal surrounding a rocket that landed in August 2007 in a field near the Georgian/South Ossetian border—which Georgia, of course, insists is of Russian provenance and Russia, of course, denies—is typical (*BBC News* 2007).

Georgia's elections in January 2008 faintly resembled the opportunity presented in 2003 to have another go at improved relations. Saakashvili, significantly weakened in his current political state, underscored the importance of improving relations with Russia, saying he wants them to start “with a clean slate (*BBC Russian* 2008).” Russia, however, was the leading voice questioning the legitimacy of his reelection. The head of Russia's diplomatic mission, Vyacheslav Kovalenko, echoing Putin's rhetoric following the Rose Revolution, expresses a desire for improved relations, but clearly indicates that it is Georgia's responsibility to pursue them, “Russia wants friendship [but] it expects from Georgia specific steps and actions that could be viewed as aiming at improving our relationship” (*BBC Russian* 2008). But any trend toward renewed friendship was disrupted by Kosovo's declaration of independence on February 17, 2008, and Russia's lifting of sanctions on Abkhazia twenty days later in response. The latter further dimmed hopes for reconciliation on the near horizon. From that point on the Kremlin's policies went beyond measures to contain Georgia indicating that Russia was no longer confident in diplomacy of containment and was preparing for a possible military confrontation.

Confrontation and the Five-Days War, March 2008–August 2008

Russia did not stop at ending sanctions on Abkhazia. In April, the Kremlin reinforced its peacekeeping forces in the republic with 1,500 fresh troops without consulting or informing the Georgian side. In the meantime, South Ossetia accepted ethnic Russians to occupy the positions of prime minister, security minister and defense minister in the South Ossetian government. Both South Ossetia and Abkhazia continued to oppose Georgia's membership in the Western alliance and to press for their own integration with Russia. The Kremlin was still not prepared to legally recognize Georgia's separatist territories, but in April, Russian President Putin issued a decree establishing direct relations between Moscow and both of Georgia's breakaway republics. In early June, Russia also repaired the Abkhaz railroad ending Georgia's blockade of the republic and preparing for the transport of additional Russian forces into Abkhazia.² All of these policies took place in the context of growing provocations and military hostilities between Georgia and its breakaway republics that included abductions of civilians, attacks against the republics' officials,³ intelligence activities and gunfire in villages on both sides of the border.

Violence escalated in June and especially July with intensification of ceasefire violations by both sides and mutual accusations of war preparations. In early July Georgian forces hit residential homes in South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali and

² In describing this stage of Russia–Georgia relations, we rely on admittedly tentative timetables produced by scholars Gordon Hahn (2008) and Nicholas Petro (2008). In addition to being consistent with each other, these timetables incorporated, to the extent possible, accounts of events by Russia's and Georgia's governments.

³ For example, head of South Ossetian police was killed on July 3, which South Ossetia Minister for Special Affairs Boris Chochiev attributed to the Georgian secret services.

the nearby villages with artillery fire.⁴ Claiming that the South Ossetian side had attacked first, Tbilisi continued its offensive actions and stopped only when South Ossetia announced a general mobilization and appealed to Russia for defense. Russian Foreign Minister condemned Georgian attacks on South Ossetia as “open act of aggression” (*Kommersant* 2008b) and insisted that all sides sign an agreement rejecting the use of force. Russia also presented a draft resolution on the situation in the conflict zones of South Ossetia and Abkhazia to the UN Security Council. Tbilisi responded by accusing Russia of de facto annexation of Georgian territory by establishing direct relations with the breakaway republics and violating Georgia’s airspace by flying Russian military planes over South Ossetia. Georgia also refused to sign the non-use of force agreement and demanded that Russian peacekeeping forces be withdrawn from the region. Western officials issued several statements expressing concerns over the deteriorating situation in the Caucasus, and the German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier travelled to the region to facilitate resolution to the conflict. However, Georgia and its autonomies continued to be engaged in provocative actions. Reports from the region showed that the sides fired on each other’s positions and surrounding villages (*Kommersant* 2008a) and that Georgia continued to concentrate heavy weaponry on the border with South Ossetia. (*Kavkaz-Uzel* 2008). According to Western observers (Chivers and Barry 2008; Ertel, Klusmann, Koelbl, Mayr, Schepp, Stark, and Szandar 2008), by the morning of August 7 Georgia had amassed 12,000 troops on its border to South Ossetia, and 75 tanks and armored personnel carriers were positioned near Gori.

