# Explaining Foreign Policy Formation in Georgia, 1991-2012:
# A Neoclassical Realist Perspective

*Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of MPhil in Russian and East European Studies at the University of Oxford*

## Abstract

This research examines specific 'moments' in recent Georgian history: the 'chaos' of 1991–1992, the 'consolidation' of 1992-2003, and the 'control' of 2004-2012. Using these periods of time as a series of small case studies, this thesis proposes a neoclassical realist model to identify the conditions under which a small state is more likely to pursue a structurally divergent rather than structurally defined foreign policy. In examining these case studies, this research indicates that Georgia exhibited structurally divergent foreign policy when objectivity was significantly compromised by domestic variables. This suggests that the degree to which the country's future foreign policy is structurally defined will depend on the level to which domestic factors distort the state's ability to act objectively as a unitary, rational actor.

# Table of Contents

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Georgia


**Figure 1.** *Caucasus and Central Asia (political) Map.* 2005. 1:19,000,000. "The Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection," University of Texas Libraries.

The country of Georgia is far more strategically important than its size might initially suggest. It lies in a crucial geographical intersection between Russia, Iran, and Turkey, and has become an increasingly vital transport corridor between Europe and Central Asia (fig. 1).[1] Georgia has served as a crossroads of culture and influence throughout history.[2] After the Ottoman Empire captured Constantinople in 1453,

[1] Svante Cornell, "Security Threats and Challenges in the Caucasus after 9/11." In *Eurasia in Balance: US and the Regional Power Shift*, ed. Ariel Cohen (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 56-62.

[2] Eric Lee, *The Experiment: Georgia's Forgotten Revolution 1918-1921,* (Zed Books Ltd.: London, 2017), 1.

the country became an entrenched battleground between Safavid Persia and the Ottoman Empire.[3] Amidst these Muslim powers, Georgia looked to Orthodox Russia for protection, and the country gave up all autonomy as it was absorbed into the Russian Empire.[4] After the Bolshevik Revolution, the newly formed Republic of Georgia sought direct links with Europe, and chose to pursue social democracy, rather than join in the Communist revolution of their near neighbor.[5] However, this experiment with democracy was short lived, and this period of independence ended after Georgia was forcefully integrated into the Soviet Union.[6]

After declaring independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Georgia struggled to establish its statehood. The country lacked a strong democratic tradition, had little in the way of financial resources, and suffered from an inexperienced and underdeveloped class of political elites.[7] An initial scholarly analysis of Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia in 1995 gave the assessment that in regard to domestic and foreign policy, "Georgia has played a weak hand poorly, Azerbaijan has played a relatively strong hand poorly, and Armenia has played a weak hand relatively

---

[3] Kornely Kakachia and Salome Minesashvili. "Identity Politics: Exploring Georgian Foreign Policy Behavior." *Journal of Eurasian Studies*6, no. 2 (2015): 173-174.

[4] Lee, *The Experiment*, 1.

[5] Revaz Gachechiladze, "Geopolitics and Foreign Powers in the Modern History of Georgia." In *The Making of Modern Georgia, 1918-2012: The First Georgian Republic and Its Successors*, ed. Stephen Jones (Routledge: London, 2014), 22-25.

[6] Lee, *The Experiment,* 1.

[7] Kakachia and Minesashvili, "Identity Politics," 174.

skilfully."[8] Now however, in contrast to Armenia's close ties with Russia, and to what some scholars have called Azerbaijan's "Finlandization" policy of neutrality, Georgia stands out for its democratization and its relationship with the West.[9] Wedged between much larger powers and aligned differently from its neighbours, the country stands out as the subject of serious debate between scholars seeking to understand its foreign policy behaviour.

## 1.2. Theoretical Purpose

Unfortunately, most of the proposed theoretical narratives fall short of providing a thorough explanation for Georgia's foreign policy behaviour. For example, neorealism, one of the most well-known schools of thought in International Relations, is based on the premise that states act in their own best interest in an anarchic environment.[10] States will align with other states or balance against them in order to survive.[11]

---

[8] Jonathan Aves, "National Security and Military Issues in the South Caucasus: The Cases of Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Armenia." In *State Building and Military Power in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, ed. by Bruce Parrott (Routledge: New York, 1995), 5:Sec 1. Electronic Legal Deposit (eLD.)

[9] John Ishiyama, Lia Mezvrishvili, and Nina Zhgenti. "An Oasis of Democracy in an Authoritarian Sea? Civil Society, Social, and Institutional Trust in Georgia." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 51, no. 1 (2018): 19-20.; Michael Cecire, "Georgian Democracy: An Island, Not a Beacon," *New American Weekly*, October 13, 2016;. Anar Valiyev, "Azerbaijan-Russia Relations after Five-day War: Friendship, Enmity, or Pragmatism?" *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (2011): 135.; Sergey Minasyan, "Multi-vectorism in the Foreign Policy of Post-soviet Eurasian States." *Demokratizatsiya* 20, no. 3 (2012): 268-69.

[10] Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, (McGraw-Hill: New York, London, 1979), 16-21.

[11] Kenneth Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics." *International Security* 18, no. 2 (1993): 70-79.

However, this theoretical framework does not adequately explain Georgia's behaviour. Neorealism would predict that a small state such as Georgia should seek to bandwagon with Russia rather than try to balance against such a great power, especially given the absence of any strong support from other countries. Yet Gvalia notes that while "Azerbaijan and most of the other small post-Soviet states have pursued a cautious bandwagoning policy towards Russia, post-Soviet Georgia has been consistently edging westward since the 'Rose Revolution' despite its contiguity with Russia and thus vulnerability to economic and military threats."[12] As Georgian scholar Alexander Rondeli argues, Georgia's "attempts to integrate" into "European structures" goes against "all geopolitical arguments and even common sense," and Nodia writes that Georgia's foreign policy choices are not "based on material necessity or strict logic."[13]

Georgia's behaviour as a small state is also bewildering from a materialist, or economic dependence perspective. Scholars like Eric Miller or Paul Papayoanou emphasize the role of economic dependence in influencing the foreign policy preferences of states.[14] If a state is economically dependent on another state, it would be less likely to balance against that state, in order to avoid economic repercussions.

---

[12] Giorgi Gvalia, David Siroky, Bidzina Lebanidze, and Zurab Iashvili. "Thinking Outside the Bloc: Explaining the Foreign Policies of Small States." *Security Studies* 22, no. 1 (2013): 100.

[13] Alexander Rondeli, "The Choice of Independent Georgia." In *The Security of the Caspian Sea Region*, ed. Gennady Chufrin, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 195.; Ghia Nodia, "Components of the Georgian National Idea: An Outline." *Identity Studies in the Caucasus and the Black Sea Region* 1, no. 1 (2009): 95.

[14] Eric Miller, *To Balance or Not to Balance: Alignment Theory and Commonwealth of Independent States.* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 3-4.; Paul A. Papayoanou, "Economic Interdependence and the Balance of Power," International Studies Quarterly 41, no. 1 (March 1997): 113–40.

Once again, however, this is a less than satisfactory explanation when it comes to Georgia. For most theories of economic incentives and resource dependence, the economic pressure exerted by Russia should result in bandwagoning behaviour from Georgia, but this is not supported by the empirical evidence.[15] Georgia still gains far more direct economic benefits from Russia, than it does from European countries.[16] Even accounting for the increased opportunities provided by greater integration with the EU, it is hard to see why Georgia would pursue policies that could potentially alienate such a significant trading partner.

This leads to the consideration of theories such as liberalism or constructivism. This covers a wide theoretical spectrum, but put briefly, the first narrative espouses a unit-level of analysis, where domestic politics is the driving force behind foreign policy behaviour. Scholars like Robert Keohane and Judith Goldstein have argued that ideas held by individuals affect policy outcomes.[17] As Gvalia writes, "ideas are independent or intervening variables that explain variation in outcomes," meaning that foreign policy behaviour is determined by "ideas and identities of the relevant foreign policy actors."[18] Similarly, the concept that "social threats are constructed, not natural" finds a prominent place in the second narrative of Wendt's

---

[15] Giorgi Gvalia, Bidzina Lebanidze, and David S. Siroky. "Neoclassical Realism and Small States: Systemic Constraints and Domestic Filters in Georgia's Foreign Policy." *East European Politics* 35, no. 1 (2019): 40-41.

[16] National Statistics Office of Georgia, *Quarterly Bulletin 2018.III,* November 2018, https://www.geostat.ge/media/20940/QuarterlyBull_2018_III_Eng.pdf

[17] Judith Goldstein and Robert O. Keohane. "Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework." In *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*, ed. Judith Goldstein, and Robert O. Keohane. (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), 11-13.

[18] Gvalia, Siroky, Lebanidze, and Iashvili, "Thinking outside the Bloc," 106.

constructivism.[19] Constructivism is based on the argument that a state perceives its interests based on "a particular construction of self-identity in relation to the conceived identity of others."[20]

Examining Georgia through either of these perspectives does allow for a more thorough examination of the closely-knit relationship between the country's foreign and domestic policy. Yet even these narratives fall short of truly providing the full picture. As scholars such as Kevork Oskanian have noted, "there is no doubt" that "ideational propensities" have been "instrumental in shaping Georgian foreign policy," but such "specific domestic, ideological factors can only tell part of the story."[21]

The danger of a liberalist or constructivist approach lies in "disregarding outside realities," which would in turn "offer a very partial and implausible view" of the full picture.[22] So even as "people who cannot move beyond the system will have difficulty explaining most of what happens in international relations," it is equally difficult to explain what happens in international relations from only unit-level analysis approaches.[23]

---

[19] Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics." *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 405.

[20] Ronald Jepperson, Alexander Wendt, and Peter Katzenstein, "Norms, Identity, and Culture in National Security." In *The Culture of National Security:Norms and Identity in World Politics,* ed. Peter Katzenstein. (Columbia University Press: New York, 1996), 60.

[21] Kevork Oskanian, "The Balance Strikes Back: Power, Perceptions, and Ideology in Georgian Foreign Policy, 1992–2014." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 12, no. 4 (2016): 629.

[22] Ibid., 629.

[23] Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy." *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 165.

Given the inadequacy of these theories to fully account for Georgia's foreign policy behaviour, some scholars have recently explored the viability of a new narrative for explaining the country's foreign policy trajectory. The work of Kevork Oskanian, and Giorgi Gvalia, Bidzina Lebanidze and David Siroky, all seek to use neoclassical realist theory as a framework for interpreting and understanding Georgia's foreign policy.[24]

The research presented in this paper recognizes the excellent work of these scholars, but seeks to go one step further in developing this neoclassical realist narrative. This paper proposes a theoretical model of neoclassical realism that synthesizes and extends the work of prominent neoclassical realist scholars, and then seeks to apply that model to Georgia across a series of case studies. Although this theoretical model is not built on new ideas, it does seek to contribute to neoclassical realism by making those ideas more explicit in their applicability and suitability for analysing and explaining foreign policy behaviour.

