



# RUSSIAN INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING AND REGIONAL PEACE OPERATIONS: THE CASES OF GEORGIA AND MOLDOVA

## El aprendizaje institucional ruso y las operaciones regionales de paz: los casos de Georgia y Moldavia

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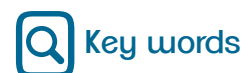
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This article examines Russia's behaviour towards intra-state conflict in its immediate regional space since the early 1990s. Existing scholarship largely attributes Russia's approach to being a mere extension of its principal security logic based on the promotion of regional hegemonic interests. While these interests cannot be ignored, this article proposes that Russia's lack of institutional learning in doctrine and practice of peace operations has also been a central, yet neglected determinant shaping its response towards the conflicts. This, it is argued, is embedded in a persuasive sub-set of secondary security logics predicated on legitimate concerns of regional stability and security. This analysis is based on an interrogation of the regional conflicts in Georgia and Moldova as they provide the most informative cases into Russia's experience of peace operations. The article concludes with some brief comments on the current crisis in Ukraine and how this relates to Russia's response towards regional intra-state conflict.



Abstract

Russia, peace operations, institutional learning, frozen conflicts, security logics  
*Rusia, operaciones de paz, aprendizaje institucional, conflictos congelados, lógica de seguridad*



Key words

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Fechas

*Este artículo examina el comportamiento de Rusia con respecto a los conflictos intraestatales en sus espacios regionales próximos a partir de 1990. La documentación existente atribuye la posición de Rusia principalmente a una extensión de su lógica de seguridad principal basada en el fomento de los intereses regionales hegemónicos. Aunque estos intereses no pueden ser ignorados, este artículo propone que la falta de aprendizaje institucional de Rusia de la doctrina y práctica de las operaciones de paz ha sido también un factor determinante, aunque descuidado, al dar forma a su respuesta ante los conflictos. Se argumenta que esto está integrado en un subconjunto persuasivo de lógicas de seguridad secundarias, basadas en la preocupación legítima por la seguridad y estabilidad regionales. Este análisis se basa en el cuestionamiento de los conflictos regionales en Georgia y Moldavia, puesto que ambos son los casos más reveladores de la experiencia de Rusia en operaciones de paz. El artículo concluye con unos breves comentarios sobre la crisis actual en Ucrania y cómo se relaciona esta con la reacción de Rusia al conflicto regional intraestatal.*



## 1. Introduction

Russia's experience of peace operations has been both extensive and diverse. Moscow has committed forces to manage the string of inter-ethnic conflicts around its regional periphery, contributed troops towards the missions in the Balkans until 2003, continues to participate, albeit on a minimal scale, towards missions in Africa, and it is playing a central role in organizing the development of the Collective Security Treaty Organization's (CSTO) peace operations' capability in Central Asia. Russia's regional experience of managing intra-state conflict – either through the (symbolic) auspices of regional organizations or unilaterally – has received the most scholarly (Allison, 2013; Arbatova, 2010; Mackinlay, 2003; Lynch, 2002, 2000; Kellett, 1999; Baev, 2003, 1998, 1997; Johnson & Archer, 1996; MacFarlane & Schnabel, 1995; Clark, 1994; Shashenkov, 1994; Crowe, 1992) and international attention. This is not surprising as the wave of “hot spots” that enveloped areas of Russia's immediate neighbourhood have revealed significant inferences about Moscow's post-Soviet foreign policy, and its approach towards the understanding and utilization of peace operations.

In several of these conflicts, Russia's behaviour has been called into question for being widely removed from internationally recognized doctrine and practice. Representative of this is Russia's progressively acerbic relationship with its former Soviet neighbours over the past two decades. Russia's war with Georgia in 2008 has served as a principal example for many commentators and analysts in demonstrating the prevalence of the security dilemma in shaping relations in the area of the newly-independent states (NIS), and the inherent insecurities still determining Moscow's relationship with the West. Russia's involvement in the current crisis in Ukraine has given additional value towards this thesis, further propelling relations to a heightened status of uncertainty. In light of this, the majority of existing scholarship has concluded that over the past two decades, Russian peace operations have progressively been used to “freeze” the conflicts in pursuit of maintaining Moscow's regional hegemonic status (Popescu, 2006; McNeill, 1997) and to protect Moscow's strategic interests (Allison, 2013; Mackinlay, 2003; MacFarlane & Schnabel, 1995; Crowe, 1992; Baev, 1993, p. 142). Indeed, Russia's leadership since the early 1990s has pointed out the importance of its immediate neighbourhood in relation to matters of security, but above all as a means to facilitate – no matter in what disillusioned fashion –

Russia's "great power" status. This has become Russia's principal security logic structuring its discourse and approach towards the NIS.