On the night of August 8, 2008, Georgia attacked the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali in an attempt to restore control over the rebellious province. Georgian troops killed 10 Russian peacekeepers and, by attacking the city with heavy artillery, inflicted heavy civilian casualties on South Ossetia.⁵ Georgia attacked despite a ceasefire agreement it had accepted on August 7. Within several hours, Russian forces responded by crossing the Georgian border into South Ossetia through the Roki Tunnel (Hahn 2008). Russia overall response was overwhelming and included several armored battalions, air power and marines, defeating and destroying much of the Georgian military. Russia also recognized independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and imposed areas of security control throughout Georgia. Despite Saakashvili’s efforts to present his offensive as a response to Russia’s aggression, and although it seems possible and even plausible that Russia “set a trap” for Georgia’s notoriously hot-headed leader, sources as diverse as intelligence agencies, human rights organizations, OSCE, the Georgian exiled leader Irakli Oкруashvili and various government analysts agreed that the initial aggression came from Tbilisi, not Moscow.⁶

⁴ Russian and European observers noted Georgia’s active fortification of their positions in the closest proximity to the breakaway republics. For example, in the mid-June military observers of the OSCE Mission sponsoring the Joint Control Commission for the Regulation of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict (JCC) confirmed the Georgians were fortifying their position in the conflict zone in the village of Ergneti in violation of the Dagomys agreements and have established a police post with a firing position illegally within the conflict zone. The Commander of the peacekeeping forces calls on the the OSCE and the Joint Committee of the Combined Peacekeeping Force to acknowledge these violations. Commander of the peacekeeping forces Marat Kulakhmetov also noted the urgency of resuming negotiations under JCC auspices, which the Georgian side, “first of all,” is refusing to do. He also reports continuing equipping and fortification of positions by Georgian forces in the conflict zone “aimed at unleashing aggression” ([<http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1225132.html>] as quoted in Hahn 2008). Georgia denied accusations.

⁵ Human Rights Watch estimated that between 300 and 400 South Ossetian civilians were killed in the Georgian attack (Bush 2008).

⁶ For a sample of such analyses, see, for example, *A Month after the War* 2008; Armstrong 2008; Chivers and Barry 2008; *Der Spiegel* 2008; Rohan 2008.

TABLE 1. Russia's Georgia Policy: Stages of Escalation

1. Cooperation 2003–October 2004	Assistance with electoral crisis Adjara Economic ties Cooperation proposals
2. Passive Containment October 2004–late 2005	Renewed charges of Pankisi terrorists Disputes over Ge conditions for troops withdrawal Warnings against using force in solving territorial issues Material assistance for Abkhazia and S. Ossetia Putin's links status of Kosovo to those of autonomies in the former Soviet region
3. Active Containment early 2006–early 2008	Warnings against joining NATO High-energy prices Travel and economic sanctions Immigration crackdown Recalled ambassador
4. Confrontation March–August 2008	Direct ties with Abkhazia and S. Ossetia Reinforcement of peacekeeping troops Accusations of Georgia of war preparations Military response to Georgia's attack on S. Ossetia

The 5 days war demonstrated failure of Russia's active containment policies and the Kremlin's willingness to use force in the areas that it viewed of critical importance. Through its actions in the Caucasus, Russia has demonstrated that it no longer viewed the old methods of preserving stability and security in the region as sufficient. As a result of the war, Russia cemented military presence in the Caucasus by defeating Georgia and recognizing its autonomies' independence.

Table 1 summarizes the four stages in Russia–Georgia relationships.

Framework for Understanding: Realism or Constructivism?

Russia's Motives and Objectives: Four Guiding Questions

In order to make a preliminary assessment of benefits of theory to the understanding the Russia–Georgia conflict, we selected several guiding questions about Russia's motives and foreign policy objectives. Based on the above-described dynamics in the two nations' relationships, at least four important questions may be formulated.

1. What were Russia's reasons for insisting on Georgia's signing an agreement about non-use of force against its breakaway republics?
2. Why did Russia choose a military response to Georgia's attack on South Ossetia?
3. Having chosen a military option, why did Russia not advance all the way to Tbilisi to depose Saakashvili's regime?
4. Why, despite opposing official recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia's independence before the five days war, did Russia recognize their independence immediately following the war?

Four Theories

It is reasonable to expect realism and constructivism to be helpful in answering the questions about Russia–Georgia conflict. Much in the nations' relations is about the security, power and perception that are at the heart of realist and constructivist analysis. However, different theories suggest different ways of understanding Russia–Georgia policy.

Offensive Realism:

Offensive realism would expect states to maximize power and, whenever possible, to achieve the status of a regional hegemon (Mearsheimer 2001, chap. 7). Russia then should be expected to pursue a policy of dominating Georgia by all means available. Strategic reasons that the Kremlin may view as compelling would include isolation of external powers' ability to penetrate the Northern Caucasus, control over energy transportation from the Caspian sea and easy access to Armenia, Russia's ally. Support for Georgia's separatists in South Ossetia and Abkhazia would therefore serve as a way of destabilizing Tbilisi's grip on power from inside the country.