More specifically, this research will conduct theory testing through the case study method, to identify the causal impact of specific hypothesized independent and intervening variables on the dependent variable, by using the analytical tool of process-tracing. This allows for the identification of conditions in which a small state is more likely to pursue a structurally divergent, rather than structurally defined foreign policy. In examining these case studies, this research indicates that Georgia

---

[24] Oskanian, "The Balance Strikes Back," 629-630; Gvalia, Lebanidze, and Siroky, "Neoclassical Realism and Small States," 24-25.

exhibited structurally divergent foreign policy where objectivity was significantly compromised by domestic variables. This suggests that the degree to which the country's future foreign policy is structurally defined will depend on the level to which domestic factors distort the state's ability to act objectively as a unitary, rational actor.

# 2. Theory & Literature

## 2.1. Introduction to Neoclassical Realism

The term 'neoclassical realism' was first used by Rose to describe the works of scholars such as Christensen, Schweller, Wohlforth, and Zakaria.[25] All of these scholars sought to blend an emphasis on the primacy of the international system with attention to domestic factors. Neoclassical realism was formed both as a logical extension of realist tradition, and as a response to "the shortcomings of structural realism identified by both realists and critics of realism."[26]

Neoclassical realism seeks to fill the gap between systemic analysis and unit level analysis, or as one scholar puts it, neoclassical realism recognizes "state behavior as the result of an anarchic international environment whose relative distributions of power are mediated through domestic conditions."[27] Indeed, as Rathbun notes, "when states do not respond ideally to their structural situations, neoclassical realism

[25] Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," 146.

[26] Norrin Ripsman, Jeffrey Taliaferro, and Steven Lobell. *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, (Oxford University Press: New York, 2016), 16.

[27] Oskanian, "The Balance Strikes Back," 630.

tells us we should find evidence of domestic politics and ideas distorting the decision-making process."[28]

Neoclassical realists accept realism's fundamental premise that states operate in an anarchic system, and that this anarchic international system and the distribution of power are the primary factors in determining a state's behavior and interests. Moreover, most scholars who support neoclassical realism also accept that "over the long run, a state's foreign policy cannot transcend the limits and opportunities thrown by the international environment."[29] However, the point of departure for neoclassical realists comes in understanding and explaining the way in which states understand and respond to the uncertainties of international anarchy. Rather than a simple relationship between systemic factors and state behavior, neoclassical realists argue that systemic pressures are translated or 'distorted' by unit-level intervening variables.[30]

## 2.2. Theoretical Model

The theoretical model presented in this paper is a synthesis of pre-existing frameworks and ideas proposed by leading neoclassical realist scholars over the past several decades. As the body of neoclassical realist literature has grown, a common

[28] Brian Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name: Neoclassical Realism as the Logical and Necessary Extension of Structural Realism." *Security Studies* 17, no. 2 (2008): 296.

[29] Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," 151.

[30] Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name," 296.

criticism of the theory has emerged, perhaps summed up best by Stephen Walt when he argues that "neoclassical realism tends to incorporate domestic variables in an ad hoc manner, and its proponents have yet to identify when these variables will exert greater or lesser effects."[31] This is often coupled with the criticism that neoclassical realism is used only to explain anomalies in the foreign policy of great powers, and thereby lacks the explanatory power necessary for a theory of International Relations.[32]

This model seeks to challenge those criticisms directly. First, it integrates the hierarchy of domestic variables presented by Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, allowing for the structured and orderly incorporation of these variables, and clarifying the external conditions in which each intervening variable is more or less likely to exert pressure on the independent variable.[33]

Second, it provides a method of assessing the type of pressure exerted by an intervening variable on the independent variable. Measuring these variables by the degree to which they detract or enhance the capability of the state to act as a unitary, rational actor, confirms the theoretical utility of neoclassical realism in analysing both expected and unexpected foreign policy outcomes.

---

[31] Stephen Walt, "The Enduring Relevance of the Realist Tradition." In *Political Science: State of the Discipline,* ed. Ira Katznelson and Helen Milner, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2002), 211.

[32] Jeffrey Legro and Andrew Moravcsik,"Is Anybody Still a Realist?" *International Security* 24, no. 2 (1999): 54.; Ja Vasquez, "The Realist Paradigm and Degenerative versus Progressive Research Programs: An Appraisal of Neotraditional Research on Waltz's Balancing Proposition." *American Political Science Review* 91, no. 4 (1997): 907.

[33] Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics,*59.

Third, it establishes an explicit theoretical structure, built on clearly defined terms. This not only provides clarity, but also reinforces the general applicability of neoclassical realism to states of all sizes. The next section will explain this structure, and then will seek to demonstrate what this model of neoclassical realism can offer, and how it differs from its close challengers.

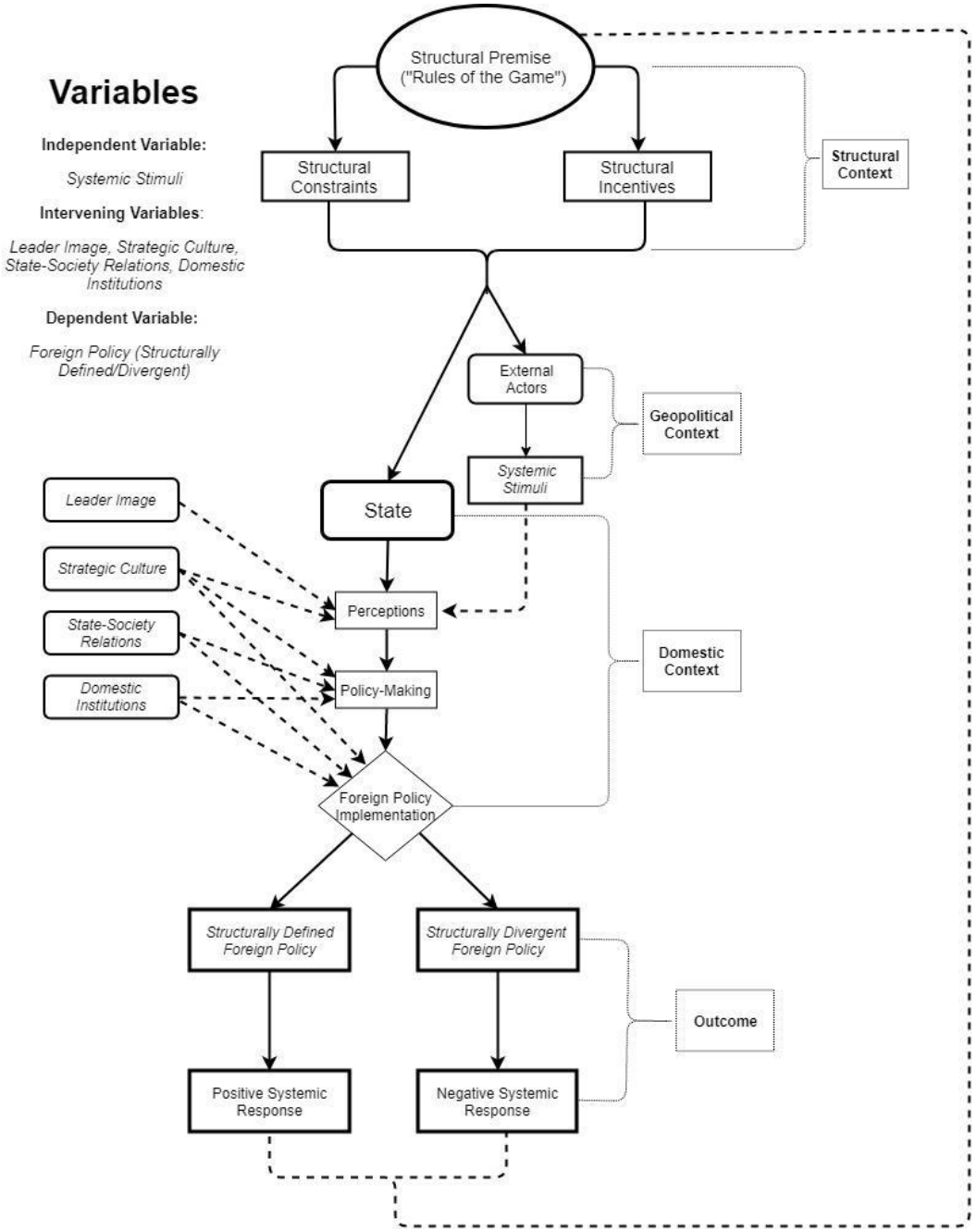


**Figure 2.** A Neoclassical Realist Model of Foreign Policy

## *Structural Context*

### Structural Premise

Neoclassical realism starts with the acceptance of structural realism's core assumptions about relative power, the role of the state, and the primacy of the anarchical material structure.[34] According to this structural premise, states are forced to fend for themselves in an anarchic environment.[35] Within this environment, states are guarantors of their own security and cannot rely on anything or anyone else to protect them.[36] Because all states want, first and foremost, to survive, all states are subject to the **incentives** and **structures** derived from this structural premise.

### Structures and Incentives

First, states are incentivised to accumulate power, not as an end in itself, but as a means of ensuring their own security.[37] Power is defined as the "combined capability of a state" and its distribution across states is constantly changing.[38] Second, states are incentivised to function collectively as a unitary actor in order to act with the most efficacy in this anarchical system, thereby maximizing their chance

---

[34] Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 16-21.

[35] Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name," 304-318.

[36] Kenneth Waltz, "Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory." *Journal of International Affairs*44, no. 1 (1990): 34-37.

[37] Ibid., 36.

[38] Kenneth Waltz, "Realist Thought and Neorealist Theory," 36.

of survival.[39] Third, states are incentivised towards rationality, defined as an objective understanding of the implications of anarchy without illusions.[40]

Just as there are structural incentives, however, there are also structural constraints that exist for states operating in an anarchic system. A state's power, relative to the international order, dictates its best available options to increase its chance at survival. Therefore, although all states are equally subject to these structural constraints, not all states are equally affected by them. This is why structural realism has traditionally focused on the options available to great powers. However, just because the options of small states are more constrained by these 'rules of the game,' does not mean that small states are without options at all. Instead, taken together, these incentives and constraints set the parameters for how a state can and should act according to the structure within which it exists.

First, a state increases its security through its power relative to the international order. The basepoint for this power potential is defined by "natural" objective factors, such as "territory size, geography, climate, and habitat," as well as "political features of the neighbourhood and larger region, the level and direction of economic development, and human and societal factors," and industrial, economic, and military capacity.[41]

---

[39] Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell, *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 26.

[40] Ibid., 26.

[41] Alyson Bailes and Jean-Marc Rickli. "Small States, Survival and Strategy." In *Small States and International Security.* ed. Archer Clive, Alyson Bailes, and Anders Wivel, (London: Routledge, 2014), 34.