Yet despite the discernible relationship between Russia's wider strategic aims and its behaviour towards the management of conflict along its regional periphery – which became more apparent during the mid-2000s –, the intrinsic problems of the regional conflicts' settlement processes are attributable towards a further factor which has yet to be considered: the inability to *institutionally learn*. Ramesh Thakur (2006, p. 41) crucially points out that each peace operation "has to make and learn from its own mistakes". In this light, this article argues that due to the absence of other solutions to resolve regional intra-state conflict, freezing can also be considered a *deliberate* policy in order to maintain regional stability. This approach has stemmed from Russia's lack of effective institutional learning in the doctrine and practice of peace operations, which has left it incapable of facilitating a durable settlement to the conflicts. In other words, Russia's failure to learn from and distinguish between previous mistakes and successes has negatively impacted its ability to facilitate a resolution to these conflicts. This explanation draws upon a persuasive sub-set of secondary security logics, which have been exercised both independently from and in support of Russia's wider strategic aims. These include: the maintenance of Russia's peripheral security, the protection of the Russian diaspora and the preservation of regional order and stability. These security logics are typically ignored or at the very most considered vehicles for the promotion of Russia's principal security logic. This is an unfair assessment of the core drivers underpinning Russian policy, as Moscow has legitimate concerns about real and credible threats that exist along its border.

The article therefore explores the relationship between Russian institutional learning and the politically charged environment in which it has unfolded, as a means to understand Russia's contribution towards regional processes of peace operations. This highlights the complexities of Russian behaviour as it pertains to both a foreign policy and issue area level of analysis, moving beyond a crude understanding of peace operations as a mere extension of strategic aims. This is important not only to dispel myths about Russia as a simple Westphalian security-actor, but primarily to interrogate how Russia understands the function and purpose of peace operations. The article begins with an overview of Russia's external policy towards the NIS since the early 1990s, in order to discuss the interplay of Russian regional security logics. It then provides a brief illustration of the evolution of doctrine and practice since the early 1990s, as a basis to juxtapose Russian regional responses in order to highlight the extent of its institutional learning in the following section. To demonstrate this, the article will only focus on the case-studies of Moldova and Georgia given that these intra-state conflicts offer the most informative insight into Russia's regional experience to date. The conclusion provides some brief comments on the current crisis in Ukraine and considers to what extent this is related to Russia's approach towards the management of regional intra-state conflict.

## 2. Russian regional security logics

Since the end of the Cold War, Russia's policy towards the NIS has been directed towards maintaining a regional sphere of interest. This has evolved amongst a thick-set of concerns about credible threats to Russia's security and of the region as a whole. The Caucasus remains an area of profound instability where threats such as extremism, terrorism, transnational crime, weak governance and intra-state conflict persist. Yet, in relation to the former, policy-

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makers have persistently advocated Russia's standing as a "great" but "normal" power, with a *legitimate* regional area of interests (see Kozyrev, 1992, p. 15; Primakov, 1996; Lavrov, 2012). Roy Allison (2013, p. 122) comments that "[f]or Russian leaders Moscow's relationships with CIS states were legitimately hierarchical; Russian leadership was assumed, as was renewed regional integration, centred around the gravitational pull of Moscow". Although Moscow has become the dominant regional actor, the former Soviet space is a complex region where the interests of external and local actors both "criss-cross and overlap" (Garnett, 1998, p. 64) creating possibilities of cooperation and confrontation. In this context, while the Kremlin may consider its regional neighbourhood a vital sphere of interests, Dmitri Trenin (2009, p. 18) points out that "Moscow's influence, although considerable, is nowhere dominant".

How to approach this region has become a focal concern for Russian policymakers, which although it "had for centuries been a matter of domestic policy for Moscow overnight [it] became a foreign policy challenge of the greatest immediacy" (Donaldson, 2000, p. 302). In this politically charged environment, Russian interests have been articulated in a thick set of secondary security logics, which have remained consistent over the past two decades. During the 1990s, Russian policy towards the NIS gradually emphasized Moscow's special ties to and interests in the region. President Yeltsin declared to the UN in 1995 that his country's "economic and foreign policy priorities lie in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. [...] Russia's ties with them are closer than traditional neighbourhood relations; rather, this is a blood relationship" (The Kremlin, 1995). Foreign Minister Kozyrev affirmed the importance of the immediate regional neighbourhood, pointing out the inevitable security vacuum and incursion of potentially hostile external actors if Russia was to leave this region (The Moscow Times, 1994). The issues concerning the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE) regarding the withdrawal of Russian troops and military bases from the former Soviet Republics reflected this logic in Russian regional policy, in that "firmly upholding the interests of the Russian-speaking population" in the neighboring republics is considered a precondition to withdrawal (Kozyrev, 1993). While this security logic prevailed under Primakov, it was made clear that Russia did not "want to restore the Soviet Union. Sovereignty of the countries of the CIS is irreversible" (Primakov, 1996). Alongside this thinking, Moscow saw itself as the natural guarantor of peace in the CIS through "the strengthening of regional stability, conflict prevention and resolution of local conflicts, especially near the Russian borders" (Ivanov, 1996).

After Yeltsin's tenure in office, Russian regional policies towards its immediate neighbourhood continued to adopt similar security logics. After the war with Georgia in 2008, President Medvedev's infamous words suggested the prevalence of the principal security logic in Russia's external policy. Medvedev declared "Russia, like other countries in the world, has regions where it has privileged interests. These are regions where countries with which we have friendly relations are located" (New York Times, 2008). The Russian Foreign Ministry (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005) echoed Yeltsin's 1994 comments, also emphasising the multi-faceted relationship between the regional counterparts, adding, "the Commonwealth is a living organism which continues to develop in accordance with the new conditions". With continued focus on the CIS, the protection of Russian citizens abroad prevails, as stated in the latest foreign policy concept (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013), as a central security logic. The concept also emphasizes the importance of conflict settlement and that Russia must endeavour to promote good relations with the NIS, and prevent regional conflicts.