Russian area studies scholars, conscientiously or not, reasoned about the motives of Russia's foreign policy using the offensive realist logic. Moscow's ties with separatist leaders, as well as the eagerness to exchange energy assistance for control over some strategic assets in Armenia and Georgia, prompted some scholars to speculate that Russia seeks to preserve its imperial power in the region—the view that was reinforced by Moscow's recent reluctance to dismantle its military bases in Georgia and occasional promises to “preventively” use force outside its own territory to respond to terrorist threats. Some speculated that Russia's talk of using preventive force was in fact a pretext for invading Georgia (Socor 2005). Others proposed that Russia is satisfied with the status quo, but will continue to seek instability and war in the region (Baev 2002). According to this group of scholars, what drives the Kremlin's increasingly assertive international policy is its perceived insecurity in response to the colored revolutions and the specter of Islamic radicalism (Cohen 2007; Lapidus 2007). Many Georgian scholars and policy makers also viewed Russia's behavior in terms of expansionism and power domination (Burjanadze 2007; also Gegeshidze 2007).

As logically compelling as it may seem, the power perspective is not supported by strong evidence. For example, it is plausible to assume that Russia's insistence on Georgia's non-use of force agreement was dictated by Russia's material weakness and inability to exercise force against Tbilisi. Yet, the evidence for such intentions by the Kremlin are not available, and it is at least as plausible to interpret Russia's motives as driven by defense and security considerations. It is even more difficult to find support for offensive realist expectation that Russia had power objectives in its military response. If it did, why then did the Kremlin wait for as long as it did and, even more importantly, why did it not try to remove Saakashvili from power to secure full control over Georgia's territory and resources? Again, interests of Russia's security are at least as helpful in determining its behavior and explaining why it limited itself to recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia's independence, but abstained from pursuing more expansionist objectives. The power/domination perspective lacks nuance and a sense of proportion and, by presenting Russia as inherently imperialist and anti-Western, this perspective is less inclined to seriously consider impact of contemporary developments on Russia's actions.

Defensive Realism:

Defensive realism seems a more plausible lens through which to interpret the Russia–Georgia policy. Rather than emphasizing power accumulation, defensive realists (Waltz 1979; Snyder 1991) focus on imperatives of security and survival, and they argue that states more commonly respond to security dilemmas with balancing or bandwagoning than with war or blackmail, as in offensive realism (Mearsheimer 2001:138). In terms of primary motivating factors, defensive realists (Jervis 1978; Snyder 1991) delineate misperceptions and institutional biases that may stand in the way of a correct reading of signals coming from the anarchical international system.

Scholars influenced by defensive realism may see Russia's policies in the Caucasus as serving objectives of security, such as preventing a major war on its borders or allowing NATO, a potentially competitive military alliance, to use Georgia as a proxy for securing additional geopolitical gains in the region. In this case, Russia is on defense, not offense, and it is the United States and NATO that want to maximize power at the expense of Russia, not the other way around. Because the intentions of attacking Russia are not there, the U.S. and NATO may not present real threats, yet, they certainly are threats in the perception of Russia's officials. This perspective is useful in understanding Russia's motivations, and there are ample statements by the country's officials and members of the political class framing their response to Georgia in terms of defending security objectives (Lavrov 2008; Medvedev 2008). Although defensive realism does not predict Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia's independence, it offers a plausible interpretation of Russia's limited objectives during the war and its insistence on Georgia's non-use of force agreement before the war.

Neoclassical Realism:

Neoclassical realism (Rose 1998) agrees with structural realists about the primary significance of the structure of the international system on state behavior, but it restores the complexity of classical realism in viewing state foreign policy objectives and adding a number of domestic factors to their analysis such as perception, domestic politics, degree of state strength, and ideology. In particular, some neoclassical realists (Wohlforth 1998) have focused on role of intangibles, such as honor, prestige and reputation in foreign policy. By emphasizing considerations of external reputation, neoclassical realism expands our understanding of Russia's motivations and objectives in the Caucasus. Russia's insistence on brokering Georgia's peace agreement with its autonomies can then be understood in terms of the Kremlin's desire to gain recognition by Western nations, which Russia has historically viewed as its "significant Other" (Ringman 2002). Similarly, Russia's limited objectives during the five-days war can be understood in terms of its fear to lose its political standing in relations with the United States and Europe. Neoclassical realism seems more ambivalent, however, on explaining why Russia went to war and why it chose to officially recognize Georgia's breakaway republics. Although making these steps made sense from the perspective of defending Russia's honor or prestige as a great power—especially when such steps are viewed in the larger context of Georgia's aspirations to join NATO—such steps may also be viewed as undermining the West's recognition of Russia as a democratic nation that is bound by the international law.

Part of the problem with neoclassical realism is that it tends to view intangibles as determined by the structure of the international system, rather than local historical factors. Considerations of honor and reputation then are merely endogenous to the international power balance, and not as something that may have a potentially significant independent effect.⁷ By overplaying the role of anarchy in determining state foreign policy, neoclassical realists cannot fully account for the perception of threat that is partly domestic. It therefore overlooks some aspect of honor and prestige that are domestically formed and defended on the basis of Russia's national cultural perceptions of threats and challenges abroad.