However, natural power alone is not an accurate representation of a state's actual power. That is determined by the degree to which the power potential of a state can be extracted and deployed at the international level. In other words, natural power is only useful insofar as it is converted into state power and projected on the international stage. The "rate at which these resources" can be translated "into state power varies" widely from state to state, depending on numerous factors such as political stability, institutional identity, elite legitimacy, and competence in governance.[42]

Moreover, state power is hard to maintain because it is not a constant, and is always relative to the capacity of other states, and domestic constraints.[43] For example, when a state grows in power vis a vis society, it increases in power, even if the aggregate "power potential" stays the same, and likewise, when the state grows weaker, so does its power, even if the "power potential" has not changed.[44]

Second, a state is defined as small when it is "the weaker part in an asymmetric relationship," and is therefore "unable to change the nature or functioning of the relationship on its own."[45] As a result, small states are "stuck with the power configuration and its institutional expression, no matter what their specific

---

[42] Michiel Foulon, "Neoclassical Realism: Challengers and Bridging Identities." *International Studies Review* 17, no. 4 (2015): 648.

[43] Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name," 302.

[44] Ibid., 302.

[45] Archer Clive, Alyson Bailes, and Anders Wivel, "Setting the Scene: Small States and International Security," In *Small States and International Security*. ed Archer Clive, Alyson Bailes, and Anders Wivel. (London: Routledge, 2014), 8.

relation to it is."[46] Thus, definitionally, a small state is a "comparative and not an absolute idea" because it is measured relative to other states in the international system.[47]

Facing a deficit of power, both to act upon others and to resist being acted upon, small states must choose between a defensive posture, focused on autonomy and avoiding trouble, or a proactive posture using partnerships and cooperation to seek protection.[48] The limited viability of the former option often results in small states being, *prima facie,* more prone to proactive posturing, which encompasses behaviours such as bandwagoning with the nearest powerful state, grouping with multiple partners as a balancing measure against other powers, or working with a remote large power to protect against the threat of a near one.[49]

However, there are also costs associated with any of these strategic choices. The pursuit of neutrality may allow for a greater degree of independence, but it can also result in isolation and greater vulnerability to large powers.[50] On the other hand, proactive posturing may not always increase security either. Large states can abandon smaller partners when the cost-benefit changes, and even if they do not, the price of

---

[46] Mouritzen, Hans, and Wivel, Ander "Introduction," In *The Geopolitics of Euro-Atlantic Integration.*ed. Han Mouritzen. and Ander Wivel. (London: Routledge, 2005), 4.

[47] Kenneth Hanf, and Ben Soetendorp, "Small States and the Europeanisation of Public Policy," in *Adapting to European Integration: Small States and the European Union."* ed. Ken Hanf, and Ben Soetendorp. (London and New York: Longman, 1998), 4.

[48] Bailes and Rickli, "Small States, Survival and Strategy," 32.

[49] Ibid., 32.

[50] Ibid., 32.

alignment may involve intrusion into the smaller state's affairs, demands for uncritical support, and even the risks of strategic tensions and conflict if the small state is pulled into a showdown between larger powers.[51] A state is therefore incentivised to view the costs of these strategic choices objectively, based on its own relative power, and make choices that will best uphold its rationally defined interests.

Together, these structural incentives and constraints come together to determine what is in a state's best interest. However, although these constraints and incentives form the basis for a state's rationally defined interests, they are not determinant of a state's actions.[52]A structure in which states are singularly responsible for their own self-help, is one in which a state cannot be compelled by the structure to exercise that responsibility, since that would violate the entire logical premise upon which it is built.[53] Neoclassical realism, as such, provides a baseline for understanding the interests of a state relative to the international environment, while also recognizing that states are not forced to act on the basis of these rationally defined interests.

## *Geopolitical Context*

### External Actors and Systemic Stimuli

[51] Ibid., 32.

[52] Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name," 304.

[53] Ibid, 304-305.

Even if states do seek to act on the basis of these rationally defined interests however, other states are also subject to the same anarchic structure, and the choices of external actors function as *systemic stimuli* that constantly alter a state's strategic considerations. An external actor may experience a relative decline in power, or it may increase its power projection, both of which change the structural constraints acting upon a state's foreign policy options, and thereby change the costs or benefits associated with each of them. *Systemic stimuli* will take on the function of the independent variable, as states, informed by their own best interests, experience changes in the international environment and adapt their *foreign policy* (the dependent variable) accordingly.

As Zakaria explains, "states may be billiard balls, but each is made of a different material, affecting its speed, spin, and bounce on the international plane."[54] Building on this example, imagine the anarchic structure as the billiard table itself. This structure defines the kind of game in which these billiard balls exist, and sets the parameters for good and bad play within the game (incentives and constraints), depending on whether the billiard balls stay on the table or end up in side pockets. However, the actual game depends on the movement of the billiard balls themselves (systemic stimuli), and using Zakaria's explanation, each billiard ball has a different internal composition that changes the way in which it can interact on the table (external actors).

[54] Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998,) 9.

## *Domestic Context*

### Intervening Variables

Ideally then, a state's optimal foreign policy is the course of action that, within the current structural constraints, best reflects the state's structurally incentivised, rationally defined interests. However, what happens when a state's foreign policy is structurally divergent, rather than structurally defined? Why would a state exhibit less than optimal behaviour, despite structural incentives to the contrary?

Well, as it turns out, states may be incentivised to act in their own best interests relative to the international environment, but they can only do so insofar as they are objectively informed of those interests. Since states never operate with complete information, they are constrained by uncertainty. This means that a state can only assess its current and future power relative to other states, based on the limits of what it perceives. Thus, imperfect information opens the door to the role of perceptions in shaping foreign policy.

Now this does not inherently mean a state will perceive power incorrectly, but it does create the opportunity for the misinterpretation of information. This is what Wohlforth calls the "elusiveness" of the balance of power.[55] In the real world, *systemic stimuli* act as information that is perceived and then interpreted accordingly.

---

[55] William Curti Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions during the Cold War.* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 14.

Therefore, because there is no immediate or perfect "transmission belt" between structurally defined interests and the formation of foreign policy, the efficacy of state actions may not always match structural incentives.[56] In other words, states are structurally incentivised to act in their own best interests but may make miscalculations based on misinterpreted information.

So how does information get misinterpreted? Well, as Rathbun puts it, "the anarchic environment is primarily but indirectly causal, while the policy-making process is secondarily but directly casual."[57] Put simply, domestic level variables can distort the state's ability to act objectively, as a unitary rational actor.[58] In situations of optimal responses, one "should see states acting in a unitary and perspicacious fashion," but in "instances of poor adjustment to the system" one should see "domestic politics overcoming the state" and "interrupting accurate readings of interests."[59] These intervening variables of *leader image, strategic culture, state-society relations*, and *domestic institutions* always exist, but their distorting effect depends on the extent to which they increase subjectivity in the foreign policy-making process.

Of these four variables, *leader image* will exert the most pressure in a time of crisis, followed by *strategic culture*, with *state-society relations* and *domestic institutions*

[56] Foulon, "Neoclassical Realism: Challengers and Bridging Identities," 648.

[57] Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name," 306.

[58] Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell. *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 60-61.

[59] Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name," 310.

relegated to positions of less overall importance.[60] As Ripsman writes, "the combination of time constraints, secrecy, and pressures given the high stakes involved in crisis decision-making, means that the other intervening variables" will have "fewer opportunities to influence the processes and mechanisms through which decision-making occurs."[61] Because these variables address "what the process looks like," they are likely to have more influence in "the short-to-medium and the medium-to-long term, when culture, society, and institutions shape and constrain the formation of policy planning."[62]

Put another way, each of these variables can be visualized on an axis. The **degree** of pressure each intervening variable exerts on the independent variable changes depending on whether the process is taking place in a time of crisis or in a short-to-medium or medium-to-long term policy-making process. The second part of the axis focuses on the **type** of pressure being exerted by the intervening variable, based on whether each variable detracts or enhances the state's ability to act as a unitary, rational actor. Thus, a variable, such as domestic institutions might only exert weak pressure towards unitary, rational action, while leader image might exert strong pressure against unitary, rational action. In sum, these intervening variables can differ both in the degree to which pressure is exerted, and in the type of pressure that is exerted on the independent variable.

---

[60] Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell. *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 61.

[61] Ibid., 61.

[62] Ibid., 61.

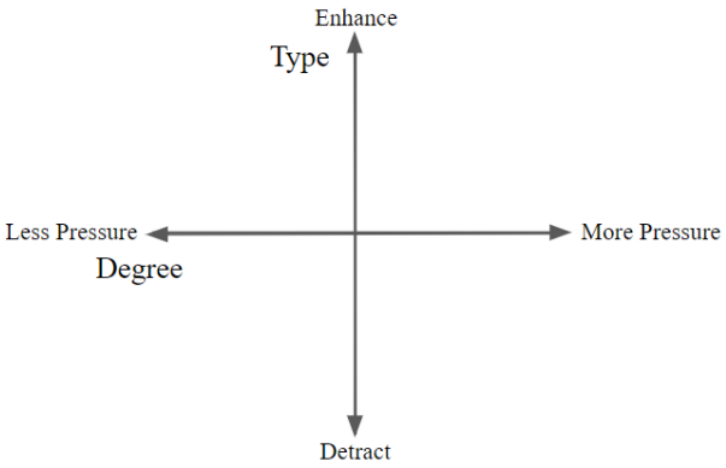


**Figure 3.** Intervening Variable Axis

**Leader Image**

The first intervening variables is *leader image*. In neoclassical realist terms, this deals with the question of "are the right actors securitising the right things?"[63] Answering this question requires both the 'Foreign Policy Executive' or FPE, and the FPE's priorities to be identified. For scholars like Kitchen, this is arguably the most important intervening variable, in terms of the weight of emphasis on endogenous processes accounting for the differentiation in states' foreign policy responses.[64]

This reasoning is intuitive in that the FPE often possesses "private information and has a monopoly on intelligence about foreign countries" thus making it the "most important actor to focus on when seeking to explain foreign

[63] Bailes and Rickli, "Small States, Survival and Strategy," 40.

[64] Nicholas Kitchen, "Systemic Pressures and Domestic Ideas: A Neoclassical Realist Model of Grand Strategy Formation," *Review of International Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1 (2010): 132.

policy.[65] Moreover, this variable acts directly on the intervening process of "perception" of the "incoming systemic stimuli."[66]

However, the composition of the FPE can range from a single dominant leader, to fragmented elites, to a fully functioning and dominant political party. In a weak or failed state, the FPE might be undefined, or in contention by multiple actors. Furthermore, Rothstein argues that "domestic instability, or the fear of it, tempts insecure leaders to use foreign policy as a supplementary resource in their political struggles."[67]

Michael Mastanduno presents a theoretical framework for the linkages of international and domestic factors that is complemented by Steven David's concept of omni-balancing, and the need of leadership to counter both domestic and external threats.[68] As David argues, "the rational calculation" of leaders is focused on "which outside power is most likely to do what is necessary to keep them in power."[69]

Identifying the FPE is important, therefore, because it is the first step in understanding the details of how foreign policy decisions are made.[70] For example,

---

[65] Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell. *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 61.