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Russia views integration of the regional neighbourhood as not only favourable to the NIS, but also towards the maintenance of Moscow's hegemony. While Russia has acknowledged that the NIS are able to choose their own direction of development (Primakov, 1996), Moscow has also made it clear to the region that the adoption of a path at the expense of Russia's interests will incur consequences. Russia has occasionally utilized the distribution of gas instrumentally, interfered in the political elections of neighbouring states, and has shown a willingness to use force when necessary. The current crisis in Ukraine has, for many Western commentators, demonstrated the lengths to which Russia's leadership will go in pursuing a deliberately confrontational policy for the protection of what they consider to be unconditional interests. Despite this, secondary security logics detached from their wider rationale of strategic interest have also played an influential role in shaping Russia's behaviour towards this neighbourhood, particularly the conflicts on its regional periphery. Therefore, the degree in which Russia has engaged in the evolution of international doctrine and practice, as noted below, is central to understanding the interplay of these security logics.

### 3. Transitions in doctrine and practice of peace operations

Conducting and contributing towards peace operations remains a challenging undertaking for intervening forces, particularly with the increased complexities of intra-state conflict (see Kaldor, 2007). The threshold for a participating actor's institutional ability to learn quickly and effectively has become extremely high, and since the early 1990s the evolution of doctrine and practice has been extraordinary. The issue area of peace operations has become considerably discursive and acquired a complex and at times confusing terminology (Wagnsson & Holmberg, 2014, p. 325). Indicative of this, are stabilization operations and counterinsurgency (COIN) which have until recently entered the peace operations' lexicon due to the recent experiences of largely Western military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan. There is an ongoing debate, however, concerning the conceptual linkages of stabilization and COIN to existing doctrine and practice of peace operations.

Making sense of this policy area has proved to be challenging for the analyst. The UN's Peacekeeping Operations Principles and Guidelines (also known as the Capstone Doctrine) (2008, pp. 17-18; also see Paris, 2004, pp. 38-39) provides a succinct catalogue of methods recognized here under the banner of peace operations and including the following concepts and definitions thereof. *Conflict prevention* is the application of structural or diplomatic measures to ensure that tensions and disputes do not escalate into violent conflict. *Peacekeeping* attempts to preserve the peace and to help in establishing agreements achieved by the peacemakers. It includes the observation of cease-fires, the separation and confinement of military forces, the delivery of humanitarian aid, and the protection of civilians (in its robust form). *Peace enforcement* involves the application, with the authorization of the Security Council, of a range of coercive measures, including the use of military force. Such actions are authorized to restore international peace and security in situations where the Security Council has determined the existence of a threat to the peace, breach of the peace or act of aggression. *Peacemaking* includes measures to address and to stop conflicts already in progress and involves diplomatic and mediation efforts to bring each conflicting party to the negotiating table. *Peacebuilding* involves establishing the foundations for sustainable peace and development by addressing core problems that affect the functioning of society and the state.

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In relation to these approaches, it is possible to discern broad shifts in doctrine and practice. The cardinal principles of *consent*, *impartiality*, and *the non-use of force except in self-defence* have experienced extensive recalibration in an attempt to craft the most effective and appropriate methods (McCoubrey & Morris, 2000, p. 49). What is noticeable is the revision of the ways these principles have been mutually conceptualized at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. In addition, the multiplicity of actors has also increased, facilitating other means such as peacebuilding and conflict prevention. There are, however, particular underlying continuities present in these broader shifts of doctrine and practice: first, such operations possess a humanitarian dimension and are for the maintenance of peace; second, the use of force has become increasingly recognized as an acceptable and necessary measure in specific circumstances; third, intervening actors must also employ methods beyond military force, including peacebuilding for operational success; fourth, the salience of state sovereignty remains highly contested if a conflict threatens international peace.

The end of the Cold War marked a period in which there was a renewed focus upon the United Nations as the arbiter of international politics. Alongside traditional enforcement actions against Iraqi forces in 1991 under Chapter VII of the UN Charter (which gives the Security Council the right to use force as a last resort in order to maintain peace), peace operations have remained a central component in the UN's arsenal to maintain international peace. The early 1990s proved to be a steep learning curve for both the United Nations, as a result of the circumstances in which intervening forces found themselves. Former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's *An Agenda for Peace* (1992) was the first report which advocated the expansion of the UN's role in managing conflict, emphasizing the necessity for the wider use of force (specified under Chapter VII, Article 42) – alongside peacekeeping and conflict prevention – in order to maintain ceasefires (ibid: paragraph 44).

Imbued by the UN's call for firmer measures to preserve peace in war-torn societies, these peace operations were much larger, launched into situations where the conflict was still raging, and utilized more robust methods (Frantzen, 2005, p. 47). Inevitably, there was confusion and failure in places such as Somalia, Rwanda, and Bosnia where intervening forces attempted to interpret UN doctrine as a means of best practice, thereby blurring the lines between peacekeeping and peace enforcement (Gray, 2008, p. 282). US involvement in Somalia confirmed the dangers of becoming a party to the conflict through a lack of consent and impartiality, and the use of disproportionate force. As understood at the time, the danger of crossing the *consent-divide* (referred to as the "Mogadishu Line") from peacekeeping to "war-fighting" was persistently reiterated in other conflicts, such as Bosnia (see Rose, 1998).