⁷ In a similar fashion, two realists (Brooks and Wohlforth 2002) analyzed the role played by Mikhail Gorbachev's New Thinking in changing the Soviet behavior and ending the Cold War. Rather than viewing Gorbachev as a conceptual innovator with a principally new vision for the world, Brooks and Wohlforth presented him as the overseer of the Soviet strategic retreat (For a constructivist response, see English 2002).

TABLE 2. The Four Theories: Hypothesized Responses to the Guiding Questions

	<i>Offensive realism</i>	<i>Defensive realism</i>	<i>Neoclassical realism</i>	<i>Constructivism</i>
1. Demand for non-use of force by others	Material weakness	Fear of escalation	External honor opportunity	Internal honor demands
2. Use of force, August 8, 2008	Power goals	Security goals	External honor goals	Internal honor goals
3. No advancement to Tbilisi	Fear of military retaliation	Limited objectives	Fear to lose external honor	Fear to lose internal honor
4. Recognition of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia	Opportunity to increase power	Misperception	Opportunity to increase external honor	Opportunity to increase internal honor

Constructivism:

This is the point at which we turn to social constructivism, which takes contexts and meanings of international actions seriously and does not treat them as predetermined by anarchy. To constructivists (Wendt 1992; Hopf 2002), state behavior is shaped by emotions and power calculations, but each can only be understood in contexts of everyday interactions and socio-historical development. Even if anarchy is out there somewhere, constructivists say, we ought to focus on everyday interactions for understanding what anarchy means and how social contexts of power are being formed and unformed. Scholars of Russia have revealed that its search for international recognition is mediated by domestic perceptions and debates (Neumann 1996; Tsygankov 2006a).

The domestic honor/recognition perspective is helpful for answering three out of four posed questions about Russia's behavior in the Caucasus. Russia views itself as a historically-established honest broker and a guarantor of peace in the region, and that perception is widely supported by the public at home. With the exception of Georgians, Russia is also largely favorably perceived by a number of other nationalities in the region (Tsygankov 2006b). These constituencies upheld and promoted Russia's more assertive actions toward Georgia, which they viewed as the bully in the region. They were largely supportive of Russia's decision to wage the war and recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia although not necessarily of the limited objectives of the war.⁸ Georgia too may be motivated by honor considerations in its relationships with Russia. Just as Russia may be frustrated with lack of recognition by the United States and NATO, Tbilisi may be angry with Moscow's unwillingness to honor Georgia's independence and the right to choose a foreign policy orientation. It is this dynamic of mutually exclusive honor claims, rather than the structure of international system per se, that is largely responsible for escalation in Russia–Georgia relations.

Tables 2 and 3 summarize the four theories' hypothesized responses to the guiding questions about the Russia–Georgia conflict and how these theories stand against available evidence.

Bridging Realism and Constructivism

This preliminary overview suggests that each of the four theories have some important insights into the nature of the Russia–Georgia conflict although not to equal degree. In order to further assess these theories' potential and propose a model for interpreting the conflict, we suggest two principal assumptions. First,

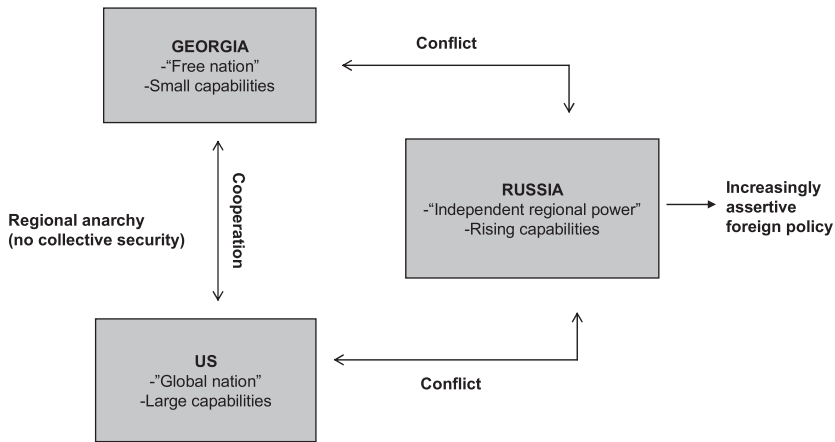
⁸ At least some evidence indicate that these constituencies were disappointed by the Kremlin's decision not to remove Saakashvili from power. See, for example, Mezhyuev 2008 and discussion of his article by *Russki zhurnal*, Russia's leading online publication.