[66] Ibid., 61.

[67] Robert Rothstein, "Foreign Policy and Development Policy: From Nonalignment to International Class War." *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*52, no. 4 (1976): 602.

[68] Michael Mastanduno, David Lake, and G. Ikenberry. "Toward a Realist Theory of State Action." *International Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (1989): 457-74.

[69] Steven David, "Explaining Third World Alignment." *World Politics* 43, no. 2 (1991): 235.

[70] John Higley and Michael G. Burton, 'The Elite Variable in Democratic Transitions and Breakdowns,' (1989) Vol 54, No 1 American Sociological Review 17-32.

some self-serving FPEs can be "delusional," "overestimate the hostility of adversaries, exaggerate the potential gains from expansion," and "mistakenly believe others will bandwagon with them in their conflicts."[71] An FPE that is weak and lacks legitimacy may conflate state security with regime security, and protect themselves at the expense of the interests of the state.[72] In this situation, questions such as whether a foreign policy would positively or negatively affect the power of the state, or whether or not an outside power could provide protection for the state, are actually questions of whether the foreign policy would positively or negatively affect the FPE's power, and whether or not an outside power will provide protection for the FPE.[73]

This directly increases the subjectivity of the state, and distorts objective, structurally informed policy-making. As Wohlforth notes, it is imperative to deal with the details of how the statesmen and policymakers of a state view and perceive the distribution of power.[74] Taliaferro calls this the two-level game, where leaders must "respond to the external environment," while they "extract and mobilize resources from domestic society, work through domestic institutions, and maintain the support of key stakeholders."[75]

---

[71] Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell. *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 61-62.

[72] Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name," 314.

[73] Steven David, "Explaining Third World Alignment." 235-236.

[74] Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions during the Cold War*. 2.

[75] Steven E. Lobell, Norrin Ripsman, and Jeffrey Taliaferro. *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 7.

**Strategic Culture**

The second variable of *strategic culture* is perhaps the most definitionally challenging. Some scholars argue for a limited interpretation related strictly to the military and the use of force, and others argue for a broader definition that includes "a set of inter-related beliefs, norms, and assumptions" as well as "dominant ideologies, which can affect the state's attitudes towards international affairs."[76]

This research utilizes the latter definition, operating under the assumption that "strategic culture or collective expectations shape the strategic understanding of political leaders, societal elites, and even the general public," and "these collective assumptions and expectations become deeply entrenched and constrain a state's behaviour and freedom of actions by defining what are acceptable and unacceptable strategic choices."[77] After all, a state's strategic choices are not constrained simply to the use of force, but encompass a wide number of other considerations, and thus any definition of strategic culture must reflect this reality.

Moreover, this national strategic culture can be "constructed and reconstructed over time" as a result of "major historical events," the "imposition of foreign occupiers," and the "conscious agency of national governments."[78] More importantly, however, it can place "constraints on the ability" of decision-makers "to

[76] Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell. *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 67-69.

[77] Ibid., 67.

[78] Ibid., 68.

undertake strategic adjustment to systemic changes."[79] When decision-makers (the FPE) are "trapped by strategic culture," it can result in "strategic exposure, self-encirclement, or overextension," because the state is left "pursuing policies that jeopardise its primary security interests."[80]

Multiple scholars have dealt with this variable from a neoclassical perspective, including Kitchen and Dueck. Kitchen finds that "prevailing ideas influence the type of foreign policy response to structural imperatives," and that ideas can intervene both through institutional means and through broader "cultural preferences of the state."[81] Dueck argues that the policy-makers will often seek to make strategic choices that reflect culturally acceptable preferences in order to maintain domestic support.[82]

Put another way, ideas "interfere with a proper adaptation to structural incentives" because they can "lead to mistakes."[83] Although certain pervading beliefs and norms, such as nationalism, might in fact contribute to "mobilization" and serve as an internal balancing tool for states seeking to increase their power, it also "leads to a charged decision-making and political atmosphere that blurs perception."[84] Thus,

---

[79] Ibid., 69.

[80] Ibid., 69.

[81] Kitchen, "Systemic Pressures and Domestic Ideas." 132.

[82] Colin Dueck, *Reluctant Crusaders: Power, Culture, and Change in American Grand Strategy.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.)

[83] Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name," 313.

[84] Ibid., 314.

a state's *strategic culture* can act as a barrier to objective perception, thereby increasing the likelihood of sub-optimal foreign policy.

**State-Society Relations**

Closely tied to this line of argumentation is the variable of *state-society relations*. After all, as Zakaria argues, "state power is that portion of national power the government can extract for its purpose and reflects the ease with which central decision-makers can achieve their ends."[85] This extraction is negatively affected by "social and elite cleavages" which "inhibit group feeling and cohesion" and therefore make "countries less of a unitary actor."[86] These divisions "reflect the prioritization of more parochial interests such as ethnic, cultural, ideological, religious, class, bureaucratic, regional, or party over the national interest."[87] Governments that preside over "fractured societies" are weakened and might be "unable to take the steps necessary to counter real threats."[88]

Scholars have argued that stable periods in the international environment also lead to greater pressure from powerful interest groups and public opinion, whereas threats in the international environment force the leadership of the state to focus on state survival, even at the expense of domestic political interests.[89] The domestic

[85] Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power,* 9.

[86] Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name," 313.

[87] Ibid., 313.

[88] Ibid., 313.

[89] Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell. *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 74.

regime, especially in a weak power or 'small state,' must be able to reconcile the external security environment with domestic political reactions, or overrule those reactions in pursuit of rational policy options.

Barnett and Levy also deal with this variable, by examining the complexity of domestic political dynamics and economy together with regime security and systemic alliance formation.[90] They find that internal threats to government provide additional incentives for seeking external alliances, even if that limits external security.[91] As Haas argues, "in terms of extreme domestic tensions among elites, a policy of uniting a badly divided nation against some real or alleged outside threat frequently seems useful to a ruling group."[92] In sum, the internal composition of states, the government's autonomy from society, and the consensus, (or lack thereof,) between elite segments of the population about the nature of international threats significantly influence the way a state is able to navigate interstate relations.[93]

**Domestic Institutions**

The fourth and final variable is that of *domestic institutions*. *Domestic institutions* not only can constrain the FPE, but they also can limit a state's extractive capacity. In

---

[90] Michael N Barnett and Jack S Levy. "Domestic Sources of Alliances and Alignments: The Case of Egypt, 1962–73." *International Organization* 45, no. 3 (1991): 369-95.

[91] Ibid., 369-95.

[92] Ernst Haas and Allen S. Whiting. *Dynamics of InternationalRelations.* (New York; London: McGraw-Hill, 1956), 62.

[93] Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell. *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 71-75.

democracies, this can include "the degree to which power is concentrated in the executive's hands, executive-legislative relations, party systems," whether "it is a two-party or multiparty system, voting rules, and whether the electoral system is based on plurality voting or proportional representation."[94] Legislatures often can become an access point through which narrow constituencies can gain disproportionate influence and make demands of the FPE.[95] In non-democracies, domestic institutions determine "the leadership's scope of authority and the degree to which it must consult or respect the wishes of key societal interests, such as the military, the aristocracy, or important business elites."[96]

In both democracies and non-democracies, formal and informal institutions, the overall quality of government, its administrative competence, and its power vis a vis society, all play a role in the degree to which this variable can act to distort objectivity.[97] For example, a patronage system can amplify the influence of specific interest groups on the FPE. Moreover, if the formal institutional structure of the state is underdeveloped, either because it is new, or because of decentralization, over-centralization, or weak administration, the state may lack the capacity to fully identify and assess the costs and demands of different strategic choices.[98]

---

[94] Ibid., 76.

[95] Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro. *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy.* 171-190.

[96] Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell. *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 77.

[97] Ibid., 76-79.

[98] Bailes and Rickli. "Small States, Survival and Strategy." 34

## *Outcome*

### Foreign Policy and the Systemic Response

When these domestic variables increase subjectivity in the foreign policy-making process, and lead to structurally divergent foreign policy, there are consequences for the state. Indeed, the way structurally informed foreign policy can be distinguished from structurally divergent foreign policy is that the "system will discipline the state" in the "form of foreign policy failure."[99] When domestic variables prevent states from properly adapting to systemic constraints, they can even become "a barrier" to state survival during "times of major external crisis."[100]

This structural response is a fundamental premise of neoclassical realism. A state that ignores the rules of the game does not change the rules, it simply receives the penalty for not abiding by them – being outplayed by other states. This is what Schweller terms a "theory of mistakes."[101] As he writes, "when a state underbalances, it either misperceives the intention" of other states as "more benign than they in fact are," or "if it correctly perceives the threat, does not adopt prudent policies to protect itself for reasons of domestic politics."[102] Waltz's iconic line that states are

---

[99] Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name," 311.

[100] Ibid., 311.

[101] Randall Schweller, "Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing." *International Security* 29, no. 2 (2004): 168.

[102] Randall Schweller, *Unanswered Threats: Political Constraints on the Balance of Power* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 10.

free to "do any fool thing" rings true here.[103] The more structurally divergent a state's foreign policy becomes, the more severe the systemic response will be, and states in which domestic variables completely override the objective pursuit of rational interests will "meet with total foreign policy failure, provoking and losing major wars."[104]

Put in more explicit terms, a state that bandwagons with a strategically viable power, thereby contradicting internal political and nationalistic platforms, might suffer the erosion of political legitimacy domestically, but will have strengthened the state's external security. On the other hand, a small state might also provoke foreign conflict by strengthening regime security through internal appeals to nationalism, the amplification of external threats, and conflictual behaviour.[105]

Thus, the structural alignment of a state's foreign policy can be judged based on the structural response to that foreign policy. States will be "rewarded for behaviour that is responsive to structural pressures and punished for behaviour that is not."[106] Structurally divergent foreign policy can be identified by the presence of a punitive structural response to the state. Mistakes and miscalculations have serious repercussions and will weaken the state's power relative to the international order.

---

[103] Kenneth Waltz, "Evaluating Theories." *American Political Science Review* 91, no. 4 (1997): 915.

[104] Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name," 318.

[105] Nikolaos Zahariadis, "Nationalism and Small-State Foreign Policy: The Greek Response to the Macedonian Issue." *Political Science Quarterly* 109, no. 4 (1994): 650-652.

[106] Waltz, "Evaluating Theories." 915.