The perceived failures in doctrine and practice of the early to mid-1990s, and the greater use of peace enforcement demonstrated by Operation Deliberate Force (1995) in Bosnia resulted in a renewed degree of caution by the UN as to the role of an intervening force (see Boutros-Ghali, 1995). Adam Roberts (1994, p. 41) explains that during this period doctrine and practice faced an inherent dilemma where intervening forces had to choose between either losing credibility for not acting (as in Rwanda and in the "safe areas" in Bosnia) or losing impartiality for potentially overreacting (as in Somalia in 1993). This debate unfolded in the academic community where some commentators argued for a return to traditional forms of peace operations, or as a minimum a strict adherence to robust peacekeeping without recourse to the use of force (Tardy, 2011; Thakur, 1994). Others claimed that present methods were acceptable but required further integration and coordination (Berdal, 2000; Goulding, 1993, p. 461).

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Departing from the dilemma premised on the consent-divide, and the UN's cautionary stance, many actors favoured the latter path (UK, 2012, 2011, 2004; NATO, 2001, 1995). This direction in development emphasized the necessity for more forceful, yet integrated methods alongside deeper civil-military cooperation through a reconceptualization of consent in the multifunctional peace support operation (PSO) (Bellamy & Williams, 2010, p. 279). According to NATO (2001, p. 21) the PSO is based on the consent and/or non-consent of the parties to the agreement and not against any biased or predetermined designation. In this regards, the PSO owes no allegiance to any party to the conflict and can *shift* between a peacekeeping and peace enforcement posture depending on the levels of consent. The salience of the use of force and the adoption of multifunctional approaches have also been promoted by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UNDPKO), as illustrated by the so-called Brahimi Report (Brahimi, 2000, chapter 2, paragraph 50, p. 9).

Peace operations have gradually taken on this new character in which the impartial and proportionate use of force is more readily acknowledged. There has also been a discernible effort in promoting peacebuilding in regions of conflict, demonstrated by the wide endorsement of multidimensional or comprehensive peace operations by a multitude of actors, where "a range of components including military, civilian police, political, civil affairs, rule of law, human rights, humanitarian, reconstruction, public information and gender" (UN, 2003, p. 1) are deployed for the long term maintenance of peace. Accordingly, doctrine and practice attributed to the PSO and multidimensional operations have been employed by both the UN and regional actors at different times and in different conflict zones during the post-Cold War period, ranging from the Balkans, to the Democratic Republic of Congo, and most recently Mali.

Certain actors, largely situated within the Western liberal democracies, have attempted, however, to revise further doctrine and practice through the reshaping of global norms regarding the provision on the use of force. David Chandler (2012, p. 224) contends that the turn towards coercive intervention in human security framings which focus on non-Western subjects has come to dominate security discourses surrounding peace operations. Military intervention, as a form of peace enforcement under Chapter VII of the Charter, has been adopted and used across state borders to prevent or stop states from persecuting their own citizens (Holzgrefe, 2003, p. 18). Although widely deemed illegal if legitimate, the NATO bombing campaign Operation Allied Force (1999) against Belgrade raised further questions about the validity of norms concerning state sovereignty.

This issue has become further entrenched within international discourse through the promotion of R2P and the notion of sovereignty as responsibility as put forward in the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) (2001), and unanimously endorsed by the General Assembly in the 2005 World Summit Outcome. The concept of R2P stipulates that it is: first, any state's responsibility to protect its citizens from fear and want; second, the international community must engage in preventive measures by assisting the state's capacity to fulfil the requirements of the first pillar; third, if the state fails in its responsibility towards its citizens, the UN Security Council must use all necessary methods in a timely and decisive response in the protection of these citizens. Yet the concept of R2P has been diluted considerably from its original form and has altered nothing as the P5 members of the UNSC, to a large extent, still pursue policy in accordance with their vital interests, the criterion for intervention has been limited to specific circumstances, and the UNSC has ensured that it is not obliged to invoke R2P in times of crisis (Hehir, 2010, p. 222). R2P has also received considerable

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opposition and disapproval from particular members of the UN who fear that the erosion of sovereignty will result in anarchy, and view military intervention under R2P as both a pretext for regime change and a cloak for the promotion of post-colonial hegemonic interests (Thakur, 2013, p. 66; Morris, 2013, p. 1280). Besides the case of Libya (2011) – which in retrospect is less of a triumph than first realized – R2P continues to face widespread contestation, and has failed to be invoked in situations such as Darfur (and possibly Syria) where there are legitimate grounds for intervention. Irrespective of its architects' intentions, R2P has not substituted existing approaches even in the most extreme cases of human rights abuses. It is questionable whether R2P, as a means to reconceptualize the use of force under the traditional banner of humanitarian intervention, has offered a new direction in the management of conflict.

#### 4. Russia's doctrinal understanding

This section will provide an overview of Russia's doctrinal understanding in light of the above discussion. Prior to Russia's involvement in the individual peace operations that began to populate the former Soviet space during the 1990s, Russian military forces and diplomatic ministries had little experience that could reflect a sound grasp of the fundamental rules of engagement characterizing peace operations. Russian defence and security culture had been crafted and shaped by the Soviet military machine responsible for conducting on the one hand large-scale conventional warfare (aimed at defeating NATO), and on the other high-intensity counter-insurgency operations (Afghanistan). Thus, Russia entered the 1990s without any knowledge about how to conduct a peace operation, and with the disastrous Afghan experience still fresh in the institutional thinking of the Russian power ministries.