TABLE 3. The Four Theories Versus Evidence: A Preliminary Assessment

	<i>Offensive realism</i>	<i>Defensive realism</i>	<i>Neoclassical realism</i>	<i>Constructivism</i>
1. Demand for non use of force by others	Yes*	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Use of force, August 8, 2008	No	Yes	Ambivalent	Yes
3. No advancement to Tbilisi	No	Yes	Yes	No
4. Recognition of Abkhazia and S. Ossetia	No	No	Ambivalent	Yes

*“Yes” means a generally correct prediction, and “No” a generally incorrect prediction.

TABLE 4. Russia–Georgia–U.S. Relations and Russia’s Foreign Policy



we attach equal importance to both material and symbolic aspects of power and security in international interactions. Second, we assume the primacy of national concept or vision of honor, which—augmented by available material and symbolic resources—determines direction of foreign policy. With these assumptions in mind, we propose the following model of interaction among Russia, Georgia and the United States for understanding Russia’s increasingly assertive foreign policy and potential escalation in Russia–Georgia relations.

This mechanism combines several motivating factors in Russia’s behavior as suggested by the above-discussed theoretical perspectives (Table 4). Both material and symbolic aspects of power are important,⁹ and there is no expectation that anarchical environment or the absence of strong international institutions would necessarily determine the nature of foreign policy, offensive or defensive. Instead, we expect that domestic aspects of honor as well as material capabilities will also figure prominently in shaping Russia’s international behavior. The most dangerous combination of symbolic and material aspects of Russia’s existence includes its growing sense of humiliation by Western powers accompanied by Russia’s rising material capabilities. Such an increasingly strong and at the same time humiliated Russia is especially prone to assertive and unilateral behavior if the United States and Georgia that do not take Russia’s concerns into consideration.

⁹ For other efforts to bridge material and non-material factors, see Barkin 2003; Jackson 2004; Sorensen 2008.

Russia does not seek to reestablish its hegemony and imperial control in the Caucasus. Nor can Russia's security be seriously challenged by the tiny Georgia. Yet, the relationship has severely deteriorated, and that happened as a result of the nations' *perceived* lack of recognition of their respective independence and special interests. Each player is acting from an internal perception of itself and its interests while reacting to the "others" and interpreting their behavior through the prism of the external perception they create. Ultimately, each actor interprets the others' actions in the context of externally generated stereotypes, and its own actions in the context of personal (national) honor and self-esteem.

In Georgia's case, it clearly strives to be an independent country with its own decision-making power. This means achieving and preserving its territorial integrity, having the latitude to make independent foreign policy decisions, and being allowed to participate in any international organizations that it desires. Any actors seen to be inhibiting this independence are therefore perceived to be acting against Georgia's interests. It so happens that Russia's desire to remain a great power and preserve its special interest and influence in the Caucasus creates objectives that directly or indirectly contradict with Georgia's interpretation of its own sovereignty. Although Tbilisi views Russia as an overt barrier to Georgian territorial integrity with its presence and policies in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia sees itself as a stabilizer in a volatile region.

Another critically important player in the Russia–Georgian relationship is the United States and other Western nations that too aim at establishing their own independent policies toward the Caucasus. Given Russia's current lack of trust in the West's intentions, on the one hand, and Georgia's high hopes to soon "join" Western institutions such as NATO, on the other, Western policies have the potential to exacerbate the Russia–Georgia tensions. The United States' ambitions to be a "global leader" are especially irritating to Russia's leadership. Importantly, while Russia perceives Georgia's flirtations with NATO as yet another new component of a growing existential threat, Georgia interprets Russia's resistance as a blatant undermining of sovereignty. Nina Burjanadze's dismissal of the Russian position is revealing, "The move [to NATO] won't leave Russia any worse off—unless, of course, our NATO membership is seen as detrimental to Russian imperial interests. It certainly isn't detrimental to any other Russian interests" (*Nezavisimaya gazeta*, January 15–17, 2007). This immediate contextualization of Russia's actions as "imperial" underscores the importance played by the perceptions the actors have of each other in interpreting each other's behavior.

Explaining the Russia–Georgia Escalation

Nascent Cooperation

The period of Russia–Georgia cooperation became possible because three constituting states—Russia, Georgia and the United States—were able to reach a tacit accommodation of their honor expectations. The Kremlin assisted Tbilisi with its power transition from Eduard Shevardnarze to Mikheil Saakashvili after the Rose Revolution. By not interfering with Tbilisi's efforts to restore control over Adjara and providing a safe refuge for its leader Aslan Abashidze, the Kremlin also sent a message of its willingness to assist Georgia with strengthening its territorial integrity. In addition, Russia stood ready to develop the already strong economic ties between the two nations. In exchange Russia expected Georgia to honor its interests in the Caucasus by not expecting an immediate military withdrawals, excluding force from dealings with South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and consulting Russia on vital security issues such as membership in NATO. In May 2004 following Saakashvili's meeting with Putin in Moscow the Kremlin formulated its

proposals for signing a good neighbor treaty and forwarded those to Tbilisi (Gurev 2005).