## 2.3. Neoclassical Realism Versus Its Close Challengers

As outlined briefly in the introduction, neoclassical realism presents an alternative to several leading theories of International Relations. So, what does this neoclassical realist model offer that these theories cannot? First, **neoclassical realism's two-level theorization of International Relations improves the explanatory accuracy of realism, and more specifically, neorealism, through a multilevel framework.** Classical realism is largely agnostic as to the privilege of systemic variables over unit-level variables, and although neorealism prioritizes those systemic variables, it has no answer for unit-level analysis.

As Wohlforth writes, a neorealist explanation "cannot offer a comprehensive account of precisely why a given state's domestic, political, social, and economic institutions decline in comparison to those of competing powers."[107] Neorealism can address broad questions, such as balancing behaviour in international politics, but neoclassical realism bridges the domestic-international spatial divide to address "individual state behaviour at the concrete level of foreign policy."[108] This gives it a significant advantage over neorealism in explaining concrete empirical foreign policy questions.[109]

Second, **neoclassical realism's two-level theorization offers a structural level challenge to constructivism, by acknowledging the importance of ideas**

---

[107] Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions during the Cold War*. 19.

[108] Foulon, "Neoclassical Realism: Challengers and Bridging Identities," 648.

[109] Ibid., 638.

**without overlooking the role of domestic factors in affecting state behaviour.** Constructivists argue that states are bound by structural constraints, but the structure is socially constructed through the interpretations and assumptions of actors. This structure can be changed, because it exists only through the actions of individuals, and has no existence independent of the agent. As such, constructivism offers an agent-driven paradigm wrapped in a structural package, in which "the nature of international politics is a product of social meanings that emerge from interaction among states."[110]

Such an approach, however, fails to explain why states have different foreign policies under similar structural constraints.[111] Although these structural constraints are ideational in origin and are subject to change through agent interaction, they are no less binding than the structural constraints of neorealism. Therefore, by arguing that these structural pressures dictate state behaviour, constructivism is no different than neorealism in completely overlooking the composition of the state and ignoring domestic politics altogether.[112] Neoclassical realism recognizes the existence of an objective structure and acknowledges the primacy of systemic-level factors, but stresses that this structure is not determinate of state behaviour.[113] By giving weight to intervening variables that incorporate the role of both ideas and domestic factors,

[110] Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name," 307.

[111] Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," 148.

[112] Foulon, "Neoclassical Realism: Challengers and Bridging Identities," 638-640.

[113] Ibid., 639.

neoclassical realism offers a superior framework for understanding the complexities of state behaviour.[114]

Third, **neoclassical realism's two-level theorization provides a domestic level challenge to liberalism, by recognizing the greater geopolitical context within which the state, and by extension, the state's domestic policy-making process, is situated.** Liberalism is based on unit-level analysis, in which the character of international politics is "a reflections of the interests of the state," which are "the aggregation of individual preferences through domestic institutions that privilege some over others."[115] It rejects a structuralist approach, but emphasizes the nature of the state as a pluralist entity that exists as an extension of society.[116] Therefore, it is domestic politics and the process of policy-making that are directly responsible for state behaviour under liberalist theory, and these take primacy over any existing geopolitical factors.[117]

Yet such an approach falls short when trying to account for why "states with similar domestic systems often act differently in the foreign policy sphere and why dissimilar states in similar situations often act alike."[118] Neoclassical realism recognizes the importance of domestic politics and the policy-making process, but

---

[114] Ibid., 640.

[115] Rathbun, "A Rose by Any Other Name," 307.

[116] Ibid., 308.

[117] Foulon, "Neoclassical Realism: Challengers and Bridging Identities," 642-643.

[118] Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," 148.

situates it within a wider structural context, allowing for a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis of a state's foreign policy behaviour.

Fourth and finally, **neoclassical realism's two-level theorization offers a more theoretically robust framework for analysis than is possible from a materialist or economic dependence perspective.** A purely materialist approach focuses on the role of economic dependence in shaping foreign policy, suggesting that it is domestic economic interests that are the driving force behind state behaviour.

Yet numerous scholars have observed that economic interests alone are insufficient to explain foreign policy.[119] This approach cannot explain why state behaviour sometimes deviates from the most economically beneficial course of action and fails to consider the geopolitical and domestic context under which the state operates. Neoclassical realism provides a more thorough approach to economic factors, by situating them within a broader analysis of state power and incorporating the domestic economy into a more comprehensive evaluation of intervening variables.

# 3. Methods

## 3.1. Empirical Framework

[119] Gvalia, Lebanidze, and Siroky. "Neoclassical Realism and Small States." 40-41.

Theories of international relations are empirically probabilistic, and not falsifiable, in that they seek to explain as much of the variance in the dependent variable as possible, without claiming to explain one hundred percent of that variance. Thus, theories must hold *ceteris paribus*, but other factors not accounted for within a specific theory may still affect outcomes. As a result, it is important to note that this research does not seek to prove or disprove a theory, but rather to identify evidence consistent with the predictions of the theory, *ceteris paribus*.

Thus, this research is situated within a soft positivist approach to both methodology and theory construction. It recognizes that social science theories are "not merely retrospective," but also "prospective," in seeking to "make predictions for future events."[120] A soft positivist approach promotes the idea that it is both possible and essential to test theories through "careful experimentation" and "case studies," and that researchers can "make contingent causal inferences about observable phenomena that can be verified through careful case research."[121]

In this, it differs from the post-positivist and critical theorist positions, yet it is also distinct from hard positivism, in that it recognizes the "limits to theory testing in social sciences" that "complicate the fact-value distinction" and "make it difficult to define and measure phenomena objectively."[122] Nevertheless, soft positivist epistemology maintains the importance of theory testing, as a means of accumulating

[120] Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell. *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 105.

[121] Ibid., 105.

[122] Ibid., 105.

knowledge and guiding behaviours. As such, ***this research will conduct theory testing through the case study method, to identify the causal impact of specific hypothesized independent and intervening variables on the dependent variable, by using the analytical tool of process-tracing.***

## 3.2. Research Design

### *The Case Study Method*

The case study approach is common to many neoclassical realist scholars.[123] Looking at Georgia as a series of time-based case studies makes it possible to conduct an in-depth study of the observed empirical phenomena, and further the understanding of a complex, spatially restricted social phenomenon. The goal of this research is to demonstrate the applicability of neoclassical realism for explaining the foreign policy of a small state. Notwithstanding caveats concerning generalizability, the case study approach will enable the "detailed examination of an aspect of an historical episode to develop or test historical explanations."[124] It will utilize what Mahoney and Goertz call the "causes-of-effects" approach, in which the objective is to "identify the causes of these specific outcomes for each and every case that falls within the scope of the theory under investigation."[125]

---

[123] Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," 153-155.

[124] Alexander George and Andrew Bennett. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, (Cambridge, Mass.; London: MIT Press, 2005), 4.

[125] James Mahoney and Gary Goertz. "A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research." *Political Analysis* 14, no. 3 (2006): 230.

These case studies are delineated into three primary periods that represent significant domestic shifts within the country. The first period is the 'chaos' of 1991 to early 1992 under Gamsakhurdia, the second is the 'consolidation' under Shevardnadze from 1992-2003, and the third is the 'control' of the country under Saakashvili from 2004-2012.

## *Variables*

The dependent variable of Georgia's *foreign policy* is constrained both by level of analysis and temporal range, and is acted upon by the independent variable of *systemic stimuli*, and by what Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell call the "four broad classes of intervening variables," *leader image, strategic culture, state-society relations, and domestic institutions.*[126]

In selecting these variables, this research utilizes a deductive strategy that seeks to "focus the inquiry a priori on the causal power of particular intervening variables with a logical, abstract analysis, based on extant neoclassical realist theories," and "existing theoretical debates." This approach relies heavily on theoretical model building, and then theoretical testing with "surface-level knowledge" of an empirical case suggesting "possible intervening variables."[127] This allows researchers to bring

[126] Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell. *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 58.

[127] Ibid., 117.

"analysis significantly closer to the real world without abandoning the paradigm's core concepts and assumptions."[128]

### *Data Selection and the Analytical Tool*

This research is built around a significant body of literature that exists on Georgia and will incorporate the findings of a wide range of academic works and publications of various research institutes. Numerous scholars have done excellent work on Georgia, from conducting elite interviews and surveys, to examining foreign policy discourse. This paper will use their findings to build a case for why the neoclassical realist model presented in this research provides an answer for Georgia's foreign policy behaviour. Primary sources, such as official documents, public statements, editorials, and newspaper articles, will also be utilized alongside these findings, to provide a more comprehensive analysis using the analytical tool of process-tracing.

The choice of process-tracing allows for the identification of causal mechanisms that trigger variation in state behaviour. This makes sense, given neoclassical realism's focus on historical narrative and its stated purpose of identifying the causal chains among independent, intervening, and dependent variables to explain state behaviour.[129] Thus, the pairing of neoclassical realism with process-tracing methodology is intuitive to reconstruct causal chains and develop or complement historical analysis.

---

[128] Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," 162.

[129] Ibid., 153-155.

[130] It not only corresponds well with the internal logic of the theoretical model and the emphasis on theoretically informed narratives, but it also allows for generating and analysing data on intervening variables that link assumed causes to observed effects.

Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey Checkel define process-tracing as the "examination of intermediate steps in a process to make inferences about hypotheses on how that process took place" and "generated the outcome of interest."[131] Collier concurs, arguing that process-tracing is "the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence and hypotheses posed by the investigator," and focuses on the unfolding of events or situations over time.[132] In other words, process-tracing allows scholars to probe the plausibility of causal mechanisms between independent and dependent variables, and scholars such as Lyall recommend process-tracing explicitly for this purpose.

Beyond the general theoretical suitability of process-tracing, this research will seek to follow a form of process-tracing that converts a historical narrative into an analytical causal explanation couched in explicit theoretical forms. However, it is important to acknowledge the challenges and weaknesses of such an approach. First, in order to truly show the complexity of the causal chain, it is vital to show that both system-level and unit-level variables actually matter, and as a result, process-tracing requires a significant amount of data in order to lead to a convincing conclusion

---

[130] Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell. *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 132.

[131] Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey Checkel. "Introduction." In *Process-tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool*. ed. by Andrew Bennett, and Jeffrey Checkel, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 6.

[132] David Collier, "Understanding Process-tracing." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44, no. 4 (2011): 823.

about the causal process.[133] The lack of data for any specific step in the process weakens the overall causal argument. Thus, process-tracing can be seen as useful only insofar as the causal chain can be formalized and verified.[134]

In an attempt to minimize this particular weakness of verification and formalization, this research will use several methods to try and strengthen the use of process-tracing as a methodological approach. In order to avoid confirmation bias, special attention will be given to predictions that fit within the theoretical framework of neoclassical realism, but are inconsistent with other theories, in order to discern which is more valid. Moreover, George and McKeown provide a template for process-tracing that involves developing a focused and structured set of questions that will be asked equally of each case, and will both guide the process and facilitate comparison.[135] This research also will seek to employ this method by asking a specific set of developed questions about each case. These questions will proceed as follows:

1. *What is the Theoretical Context?*
2. *What is the Geopolitical Context?*
3. *What is the Domestic Context?*
    a. *Who Securitizes? (Leader Image)*
    b. *Are the Right Things Being Securitized? (Strategic Culture)*
    c. *How Divided is the State? (State-Society Relations)*

---

[133] John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 181.