Since its regional participation in such operations, Russia has sporadically engaged in the minor development of doctrine. This doctrinal thinking has been defined in Russian terminology as *mirotvorchestvo*, which in its literal sense means "peacemaking" or "peace-creating" (Allison, 1994). There has been further debate as to Russia's precise doctrinal understanding of peace operations. Some scholarship contends that *mirotvorcheskii operatsii* (peace-creating operations) are used to enforce a peace on the opposing parties as

Russian military views on the conduct of peacekeeping operations are strikingly different from thinking in the West. Perhaps the fundamental difference concerns the concept of low-intensity conflicts. While Western theories suggest a rather ambivalent link, in Russia peacekeeping remains part and parcel of conflict-waging. (Baev, 1998, p. 216)

This argument is based on the behaviour of Russian military units during the initial stages of conflict in the regional wars of the 1990s. Others advocate that Russia's adoption of peace-creating is an umbrella term used to cover a range of methods, in accordance with the evolution of international doctrine and practice (Nikitin, 2014). This contrast is significant when determining the nature of Russia's thinking and intentions underpinning its approach. As will be demonstrated below, Russia's doctrinal approach is characterized by the latter understanding.

As early as 1992 the newly formed regional organization, the CIS, introduced the Agreement on Groups of Military Observers and the Collective Peacekeeping Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The document was the first collective effort by the CIS to draft a set of guidelines as to the application of peace operations. The agreement, however, was modest in scope only focusing on peacekeeping methods that were based on a strict adherence to consent,

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impartiality, and the non-use of force except in self-defence (Article 2). The agreement did, nevertheless, recognize “assistance [in] ensuring human rights and freedoms, [and] the provision of humanitarian assistance” as the additional responsibilities of peacekeeping duties (Article 3). Russia’s Military Doctrine (1993) was more ambiguous, vaguely mentioning that Russia would use various approaches such as political, diplomatic, and other peaceful means to ensure the security of Russia and the international community. Foreign Minister Kozyrev (1993) in an article for *Krasnaia Zvezda* offered further insight, stipulating that the responsibilities of a peace operation may include the separation of the warring sides, monitoring of both the ceasefire and the delivery of aid, demilitarization of the conflict zone, and the establishment of safety areas.

During the mid-1990s Russia and the CIS engaged in further doctrinal development through the Regulations on the Collective Peacekeeping Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States (Commonwealth of Independent States, 1996). This did not depart, however, from existing doctrine as consent was still viewed as central to the integrity of an operation (paragraph 3); the intervening force must still adhere to the principles of impartiality (paragraph 23), and could only use force in self-defence or in defence of civilians (paragraph 27). Russia also recognized the utility of peace enforcement as a means to restore intra-state peace, yet still conceptualized its understanding of force on the consent-divide:

Elements of enforcement as well as the dosage use of a forceful military factor (in separation of the parties, establishing buffer zones, carrying out emergency humanitarian tasks, etc.) do have the right of existence as extraordinary measures for the restoration and maintenance of peace. The Somali and Yugoslav experiences have, however, highlighted the practical incompatibility of traditional and enforcement mandates in one operation. (Lavrov, 1996, p. 26)

In a peacekeeping capacity, Russia’s understanding also acknowledged that the role of intervening forces should consist of a diverse catalogue of responsibilities, including: the monitoring of ceasefire agreements, separating the warring parties, promoting the de-concentration of the parties, restoring law and order for the restoration of the state and public functions, and facilitating the smooth delivery of humanitarian aid to the civilian population (CIS, 1996, paragraph 6; also see Russia’s Military Doctrine, 2000). Since the 1990s, while the Russian Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) have failed to craft further official doctrine available in the public domain, Russia’s understanding has remained consistent since it normalized after the initial period of doctrinal disorder and regional conflict. Moreover, Russian representatives at the United Nations have occasionally commented on the necessity of conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction efforts as a means to sustain peace before and after periods of conflict (Churkin, 2009; Lavrov, 1996).

Russian doctrinal understanding of peace operations has primarily remained in accordance with international thinking that was prevalent during the early to mid-1990s; and, although the doctrine developed in this period remains relevant today, it lacks the comprehensive nature of subsequent doctrine and the willingness to incorporate force beyond defensive measures, transcending passive and static approaches. While Russia has gradually come to recognize the use of an array of methods – as in accordance with the UN Capstone Doctrine – under the broad banner of peace-creating, it is unclear in Russian thinking how these instruments operationally coexist in relation to the above notions. This is especially apparent regarding the use of force in peace-creating operations, where there is still an inherent degree of “mission creep” in the

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Russian military and policy community concerning the impact of force on the consent-divide. Russia has also consistently supported state-sovereignty and opposed the strategic use of force which it views as inadmissible in international affairs (Putin, 2013; Lavrov, 2011). Moreover, while there have been remarks regarding the necessity of civil-society initiatives by Russian diplomats at the UN, this has not suggested a systemic level of understanding and expertise regarding these approaches throughout the Russian political and military establishments. Pavel Baev (1993, p. 141) points out that “[t]he idea of peace-building (i.e. social reconstruction) remains essentially foreign, mainly due to the dangerous erosion of the socio-economic fabric in the newly-born states, all ripe for social conflicts”.