Georgia and the United States did not seem to be prepared to oppose Russia's policy at the time. At least initially Georgia was amenable to granting Russia the special recognition it sought. During his summit with Putin, Saakashvili humbled himself by referring to Georgia as "a small country" and pledged to respect Russia's security interests in the region. He expected Russia to begin to dismantle its bases in Akhalkalaki and Batumi, but he also promised not to have foreign troops on Georgia's territory after Russia's withdrawal. The United States—although it had already experienced its first doubts about Russia's domestic centralization (Slevin and Baker 2003)—was still hoping to make the post-9/11 partnership with Moscow work. In its turn the Kremlin was still expecting to be consulted by the White House on issues determining security in the Caucasus.

Passive Containment

These expectations changed in August 2004. Against the Kremlin's expectations, Tbilisi did not seek to consult Russia and used force against South Ossetia, possibly attempting to win control over the strategic Djava district (Chivers 2004). Putin responded by calling for Georgia to show restraint and honor its pledge to resolve sovereignty disputes peacefully. "It is important," he said, "that the negotiation process continue with a view to creating an atmosphere of trust and preserving peace and stability. Russia will do its utmost to foster this process" (Peuch 2004b).¹⁰ Russia therefore was trying to get Georgia to return to the initial expectation of cooperation that the Kremlin thought was being established.

Tbilisi, however, had already adopted a different strategy of achieving its objectives. It aimed at solving territorial disputes without assistance from Russia and by relying on political support from a United States that had emerged as Georgia's most important ally and patron in the region. Washington has provided \$1.2 billion in aid in the past decade, and it had deployed military advisors in Georgia officially to train and equip forces to eradicate terrorism from the lawless Pankisi Gorge. Yet as revealed by a Georgian Defense Ministry official, the U.S.-military intended to "train our rapid reaction force, which is guarding strategic sites in Georgia—particularly oil pipelines" (Georgian 2002). The United States was determined to secure its access to the Caspian oil and strengthen its geostrategic presence in the Caucasus, which the Kremlin saw as evidence of America's bias and lack of recognition for Russia's role in the region. Tbilisi, on the other hand, felt emboldened by Washington's support. Georgian foreign ministry did not respond to Russia's offer of a good neighbor treaty until October and then unsatisfactorily so (Gurev 2005). Although the United States' official position regarding the violence in South Ossetia was for both sides to disengage militarily and work toward negotiations (Chivers 2004), Georgian leaders felt compelled to continue trying to solve the territorial disputes by whatever means necessary.¹¹

This was the point at which Russia felt compelled to act on its feelings of wounded honor and unappreciated regional interests. Instead of a partner in the region, Moscow felt it was confronted with an ungrateful and uncooperative neighbor that wanted to accelerate Russian withdrawal and integrate, even by use of force, the separatist enclaves. The Kremlin therefore changed its tactics by

¹⁰ Russia's first Deputy Foreign Minister Valerii Loshchinin also indicated that Moscow held Tbilisi responsible for the increasing tensions in South Ossetia (*RFE/RL Newline* 2004).

¹¹ According to the former Defense Minister Irakli Oruashvili, Georgia planned a military invasion of South Ossetia in 2006 (*Izvestia* 2007).

canceling Putin's official trip to Georgia, severing the issuance of visas for Georgians, strengthening ties with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and escalating political rhetoric. Over time, Russia also adopted a more combative tone in relations with the United States. Most irritating and insulting to the Kremlin was Washington's newly revealed strategy of global regime change that was now being implemented in the former Soviet region, not just in Iraq. Russia was fearful that the so-called colored revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan during 2003–2005 would undermine Russia's stability and its prestige as a power in its own right. That the post-revolutionary Georgia and Ukraine had expressed their desire to join NATO, only added to Russia's sense of being vulnerable and politically isolated by the West. To Georgia, it all served as indicators of Russia's imperial complex and unwillingness to recognize their neighbor's independence, as Georgians officials engaged in inflammatory rhetoric and referred to the Kremlin as a "fascist regime" (*Izvestia* 2006).

Active Containment

The next level of Russia's effort to contain Georgia demonstrated that the Kremlin was prepared to go far to make others recognize its special status and interests in the region. Although its decision to impose tough sanctions against Georgia after the "spy scandal" was met with almost universal condemnation in the West, that condemnation only served to validate Russia's already formed suspicions vis-à-vis Western, particularly American intentions in the Caucasus. By now, the Kremlin felt it had only one option left—the toughest possible response short of using force. As Western officials demonstrated their support for Georgia,¹² the Kremlin sought to send a strong warning for both Tbilisi and the West. A most important aspect of the warning was that Russia would no longer tolerate its disregard by Western countries, including prospects of Georgia's membership in NATO.