[134] Ibid., 181.

[135] Alexander George and Timothy McKeown, "Case Studies and Theories of Organizational Decision Making." In *Advances in Information Processing in Organizations*, Vol. 2. ed. Robert Coulam, and Richard Smith, (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1985), 21–58.

*d. What Structures are in Place for Policy-Making & Policy Execution? (Domestic Institutions)*

*4. What is the Outcome?*

George and Bennett also argue that combining congruence with process-tracing to test theories helps to demonstrate whether "the congruence between the independent and dependent variables is causal or spurious and also provides opportunity to take into consideration intervening variables that connect them."[136]

Van Evera outlines three primary ways in which congruence and process-tracing can be combined.[137] In the first type, a researcher establishes the expected value for an independent variable and the outcome of the dependent variable, which is then compared to the theory expectation.[138] In the second, a researcher makes paired observations of values based on both the independent and dependent variables across the spectrum of a case, and then assesses these values relative to theoretical predictions.[139] The third type is the approach used by this research, and is a hybrid of the first two, combining paired observations of values both with each other, and the typical, hypothesized value.[140]

---

[136] George and Andrew Bennett. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences,* 182.

[137] Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 61–67.

[138] Ibid., 61-67.

[139] Ibid., 61-67.

[140] Ibid., 61-67.

A second weakness of process-tracing is that the evidence used is difficult to verify, since any such evidence would necessarily rest upon contextual assumptions.[141] As such, this paper recognizes that the burden to judge the conclusions of this research rests with the reader. Process-tracing necessarily requires the interpretation of evidence, and with this interpretation comes the possible problem of subjectivity. [142] While the diversity of sources used in this research seeks to minimize and lower the impact of such subjectivity, it is not a full answer to criticisms regarding the difficulty of transparency and the struggle of replicating qualitative research. Thus, this research seeks only to provide a clear and thorough empirical assessment of the applicability of the theoretical model and makes no claim to do anything further.

# 4. Analysis

The model of neoclassical realism presented in chapter two consists of four primary parts, and these case studies will be organized accordingly, beginning first with the structural context, followed by the geopolitical context and the domestic context, and then concluding with an analysis of the outcome. Of these four sections, the structural context is perhaps the most straightforward, in that both the structural premise, and the structural constraints and incentives derived from that premise, remain constant across all the case studies. Georgia exists within an anarchic structure of international order that incentivises states to act as **unitary, rational**

[141] Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell. *Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Politics*, 105-108.

[142] Ibid., 105-108.

actors that **accumulate power** in order to ensure their own survival. Likewise, Georgia's ability to act within this international order is constrained by its **power, relative to other states**.

However, as stated previously, although all states are constrained equally by the structure, the degree to which a state is affected by that constraint changes based on how much power the state is able to exert on the international system. Thus, under **structural context**, each case study will begin with an analysis of changes in Georgia's relative power, and the degree to which that subsequently constrains Georgia's ability to act within this anarchic structure. In **geopolitical context**, the independent variable of *systemic stimuli* will be analysed, followed by an examination of the intervening variables of *leader image, strategic culture, state-society relations, and domestic institutions*, in the **domestic context** section. Finally, under **outcome**, the dependent variable of Georgia's *foreign policy* will be measured against the systemic response it evokes to determine whether Georgia exhibits structurally defined or structurally divergent foreign policy.

## 4.1. "CHAOS" 1991-1992A

### *STRUCTURAL CONTEXT*

**Key Points:**

1. **Georgia experiences a *decline* in natural power potential**
2. **Georgia experiences a *decline* in actualised power**

Protests in March of 1990 prompted the Georgian Parliament to claim independence, and after significant political manoeuvring, Zviad Gamsakhurdia won the popular election to become the first president of Georgia.[143] However, during his tenure, relations with Moscow were often strained, and the country faced numerous economic problems upon independence.[144]

Although Georgia's per capita income in 1991 was one of the lowest of the former Soviet republics, Georgia had actually enjoyed one of the highest standards of living within the Soviet Union due to a thriving underground shadow economy and natural climatic conditions.[145] Georgia's overall share in interrepublic trade in the Soviet Union was 3.07% for exports and 2.17% for imports in 1991, and Russia was by far Georgia's largest and most important trading partner.[146]

Until 1991, the rate of inflation in Georgia was in line with general patterns across the USSR, even though the country had experienced a contraction of the economy in real terms in the 1980s.[147] However under Gamsakhurdia, the country's economy deteriorated rapidly, manifesting in a "drastic contraction in output,

---

[143] Darrell Slider, "The Politics of Georgia's Independence." *Problems of Communism*40, no. 6 (1991): 68-70.

[144] Stanislaw Wellisz, "Georgia: A Brief Survey of MacroeconomicProblems and Policies." *Russian & East European Finance and Trade* 35, no. 1 (1999): 8-9.

[145] Lado Gurgenidze, Mamuka Lobzhanidze, and David Onoprishvili. "Georgia: From Planning to Hyperinflation." *Communist Economies and Economic Transformation* 6, no. 3 (1994): 259.

[146] World Bank, "Statistical Appendix." Vol 2 of *Georgia Country Economic Memorandum - From Crisis to Recovery. A Blueprint for Reforms*, (Washington, DC: IBRD, 1993), Table 3.5.; Wellisz, "Georgia." 8.

[147] Gurgenidze, Lobzhanidze, and Onoprishvili. "Georgia." 261.

accelerating inflation, the emergence of a budget deficit, and a decrease in the volume of external trade."[148]

From 1990 to 1991, Georgian NMP had a cumulative decline of 31%, and during the same period of time, industry output declined by 27%, construction by 34%, and agricultural production fell by 18%.[149] Inflation skyrocketed, due to a drastic decrease in the domestic availability of goods, and the excess demand due to the existing monetary overhang.[150] Despite several rounds of increases in administratively controlled prices, the retail sales price deflator increased by 79% and inflation was 123% by the end of 1991.[151]

It is important to note that Georgia was certainly not alone among the post-Soviet republics in experiencing economic upheaval. However, the situation was exacerbated in Georgia for a number of reasons. An increasing difficulty in collecting taxes, wage and subsidy increases for the population and state enterprises, as well as unexpected reconstruction expenses in the aftermath of the April 1991 earthquake, contributed to a budget deficit of R1 billion.[152] Additionally, Georgia was particularly dependent on trade due to the small size of its economy, meaning that the decline in

[148] Ibid., 262.

[149] Ibid., 262.

[150] Ibid., 262.

[151] World Bank, "Statistical Appendix." Table 8.1

[152] Gurgenidze, Lobzhanidze, and Onoprishvili. "Georgia." 262.

interrepublic trade, and the output contraction in other republics, and especially in Russia, reduced demand for exportable Georgian goods.[153]

As the formal economy collapsed, the Georgian people relied heavily on the "large and relatively well-developed underground economy" which "flourished as central controls were weakened."[154] Some scholars argue that this shadow economy mitigated the overall economic decline to a certain extent, reducing the "overall contraction of output during 1991-1992" by as many as 10-15 percentage points less than the officially recorded figures.[155] Be that as it may however, the state's inability to exercise control over this informal economy further weakened its extractive capacity, thereby compounding the state's overall loss of economic power.[156]

Beyond economic concerns, the state faced a severe deficit in military capacity. Even before the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Georgia had the lowest recruitment rate of all the Soviet republics, meeting only 10% of its quota in 1990.[157] Upon independence, the newly formed parliament ended the Soviet military draft, and took the first steps towards creating its own army by creating a new draft for Georgian males into a 'national guard.'[158] It also passed a law demanding the removal

---

[153] Wellisz, "Georgia." 8.

[154] Gurgenidze, Lobzhanidze, and Onoprishvili. "Georgia." 263.

[155] Ibid., 263.

[156] Vladimer Papava, and Elene Chikovani. "Georgia: Economic and Social Challenges of the Transition." *Problems of Economic Transition*40, no. 7/8 (1997): 6-7.

[157] Slider, "The Politics of Georgia's Independence." 73.

[158] Ibid., 73.

of all Soviet troops from the republic, and Gamsakhurdia himself took steps to dismantle and reorganize the Georgian branch of the KGB.[159]

Yet even amidst these attempts to increase the state's military capacity, various armed factions proved to be a significant challenge to the new country. Although some groups threw their support behind Gamsakhurdia, the very existence of these paramilitary groups undermined the legitimate monopoly on violence exercised by the state.[160] Some of these groups had previously been given legal status, but even these nominally legal armed factions continued to be a source of trouble, with some of them attacking local police stations and Soviet military installations for weapons.[161]

However, Gamsakhurdia was also occupied with another security concern. In Abkhazia and South Ossetia, regions heavily populated by ethnic minorities with a long set of historical grievances against Georgians, people grew worried that an independent Georgia based on Georgian nationalism would be less likely to respect their rights than the former Communist regime.[162] Communist institutions continued in these regions, long after they were dissolved elsewhere in Georgia, and after a vote by the Supreme Soviet of South Ossetia on a measure asking for direct subordination to the USSR, the Georgian Parliament voted unanimously to abolish South Ossetia as

[159] Ibid., 73-74.

[160] Ibid., 71-72.

[161] Ibid., 71-72.

[162] Ibid., 75-76.

an autonomous entity, which led to open warfare between Georgian and Ossetian armed forces.[163]

In sum, Georgia's natural power potential and the state's actualized power *declined* significantly during this period. This was a result of the economic collapse that limited the state's natural power potential, and therefore the state's extractive capacity, but also of the state's loss of control vis a vis society, both militarily and territorially.

### *Geopolitical Context*

**Key Points:**

1. **The fall of the USSR is a shock to the international system**
2. **Regional restructuring requires a redefining of relationships**
3. **Russia experiences a loss of relative power**
4. **The West is reluctant to project power in the region**

The dissolution of the Soviet Union was the immediate context for Georgia's emergence onto the world stage, and resulted in a renegotiation of relations with leadership in Moscow both politically and economically. Former Soviet republics were declaring independence, and the transition resulted in a significant loss of Russia's relative power.[164]

Russia had little control over much of the activity that took place in the region during this time, and the "Russian position was represented independently by

[163] Ibid., 75-76.