## 5. Russian regional operations: putting it into practice

Putting its doctrinal understanding into practice has been a challenge for Russia’s power ministries. The disintegration of the Soviet Union triggered a period of political, economic, and societal turmoil in Russia’s immediate neighbourhood. As a result, a string of deep and protracted conflicts erupted along Russia’s regional periphery. Many Russian military units found themselves in the midst of these intra-state conflicts on deployments related to a bygone era. With minimal to no experience, intermittent guidance from Moscow, and in some cases strong cultural and ethnic ties with the region, the local units were far from ideal as a means to legitimately mitigate the violence. As noted above, while the principal security logic has driven Russian behaviour towards the NIS as a whole, the continuity of the relationship between Russia’s wider strategic aims and its contribution in practice towards the individual settlement processes is more ambiguous. Interceding in this relationship is Russia’s failure to learn institutionally from practice and to adapt to the changes on the ground, limiting Russia’s options in solving the conflicts.

The use of force in Russia’s approach towards the conflicts in Moldova and Georgia has been erratic and inconsistent. During the early 1990s, Russian troops participated alongside the separatist entities of Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia in an effort to establish peace by defeating Moldovan and Georgian government forces. Typical of this behaviour was the conflict that erupted in Moldova in 1992 between the central authority in Chisinau and the Transnistrian separatists. The war began as a result of Transnistria’s attempt to secede from a nationalist Moldova and policies of unification with Romania (Hill, 2012, pp. 49-50). Major hostilities broke out in 1992 with a Moldovan offensive against Transnistrian forces around the city of Bendery, followed by skirmishes in the ensuing months. Violence also erupted in South Ossetia (1992) and Abkhazia (1992) due to similar nationalist sentiment influencing the policies of Georgia’s government in Tbilisi, and a desire by the separatists to become further reliant on Russia as a means to gain independence (Ozhiganov, 1997, pp. 341-342). In each case, Russian troops stationed amidst these “hot spots” took an active part in the cessation of the violence, providing logistical support, and occasionally using force. In Transnistria the Russian 14<sup>th</sup> Army commanded by General Alexander Lebed intervened on the side of the separatists and helped to repel Moldovan attacks on Bendery in 1992 resulting in an end to the hostilities, while in Georgia, Russian local military forces began to provide support and direct military assistance against Georgian government forces. After the Sochi Talks and ceasefire agreement in 1993, Abkhazian troops reinforced by Russian military units launched a major offensive aimed to expel Georgian forces from Abkhaz territory. However, in each case, there is no definitive evidence to suggest that Russian military units received direct orders from Moscow. Baev (2003,

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p. 140) goes as far as to suggest that “the decision to launch an operation [...] or to withdraw, was taken in the Kremlin; all the details, however, were left to the military to sort out without even a symbolic political oversight”.

Despite Russia’s violation of the rules of engagement underpinning internationally recognized doctrine and practice at the time through a lack of consent, impartiality, and the use of disproportionate force, Russian troops – on an ad hoc and reactive basis – engaged in an approach which by the mid-1990s had become more acceptable in terms of the use of force. General Lebed pointed out that “[s]urprise, precise, powerful pre-emptive strikes, as well as the availability of backup mobile armoured groups, forced the initiators of the military conflict to come to the negotiation table” (BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 1994). The Russian Foreign Ministry also remarked that the only way to bring about a swift and lasting peace is to use “forcible methods in order to convince an enemy or more precisely a conflicting side to embark on a path of negotiations and seek peace” (Lynch, 2000, pp. 116-117). Nevertheless, this practice was not perfected or built upon suggesting that, in fact, these levels of force were reactive and outcomes largely determined by the inexperience of local Russian troops, and the typical turmoil following early periods of political transition from the break-up of a contiguous land empire.

Caution should also be taken when considering whether the use of force against Georgia in 2008 was also a reflection of Russia’s understanding of peace operations. Russia justified its actions based on secondary security logics in preventing further humanitarian catastrophe, maintaining stability and order, and in self-defence (Medvedev, 2008) as a result of Georgia’s attack on both South Ossetia and the Russian peacekeeping contingent stationed in the area. In spite of this, it is widely agreed that Moscow’s reaction towards Tbilisi demonstrated a *political* decision primarily in support of the principal security logic. Roy Allison (2009, p. 173; 2008; 2014) points out that Moscow’s actions towards Georgia in 2008 and the subsequent recognition of Abkhaz and South Ossetian independence is “strongly influenced by political self-interest and Russian views about its entitlement within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region”. A caveat is placed, however, on the generalizability of these conclusions on Russia’s behaviour towards the entirety of these regional conflicts.

In this regard, analysis should refrain from overstating Russia’s use of force during the initial stages of the conflicts and in 2008 as a basis to explain Russian peace operations (see Sagramosa, 2003; Lynch, 2000; Baev, 1998), since the use of force in both Moldova and Georgia has not been utilized on an operational or strategic level outside of these specific episodes. Indeed, after the enforcement of the ceasefires in these regions, peace operations based on wider-peacekeeping mandates were established through trilateral formats (Joint Control Commission) in South Ossetia (1992) and Transnistria (1992), and (symbolic) institutional arrangements under the CIS in Abkhazia (1992). The UN monitored the Abkhazian operation through the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), while in South Ossetia and Transnistria the OSCE provided observer missions.