Although Western nations helped to defuse the crisis of the arrest of Russia's officers and also sought to discourage Tbilisi from using force against its separatist territories, the Kremlin did not see such efforts as sufficient in recognizing Russia's vital role in the region. In June 2006, Russia's Foreign Minister said that Ukraine or Georgia joining NATO could lead to a colossal shift in global geopolitics (*RIA Novosti* 2006). The Kremlin was determined to stop the alliance expansion, and the spat with Georgia seems to be a crucial test of will for Moscow. The so-called "frozen conflicts" are merely leverage in the Kremlin's hands, and they will remain frozen until NATO bears out plans to continue its March to the East. The Russia–Georgia crisis therefore became an indicator of a bigger Russia–West crisis.

The developments during 2006–2007 provided ample reasons to view Russia as a power that is angry and frustrated by what it perceives as an unfair treatment by the United States and NATO. President Putin's criticism of the U.S.-led "unipolarity" beginning with his speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy in January 2007, as well as his threats to withdraw from already signed international treaties, such as the Intermediate Nuclear Missile Treaty, meant to convey Russia's frustration with its inability to develop more equitable relations with the United States. The Kremlin was desperate to be heard that it was Russia, not America, that had to swallow the war in the Balkans, two rounds of NATO expansion, the U.S. withdrawal from the ABM treaty, military presence in Central Asia, the invasion of Iraq, and, now, plans to deploy elements of nuclear missile

¹² Many Western officials insisted on immediate cessation of the sanctions, and the special representative of the NATO Secretary-General Robert Simmons extended his support for Tbilisi during his demonstrative trip to Georgia in the midst of the crisis.

defense in Eastern Europe. Although humiliation is a sensitive subject,¹³ it is not difficult to see that Russians felt humiliated by the situation and were increasingly prepared to do anything to change it. For the third time during the last fifteen years, Russia feels betrayed by the West—first due to it not keeping the promise given to Gorbachev not expand NATO, second because of being denied a greater integration into Western institutions under Yeltsin, and more recently because of breakup of the post-9/11 coalition and the West’s growing presence in the Caucasus (Tsygankov 2008).

Russia’s policy of active containment and its new attitude of frustration only further reinforced the already strong sense in Tbilisi that the Kremlin had no respect for Georgia’s independence. Just as Russia was frustrated with lack of recognition by the United States and NATO, Georgia demonstrated anger at what it saw as Russia’s lack of respect for its choice of foreign policy orientation. President Saakashvili and other officials were defiant and continued to condemn Russia’s “imperialism” and unwillingness to honor Georgia’s independence. The discourse of anger and frustration comes clearly in many policy statements, such as the following from President Saakashvili (2007): “In my opinion, Russia is unable to reconcile itself with Georgia’s independence. It wants to revert to the Soviet rule although this is impossible. Georgia is no longer a country that it was some four or five years ago, when we did not have either an army or police and corruption was rife in this country. Georgia is now able to protect its territorial integrity and sovereignty.”

Capitalizing on a special relationship with the United States and determined to benefit from the growing confrontation between Russia and the West, Tbilisi seemed, in Russian eyes, determined to humiliate Russia further. There was no longer a talk of Georgia’s military neutrality after Russia’s withdrawal; instead, a discussion in Tbilisi was under way that a future Georgia may not have objections against possible future deployment of weapons of mass destruction on their territory by NATO (*Itar-Tass* 2007). The issue came full circle when Russia insisted that Georgia’s foreign policy choice was not independent, but instead was formed by the United States, as Tbilisi’s most important ally in the Caucasus.

Military Confrontation

The last stage in Russia–Georgia escalation became possible when Georgia moved from anti-Russian actions and refusals to sign a non-use of force agreement to concentrating a heavy weaponry on Abkhazia and South Ossetia’s borders, while the United States and other Western nations provided an implicit legitimization for Georgia’s actions. Although the United States is not directly responsible for Russia–Georgia confrontation, by its actions, it has emboldened both nations to act in a more assertive and unilateral fashion. Support of Kosovo’s independence by the U.S. and other Western powers encouraged separatism of Georgia’s breakaway republics making it more difficult for Russia to resist recognizing their independence claims. It was after Kosovo recognition in February 2008 that Russia lifted sanctions on Abkhazia and established direct relations with both Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Chivers 2008). On the other hand, the United States did little to restrain Georgia’s militarization and

¹³ Most face saving Russians prefer not to articulate their frustration with the United States in terms of pride, honor and dignity in public. Still some do, as did leading Russian politician and potential Putin successor Vladimir Yakunin (2007). Responding to the German magazine *Der Spiegel*’s question “What should the West do?” Yakunin said: “It should not humiliate us. You can throw a bucket of cold water on Russians, and we can take it. But one shouldn’t humiliate us! The political scientist Hans Morgenthau said that countries should not forget the national interests of other countries when defining their own. The current American government becomes irritated over every attempt on the part of a country to go its own way—especially when it is as big and wealthy as Russia. That’s political arrogance.”

ambitions to reign in its autonomies by force. American support of Georgia's NATO aspirations, economic assistance and training of the Georgian military were crucial in maintaining the sense of confidence in Tbilisi.