[164] Kavus Abushov, "Policing the near Abroad: Russian Foreign Policy in the South Caucasus." *Australian Journal of International Affairs*63, no. 2 (2009): 193.

the president," and the "parliament and the military," with "each acting autonomously."[165] As a result, there were numerous situations where unclear information was being signalled, as to whether "certain actions committed on behalf of the Russian state were a part of the Russian state policy or purely private actions."[166]

However, Russia still maintained significant power relative to Georgia, and it continued to project that power. It established the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which was comprised of eleven member states, though notably, it was unable to bring Georgia into the fold.[167] It sent troops to deal with an anti-Soviet Georgian paramilitary group that was raiding Soviet installations in Georgia, and it refused to withdraw troops from South Ossetia, even though it declared South Ossetia's proclamation of freedom to be unconstitutional.[168] Russia also participated in negotiations over the conflict in South Ossetia, as a member of a Joint Commission, but did not make efforts to reinstate the commission after it went into recess over the holidays.[169]

As this happened however, the West, and more specifically the United States, chose to withhold power projection within the region. Georgia was not

---

[165] Ibid., 193.

[166] Ibid., 193.

[167] Ferdinand Feldbrugge, "The Law of the Republic of Georgia." *Review of Central and East European Law* 18, no. 4 (1992): 373.

[168] Slider, "The Politics of Georgia's Independence." 72; Stephen Jones, *Georgia: A Political History since Independence*, (London: Tauris, 2012.) 94-97.

[169] Jones, *Georgia.* 94-97.

internationally recognized by the United States, Sweden, and France, until diplomatic relations were established in late December of 1991, after the coup against Gamsakhurdia.[170] This skepticism was also accompanied by criticism, such as the infamous "Chicken Kiev" speech by President Bush in Ukraine, where he condemned "suicidal nationalism based upon ethnic hatred," and many Western countries both acknowledged and highlighted reports condemning countries like Georgia for human rights violations.[171]

### *Domestic Context*

**Key Points:**

1. **Gamsakhurdia is the sole acting FPE amidst a disunified political elite**
2. **Ideological paradigm of Georgian nationalism shaped strategic culture**
3. **The state-society relationship is characterised by distrust and ideological disconnect**
4. **The state is institutionally weak and subjected to competing claims of legitimacy**

*Who Securitizes? (Leader Image)*

Zviad Gamsakhurdia is identifiable as the primary Foreign Policy Executive (FPE). However, his inability to establish control over the country prevented the establishment of a "a coherent foreign and security policy beyond the requirements of bare state and regime survival."[172] Despite his animosity towards the Soviet

[170] Elizabeth Fuller, "Georgia since Independence: Plus Ça Change . . ." *Current History* 92, no. 576 (1993): 343.

[171] Jones, *Georgia.* 68.

[172] Oskanian, "The Balance Strikes Back," 633.

system, he presided over a "neo-patrimonial" state, demonised his opponents using hostile rhetoric traditionally used in the Soviet Union to denote enemies of the state, and was hostile to the concepts of privatization and a free market.[173]

His policies were "an amalgam of nationalism, populism, religiosity and conservatism."[174] His ethno-nationalism alienated minority populations, and his authoritarian style alienated the emerging political elite, resulting in his eventual ouster from leadership.[175] Nodia perhaps sums it up best, arguing that "Gamsakhurdkia's failure to be a democrat did not mean that he was a successful dictator either," for his leadership was "more a matter of style than of substance or performance."[176]

On the one hand, Gamsakhurdia "knew how to address mass rallies and recruit supporters from the ranks of political neophytes, but his paranoia and grandiosity eventually drove most of his lieutenants to become his implacable foes" primarily because "he could not master such simple tricks as making temporary deals with minor opponents in order to suppress more dangerous ones."[177] Put simply, "he only made enemies out of friends, and never the reverse," thus provoking "the

---

[173] Revaz Koiava and Edisher Baghaturia, "Georgia and Russia in Between Closeness and Confrontation: 25 Years of Relations," In *Georgia and Russia: Bilateral View on the Quarter Century Relations*. ed. Revaz Koiava, Edisher Baghaturia and Yulia Nikitina. (Tbilisi: Caucasian House, 2017), 7-10.

[174] Jones, *Georgia*. 53.

[175] Ibid., 73.

[176] Ghia Nodia, "Georgia's Identity Crisis." *Journal of Democracy*6, no. 1 (1995): 110-111.

[177] Ibid., 111.

creation of an extremely diverse coalition of ex-allies" who agreed only that "Gamsakhurdia had to go."[178]

Gamsakhurdia's role as the sole Foreign Policy Executive is made more explicit by an analysis of the political elites during this time. Elites were certainly present and active, both in the Supreme Soviet, and in leading opposition groups and parties. However, they were also what Higley would call "a disunified elite."[179] As he defines it, "a national elite is disunified when its members (1) share few or no understandings about the proprieties of political conduct and (2) engage in only limited and sporadic interactions across factional or sectoral boundaries."[180]

According to Higley, "the basic situation of persons composing this elite type is one of deep insecurity – the fear, usually rooted in experience, that all is lost if some other person or faction gets the upper hand."[181] As a result "members of a disunified elite routinely take extreme measures to protect themselves and their interests: killing, imprisoning, or banishing opponents, fomenting rebellions against ascendant factions, expropriating opponents' resources, and so on," because "in the context of elite disunity, these actions are often the most rational ones available."[182]

---

[178] Ibid., 111.

[179] John Higley and Michael Burton. "The Elite Variable in Democratic Transitions and Breakdowns." *American Sociological Review* 54, no. 1 (1989): 19.

[180] Ibid., 19.

[181] Ibid., 19.

[182] Ibid., 19.

Most scholars saw Georgia during this time as a weak or failing state, and as Higley argues, "the origin of national elite disunity" lies in "the process of nation-state formation."[183] A direct consequence of this disunity, as scholars such as Higley and Sanders would argue, is inherent regime instability.[184] In this sense, regime instability refers to political violence in the form of revolts, riots, and demonstrations, frequent changes of the governing coalitions and cabinets, and finally the possibility of coups d'etat or other government takeovers.[185]

If these definitional characteristics were a checklist, Georgia would have checked every box on the list during this time. Even from the beginning, an initial split between groups seeking to work within the Supreme Soviet and those working to establish a new legislative body, reflected a severe deficit in anything resembling O'Donnell and Schmitter's definition of an elite pact .[186] This elite pact is supposed to be an "explicit, but not always publicly explicated or justified, agreement among a select set of actors which seeks to define (or better, to redefine) rules governing the exercise of power on the basis of mutual guarantees for the 'vital interests' of those entering into it."[187]

---

[183] Ibid., 20.

[184] Higley and Michael Burton. "The Elite Variable in Democratic Transitions and Breakdowns." 18.

[185] David Sanders, *Patterns of Political Instability* (London: Macmillan, 1981).

[186] Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986,) 37-38.

[187] Ibid., 37-38.

In Georgia however, while the elites were certainly a political force to be reckoned with, they lacked this sort of homogenous identity, and thus had little actual policy-making power. The legislature often served as nothing more than a rubber stamp, and when Gamsakhurdia marched into the parliament in April 1991 to read the independence declaration to the assembled deputies, they unanimously endorsed it with a standing ovation and without any debate or vote.[188]

The high turnover rate for elites in Gamsakhurdia's government, and the growing divisions among those alienated by the president's style, certainly did not contribute to elite solidarity, except perhaps in their dislike of Gamsakhurdia. His actions, his abrasiveness, and his distrust of his own allies resulted in many elites joining ranks to consolidate forces against him.[189]

In December of 1991, a coup d'etat was engineered against Gamsakhurdia, who managed to escape Tbilisi and flee the country.[190] With insurgencies continuing in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the state of the country collapsed into chaos.[191] By March of 1992, the council collectively decided to invite Eduard Shevardnadze, a former First Secretary of the Georgian Communist Party, to Tbilisi as the chairman of the council.[192]

---

[188] Fuller, "Georgia since Independence." 343.

[189] Nodia, "Georgia's Identity Crisis." 111.

[190] Jones, *Georgia.* 73.

[191] Ibid., 75.

[192] Ibid., 73.

Yet despite this act of elite solidarity, it is telling that the political elites chose to hand over the reins of government to Shevardnadze after Gamsakhurdia's ouster. Put simply, the political elites lacked any cohesive unity or functionality to create policy, let alone set the foreign policy for the country, leaving Gamsakhurdia to act as the FPE right up until his removal from office.

*Are the Right Things Being Securitized? (Strategic Culture)*

Given that Gamsakhurdia was acting as the sole FPE, what shaped the way he conceptualized state security? Overwhelmingly, the most prominent ideological paradigm under which Gamsakhurdia operated, was Georgian nationalism. Mobilization over issues considered integral to national identity became a key component of protests during the 1980s, and took on a significant religious and ethnic nature, even before the country's independence.[193]

As Jones notes, "Georgian literary elites constructed a role for the church as an embattled and victimized institution leading a centuries-old struggle to preserve Georgian national identity," and "almost all the parties and popular fronts in the Georgian national liberation movement of the 1980s and early 1990s" underlined the "importance of Georgian Orthodoxy to Georgian identity."[194] Indeed, the National Democratic Party at one point even called for a quasi-theocracy, wherein the church

[193] Stephen Jones, "The Role of Cultural Paradigms in Georgian Foreign Policy." *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 19, no. 3 (2003): 90.

[194] Ibid., 88.

would "play a leading role in moral questions concerning the nation's life."[195] Although religion itself certainly has a distinctive role in Georgian culture, the integration of this religious Orthodox identity into national politics was notable on several fronts.

The church was cautiously supportive of the early national liberation movement in the 1980s, and became "a rallying-point" for the "demonstrations of the 1980s and 1990s, which often resembled religious processions with candles, crosses and religious banners."[196] Under Gamsakhurdia's leadership, the church became even more politicized, as "priests were appointed to government posts, religious holidays replaced secular ones," and the media, under Gamsakhurdia's control, sought to portray him as a "pious and patriotic president."[197] Indeed, Gamsakhurdia wrote with an almost messianic zeal about the church, declaring that "Georgian Christianity" was "in essence" a "military type of Christianity" or a "warrior Christianity," and that Georgia was the "single and complete spiritual order of St. George as perceived by the Crusaders."[198]

However, this conceptualization of Georgian Orthodoxy as a requirement to be a true Georgian was also linked closely to another aspect of Georgian nationalism, namely the ongoing reinforcement of the 'other' in both domestic and international

---

[195] Ibid., 89.

[196] Ibid., 90.

[197] Ibid., 89.

[198] Ibid., 89.

spheres. Internationally, this can be seen as a response to Moscow, for example with the protests of the 1980s and the significant focus on preserving markers of 'Georgian identity' such as language or religious practices. However, there is reason to suggest that this may go even deeper, and is, at least in part, a result of Georgia's historical struggle to survive as a small state surrounded by great powers, a reality that has constrained Georgia in geopolitical terms for much of its history.