These individual operations failed to adapt to the changes on the ground and were wedded to traditional interpretations of consent, impartiality, and the non-use of force except in self-defence. Russia’s approach towards peacemaking reveals this doctrinal thinking, in that the formats of the settlements were established on the basis of a collective consensus of all the parties. Russia, as the dominant arbiter in the settlement processes, remained committed to this format as it was shaped by doctrine that emphasized the logic of mutual decision-making. In relation to

*Analysis should refrain from overstating Russia’s use of force during the initial stages of the conflicts and in 2008 as a basis to explain Russian peace operations*

the settlement processes in Georgia, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov (2004) commented that “[w]e are convinced that the route to settlement lies in the active use of these mechanisms and in the inducement of the sides to find via these mechanisms mutually acceptable agreements”. Russian policymakers argue that only an inclusive dialogue can provide an opportunity for a common agreement and lasting peace (Yakovenko, 2003). Russia on several occasions promoted peace agreements – most notably the Russian Draft Memorandum on the Basic Principles on the State Structure of a United State in Moldova (The Kremlin, 2003) (generally referred to as the Kozak Memorandum) – in these settlement processes to have them rejected not only by the opposing sides, but also by the formal observers on the grounds that they either favoured Russia or were not mutually beneficial for the opposing parties. Russia’s refusal to change the format of the JCC and the peacemaking framework to allow for further flexibility in decision-making, has been accused of deliberately freezing the conflicts in order to serve Russian regional strategic interests (Popescu, 2006, p. 7 & 2012, p. 4). While the status quo indeed served Russia’s wider strategic aims, Russia’s opposition to the altering of the political framework derived from a concern that such an action would irrevocably change the shared understanding of consent to which its approach remained committed – however problematic in terms of effectively solving the conflicts and in light of the international progression of doctrinal thinking.

Similarly, there were instances which necessitated the adaptation of peacekeeping functions to reflect the evolutionary trajectory of international doctrine and practice, especially in relation to the use of force. This is particularly the case regarding the settlement process in Abkhazia, where the opposing parties consistently breached the mandate of the peacekeeping mission. In 1998, for instance, a resumption of large scale violence between Abkhaz and Georgian-backed paramilitary forces caused further chaos to an already unstable region. According to a representative of the Russian Foreign Ministry, Russian forces did not act in order to stop the crisis as “under the current mandate the ‘blue helmets’ [Russian peacekeepers] only have the right to intervene in the actions of subversive and terrorist groups by *agreement* and in *cooperation* with the conflicting parties” [emphasis added]. There were further occasions during this peacekeeping mission – the area of the Kodori Gorge was a haven for Georgian paramilitary units – where the use of force, at a tactical and operational level, was overlooked as a means of deterrence. At the same time, in South Ossetia, coinciding with Georgia’s Rose Revolution and Mikheil Saakashvili’s rise to power in the mid-2000s, tensions and incidents began to increase without further measures being implemented on the ground. Certainly, not all situations warranted the use of force as a means to facilitate the settlement processes, as in Transnistria the atmosphere of hostility between the opposing sides has yet to provoke any large scale military clashes. Ultimately, in circumstances where the use of force was necessary to establish peace, Russian forces lacked the political will for fear of causing further destabilization and the institutional understanding of its value in such settings, rather than a profound level of self-interest about where and when to deploy it.

This uneasiness in using force is a feature of the deliberate but unorthodox development of the trilateral peacekeeping formats in Transnistria and South Ossetia. Russian military and policy planners believed that such arrangements – where the parties to the conflict are included in the peacekeeping forces – would facilitate further transparency. This, it is advocated, enables the forces to abide by the notions of consent and impartiality. In Abkhazia, while it was a unilateral rather than trilateral force, Russia also built its operation upon corresponding notions. Yet in each of these conflict zones Russia failed to apply comprehensively its understanding of pea-

*Russian forces lacked the political will for fear of causing further destabilization and the institutional understanding of its value in such settings*

cekeeping in relation to either/or all of the following: the protection and return of refugees, the delivery of humanitarian aid, and the facilitation of order through law enforcement. As a result, the individual missions failed to exercise a pro-active peacekeeping approach. Abkhazia serves as a prime example of this where the Russian peacekeeping contingent failed to expand their mandate to include police functions, and did not make a sustained attempt to return refugees (although due to the inadequate size of the operation it was virtually impossible for the intervening forces to ensure the return of refugees *en masse* into a post-conflict zone which was still insecure). The situation was similar in South Ossetia where the trilateral peacekeeping contingent, while acting as a buffer between the opposing sides, was a static force only engaging in mine-clearance and regular patrolling (Reeve, 2014). There is evidence, however, of doctrinal development through the training of law enforcement personnel by the Russian Ministry of the Interior (MOI) (2015)<sup>1</sup>. This, however, has been minimal and aimed at international rather than regional missions, with little cross-border interaction between the power ministries in cultivating effective regional approaches.