The continued expansion of NATO is especially important in explaining Russia's willingness to use force in the Caucasus. The West's geopolitical advances into what Russia has traditionally viewed its sphere of interests and the desire expressed by post-revolutionary Georgia and Ukraine to join NATO exacerbated Russia's sense of vulnerability and isolation with respect to the West. Following the summit of NATO in Bucharest in April 2008, Russia reiterated that it would do everything in its power to prevent expansion of the alliance and extension of its membership to Georgia (*RFE/RL Newswire* 2008). The so-called "frozen conflicts" were merely leverage in the Kremlin's hands, and the Kremlin planned to keep them frozen until NATO scuttled its plans to continue its March to the East. However, in the aftermath of the Bucharest summit, some Russian analysts (Tsyganok 2008) began to argue that if membership in NATO was most important to Georgia, then Tbilisi was likely to obtain it at the cost of its territorial integrity. The Kremlin too sought to signal its dissatisfaction by applying both sticks and carrots. By extending additional assistance to the secessionist Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the Kremlin made their independence a few steps closer, but it also expedited negotiations with Moldova over the incorporation of Transdnistria, with the provision that Kishinev stays a neutral state and does not join NATO. The latter might have been a signal that a "no to NATO membership in exchange for territorial integrity" deal was still possible to conclude.

However, as Russia and Georgia were moving into the summer of 2008, it was becoming increasingly difficult to prevent their military confrontation. With Georgia and South Ossetia engaged in constant provocations and fire exchanges, some urgent and concerted actions were necessary on the part of larger players including the United States, the European Union and Russia. In the meantime, as the European Union was only beginning to be aware of need for mediation, the United States and Russia acted in a partisan manner by supporting opposite sides in Georgia's conflict with its breakaway republics. While Russia was increasing its support for Abkhazia and South Ossetia, NATO and the U.S. officials did not hide their backing of Tbilisi, and rarely criticized Georgia's actions in public. For example, on June 20, NATO's general secretary met with president Saakashvili to discuss the planned conclusion of a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Georgia, and scheduled a traveling session of the North Atlantic Council to be held in Georgia in September. Less than a month before the war, the U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice traveled to Europe. She found no time to visit Moscow, but on July 9, Rice went to Tbilisi to demonstrate support for Georgia's territorial integrity and the MAP.

Our explanation of Russia's Georgia policy from nascent cooperation to active containment is summarized in Table 5.

Conclusion

The above-cited evidence of Russia-Georgia interaction underscores the importance of studying national perceptions and emotions in understanding international conflicts. In understanding the spiral of escalation in Russia-Georgia relations, perspectives that emphasize rationally defined interests to maximize power or security are important but insufficient and even potentially misleading if they are not combined with analysis of mutually exclusive honor claims.

Given the involvement of Western states, such as the United States, the conflict has a larger and even more disturbing dimension of Russia-West confrontation. It is possible that there is worse yet to come if the parties continue to act and think unilaterally, rather than look for a compromise. Russia certainly feels

TABLE 5. Explaining the Russia–Georgia Escalation

<i>Georgia's Actions</i>		<i>Grown intensity of anti-Russian actions and rhetoric</i>	<i>Military build-up near Abkhazia and South Ossetia</i>
<i>"Clean slate"</i>	<i>Russia-isolating actions</i>		
Actions of the U.S. Post-9/11 support	Relative cooperation		
Support for Colored revolutions	Passive containment		
Intensified support for Georgia		Active containment/ Sanctions	
Continued support for Georgia and Kosovo recognition			Confrontation/War

it had enough of compromising with NATO, since most of it has only produced concessions on Russia's part. Moscow is unlikely to back off when it has full support at home and when the perceived honor of a great power is at stake. Since Yevgeni Primakov's unsuccessful opposition to NATO's expansion, Vladimir Putin has tried to reengage the West into yet another common security framework. However, the post-9/11 cooperation with the United States is now largely over, and—as far as the Kremlin is concerned—largely because of U.S. arrogance toward Russia.

All of this is reminiscent of competition among great powers in the early and mid-twentieth century, which were about material power as well as honor and prestige. After WW II, for example, the United States wanted to secure Europe on its own terms, while Russia was insisting that it too deserved "fruits of victory." Having made a more considerable human and material effort to defeat Hitler than the allies, and having suffered much greater losses, Moscow felt vindicated in demanding recognition of its newly acquired great power status. Although today's Russia is weaker, the underlying causes of the current conflict are the same, and Russia feels it has been humiliated by the Western powers for too long. De-escalation of the Russia–Georgia conflict requires the sides' increased awareness of how their actions, regardless of intent, can reinforce mutually exclusive perceptions. A way to de-escalation lies through all players' willingness to tone down exclusive claims and seek instead mutually inclusive security arrangements and mutually respectful definitions of honor.

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