The disconnection between Russian doctrine and practice regarding the scope of peacekeeping responsibilities in these conflicts is apparent. In practice, Russia has failed to acknowledge that peace operations have become progressively multidimensional and, therefore, humanitarian aid and post-conflict reconstruction has been limited in these areas of instability. For instance, the Co-Chairman of the Joint Control Commission commented in 2004 that the peace operation in South Ossetia was beginning to fail as “there was still an atmosphere of distrust between the sides” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004) because complete demilitarization had not occurred, roads and communications were still largely blocked which remained the principal obstacles to the delivery of aid to the civilians in the conflict zone, and the advancement of economic rehabilitation was negligible. Indeed, since the beginning of Putin’s first presidential term, Russia has even used bilateral trade as a political lever (Tolstrup, 2009) against each of the parties to the conflicts. Yet, through organizations such as the Ministry of Emergency Situations (EMERCOM)<sup>2</sup> there have been some attempts to alleviate the above problems, as in 2006 where EMERCOM, via a convoy transiting through Ukrainian territory, delivered aid to the people of Transnistria (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2006). These operations, however, have been modest due to low level institutional coordination between the MoD and EMERCOM. Only after the war in 2008 have EMERCOM’s peacebuilding activities increased indicating the underlying political agenda behind Russia’s regional policies. In addition, where NGOs have engaged in peacebuilding initiatives this has been met with considerable suspicion by Russian authorities (Ivanov, 2004) and as a consequence interaction with the peacekeeping forces has been negligible.

*Russia has failed to acknowledge that peace operations have become progressively multidimensional*

## 6. Conclusion

Since the early 1990s, the development in doctrine and practice of peace operations has demonstrated a gradual progression of the aims, purposes, and methods used to facilitate peace as a means to transcend the containment or freezing of the conflict. While there are nuances between certain actors – particularly amongst the P5 in the Security Council – this

<sup>1</sup> The MOI has to a limited degree invested in training facilities for law enforcement officers and staff of internal affairs agencies deploying on peacekeeping missions.

<sup>2</sup> For further insight see Renz (2010).

article has revealed a number of trends which have either emerged or have been reinforced to reflect changes in the perception of security and how to tackle intra-state conflict (Tardy, 2004, p. 3). These include: a further emphasis on the humanitarian dimension of operations, an acceptance of the use of force as a necessary measure in specific circumstances, a reliance on methods which target the root causes of conflict, and an acknowledgement that the norm of sovereignty remains a highly contentious issue even if a conflict directly threatens civilians and international peace.

In this light, Russia's approach towards the post-Soviet conflicts, as demonstrated in Georgia and Moldova, has shown that the deliberate freezing of the settlement processes has not only been an expression of Russia's regional principal security logic, but also a consequence of Russia's institutional failure to learn doctrine and practice as it has evolved over the past two decades. Freezing the conflicts – regardless of the sporadic and selective peacemaking initiatives – was considered by Russia's political leadership as a viable option in support of Moscow's secondary security logics. Rather, Russia's approach towards the management of the conflicts lacked the institutional knowledge for the provision of durable peace in Transnistria, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia. This has been demonstrated by Russia's equally intransigent approach towards doctrine and practice. With regards to the latter this is even more problematic, because while it largely adheres to a set of core principles – consent, impartiality, and the non-use of force except in self-defence – it has failed to consistently apply instruments such as peacebuilding and wider forms of peacekeeping as recognized by its own doctrine. This approach has primarily been shaped by Russia's inexperience in managing conflict, a lack of adaptation to the rapid changes on the ground, and as a result of further explanations in Russian security culture.

Nevertheless, how the Russian leadership has chosen to approach regional intra-state conflict in the last decade has certainly unfolded amidst the interplay of Russia's secondary and principal security logics. Indeed, the credibility of Moscow as an impartial third party guarantor has been compromised on particular occasions especially since the early- to mid-2000s. This interaction between security logics has become a *tension* reflected in Russia's approach towards the current crisis in Ukraine, demonstrating concerns for the loss of hegemonic status and for the spread of regional instability. This has resulted in a “Jekyll and Hyde” policy where the political leadership in Moscow has been acutely aware of its interests being side-lined by external actors in Ukraine and in the region as a whole. This has led to the orchestrating of a referendum in the Crimea, the use of information warfare to domestic and international audiences, and to the provision of (at least) tacit support for separatist forces in the Donbas, in what one scholar has labelled a “deniable intervention” (Allison, 2014). Despite this, the Russian leadership also views itself as a guarantor of peace, justifying its policies towards the crisis as preserving the international legal order from actors intentionally violating basic principles of law through the incitement of revolution in Kiev (Putin, 2014), through the protection of the Russian diaspora (ibid), and through the maintenance of regional stability and order (Lavrov, 2015). Russia has therefore engaged in peace-brokering in Geneva and Minsk, and continues to deliver humanitarian aid, albeit under controversial circumstances, to the worst affected areas of the fighting.

Problematically, Russia has been selective about the doctrine and practice it has engaged in. Thus, explanations based on the effectiveness of Russian institutional learning have less bearing on how Moscow has chosen to approach this crisis. Yet, to what extent Russia's response towards this intra-state conflict demonstrates *the* watershed in how it responds to regional intra-state violence is a question which requires further attention. What is certain, however,

*The credibility of Moscow as an impartial third party guarantor has been compromised on particular occasions especially since the early- to mid-2000s*



is that policy towards regional conflict is primarily contingent upon the manner of interaction between Russia's layers of security logics as they navigate a neighbourhood populated by actors who are increasingly looking westwards for their security.

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