Georgians were often noted as particularly troublesome by Soviet leadership during the Soviet Union in terms of both ethnic and political integration. Georgians not only tended to marry other Georgians, many also refused to leave Georgia when assigned to positions outside the country.[199] Arutiunov recounts that Georgian villagers knew "the truth about the GULAGs already in the 1940s," and "never referred to Stalin in other terms" besides "that moustached beast."[200] However, when the official Soviet line promoted the denunciation of Stalinist practices, the villagers "promptly displayed portraits of Stalin on the windshields of their tractors and lorries," in a "surprising diametrical shift."[201]

Yet while accepting this new party line in Russia was simply "a shift from one sort of conformity to another conformity," in Georgia, the "shift was from one non-conformist behaviour to another kind of non-conformist behaviour."[202] This

---

[199] J. W. R. Parsons, "National Integration in Soviet Georgia." *Soviet Studies* 34, no. 4 (1982): 553-557.

[200] Steven Usitalo and William Benton Whisenhunt. *Russian and Soviet History: From the Time of Troubles to the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, (Lanham, Md.: Rowan & Littlefield, 2008) 257.

[201] Ibid., 257.

[202] Ibid., 257.

non-conformist behaviour was actually a source of identity creation and confirmation against an 'other,' in this case, Soviet Russia.

Domestically however, this same push towards national identity can be seen as a self-perpetuating means of consolidating domestic control. The "original sin" of the Georgian leadership's response to minority populations "transformed a difficult political situation" into a "complicated knot that poisoned" relations with autonomous regions and "further destabilized Georgia."[203] As Snyder writes, "nationalism reflects a need to establish an effective state to achieve a group's economic and security needs," and the "most aggressive nationalist movements arise when states fail to carry out tasks."[204]

In other words, the alienation of minority populations was a "clash of local political projects that were mobilized to fill the space of the collapsing Soviet Empire," and in a "moment of historic change and uncertainty" ethnic groups with "historic trauma" mobilized to defend themselves against a perceived threat from Georgian nationalism. By "refusing to see how its own quest for independence challenged the identities of the Abkhazians and Ossetians, Georgia failed to create a more integrated national identity."[205]

---

[203] Vicken Cheterian, *War and Peace in the Caucasus: Russia's Troubled Frontier*, (London: Hurst &, 2008), 202.

[204] Jack Snyder, "'Nationalism and the Crisis of the Post-Soviet State," in *Ethnic Conflict and International Security.* ed. Michael Brown. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 81.

[205] Cheterian, *War and Peace in the Caucasus,* 311.

Gamsakhurdia and the political leadership used the "mass nationalism set free by the collapse of the Soviet state," from a place of insecurity, seeking to legitimize their own authority and that of the larger 'national project' of the Georgian state on the basis of a flimsily constructed, and highly questionable historical narrative about Georgian identity.[206] As Joffe notes, this concept of the Georgian nation-state reflects a "basic ideological conflict," where it "provides a vehicle for individual participation in collective action and individual identity within the collective."[207] However, because this "vehicle" is framed and defined in nationalist terms, "it does not do so on the basis of individual decision but on the basis of adherence to a collective cultural identity."[208]

Moreover, Georgia's status as a post-colonial state also contributed to this overarching paradigm. As one scholar noted, the resistance of Georgians "to Russian colonialism and their political and cultural clash with the dominant Russian culture can partially account for the large numbers of Georgians in the Soviet underground economy."[209] A distrust of government and state power created a "survivalist culture"

[206] Ibid., 378.

[207] George Joffe, "Nationalities and Borders in Transcaucasia and the Northern Caucasus." In *Transcaucasian Boundaries*, edited by Wright, John F. R., Suzanne Goldenberg, and Richard N. Schofield, (London: UCL Press, 1996,) 24.

[208] Ibid., 24.

[209] Alexander Kupatadze, *Organized Crime, Political Transitions, and State Formation in Post-Soviet Eurasia*, (Basingstoke; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 76.

in which Georgians learned to rely on informal ties to provide "the resources necessary for sustaining life."[210]

Reminders of this post-colonial status were especially fresh in Georgians' minds in the years following independence, since the country's "new history was a bloody struggle for national liberation, illustrated by the anti-Soviet revolts and demonstrations of 1925, 1956, and 1989."[211] Jones notes the "post-independence wave of revolutionism" among the Georgian population, and argues that elites especially were "profoundly affected by the Soviet experience," which "paradoxically, created an idealized image of the West" that contrasted with the view of Russia as a threatening oppressor.[212]

*How Divided is the State? (State-Society Relations)*

Scholars such as Nodia argue that this time was marked by a severe ideological disconnect between the elites and the general public. As he writes, "the greatest agony of Georgia's liberal intellectuals came from their disappointment with their own people."[213] The popularly elected president's voter base was, as one liberal said bitterly, a "stinking mob."[214] In this sense, the coup was a "war pitting the elite"

---

[210] Ibid., 76.

[211] Rick Fawn, *Ideology and National Identity in Post-communist Foreign Policies*, (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), 95.

[212] Jones, "The Role of Cultural Paradigms in Georgian Foreign Policy." 87.

[213] Nodia, "Georgia's Identity Crisis." 112.

[214] Ibid., 112.

against this so called "mob," and in such a war, "even a coalition with semi-criminal paramilitary groups seemed justifiable."[215] For these elites, "better the civilized, liberal, pro-Western autocracy of Shevardnadze," than "the backward, nativist, half-mad autocracy of Gamsakhurdia."[216]

This disconnect was visibly demonstrated by the way in which Tbilisi was physically divided during the coup. Rustaveli Avenue was split in two, with "hunger strikers and protesters filling up barricades erected by the opposition."[217] Gamsakhurdia, the "National Guard members and supporters arriving from various regions of Georgia" occupied the parliament building and other ministerial buildings, and the opposition took up residence in the Philharmonia Hall, the TV studios, Tbilisi State University, the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, and the Chess House.[218] Districts of Tbilisi, like Vake and Saburtalo, were largely comprised of 'red intelligentsia' and 'gilded youth' who threw their support behind the coup, while residents of Gldani, Nadzaladevi, and Didube supported Gamsakhurdia.[219] By the end of the coup, numerous people had been killed or wounded in the confrontations, and buildings like the Hotel Tbilisi were in ruins.[220]

---

[215] Ibid., 112.

[216] Ibid., 113.

[217] Jones, *Georgia*. 69.

[218] Ibid., 69-70.

[219] Ibid., 70.

[220] Koiava and Baghaturia, "Georgia and Russia in Between Closeness and Confrontation." 10.

Beyond the elite-public divide, the relationship between the state and society was largely defined by the patronage system that had developed in Soviet times. As early as the 1970s, a Soviet criminologist reported that economic crimes such as bribery and embezzlement accounted for almost 40% of all reported criminal offences in Soviet Georgia.[221] These practices were of course, in no way unique to Georgia, but even according to Soviet standards, the country was a particularly egregious offender.[222]

As Willerton notes, this patronage system was a significant source of political mobility in the Soviet Union."[223] The officials divided the state into spheres of influence where they took districts, towns, and even party organizations into patronage.[224] These leaders were "paid regular tribute by chairmen of collective farms and managers of state farms" and "the owners of private enterprises made monthly protection payments."[225] In this way, "each major official had his own sphere of influence and his own clientele by whom he was paid regular tribute in return for protection."[226]

---

[221] John Kramer, "Political Corruption in the U.S.S.R." *Western Political Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (1977): 214.

[222] Ibid., 215.

[223] John Willerton, "Clientelism in the Soviet Union: An Initial Examination." *Studies in Comparative Communism* 12, no. 2 (1979): 181-182.

[224] Konstantin Simis, Jacqueline Edwards, and Mitchell. Schneider. *USSR: Secrets of a Corrupt Society* (London: J.M. Dent, 1982), 61.

[225] Ibid., 61.

[226] Ibid., 61.

The informal institutions that dominated Soviet society did not disappear with the collapse of the Soviet Union but continued after Georgia's independence, as the patronage system continued to bolster the underground economy. This shadow economy had evolved naturally out of the Soviet system of centralized leadership, as the "centralization of power caused lags and inefficiencies in the production of goods and services."[227] In the command economy, the "formal economy" could never catch up with the demand because scarcity occurred both at the "consumer level" and "also in industry," where "shortages in critical supplies and equipment interfere with production."[228]

As a result these formal deficiencies gave rise to informal solutions, such as the development of a second economy that branched out "into most fields of economic activity."[229] Private enterprises sprung up illegally, and eventually most goods and services became "available in this fashion," which in turn decreased "the incentive to make the formal economy work."[230]

As might be expected, therefore, the relationship between the centralized leadership, the patronage system that accompanied it, and the shadow economy, was highly symbiotic. "Officials with access to bureaucratic decisions" had a valuable service they could offer, and by supplementing their official incomes in exchange for

---

[227] Larissa Adler Lomnitz, "Informal Exchange Networks in Formal Systems: A Theoretical Model." *American Anthropologist* 90, no. 1 (1988): 52.

[228] Ibid., 52.

[229] Ibid., 53.

[230] Ibid., 53.

looking the other way, an "increasing proportion of state resources" was continually being diverted into this second economy.[231]

With every transaction and favour in the shadow economy, these "highly idiosyncratic, culturally conditioned forms of economic cooperation" were strengthened, with everything from "daily shopping to protection money" built on the trust developed within personal networks of reciprocity.[232] Thus, when the formal economy began to contract in 1989, going into complete freefall shortly after, Georgians continued to rely on the informal economy to access the goods and services they needed to survive.[233]

Several scholars refer to this as a "non-state mindset" that permeated Georgian society during this time, arguing that "the Georgian experience with communism" deepened the "alienation of individuals from state institutions."[234] The state was defined by "restrictions, repression, and deception," making it something to be "avoided," and this contributed to a societal proclivity for avoiding the state through a reliance on the personalistic networks of clientelism, neo-patrimonialism, and corruption."[235]

---

[231] Ibid., 53.

[232] Ibid., 53.

[233] Papava, and Chikovani. "Georgia." 6-7.

[234] Ghia Nodia, "Georgia. Dimensions of Insecurity." In *Statehood and Security: Georgia after the Rose Revolution*. ed. Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold, (Cambridge, Mass: Cambridge; London: American Academy of Arts and Sciences MIT Press, 2005,) 68

[235] Ibid., 68.

This distrust of the state ran deep in Georgia. The country had flirted with independence before being forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union by the Bolsheviks, and it had a legacy of mass demonstrations and uprisings throughout the Soviet Era.[236] In 1989, for example, Georgian protests against an appeal by Abkhazian leaders for self-determination ended in violence when military force was used against the demonstrators.[237] This resulted in the death of twenty Georgians, many of whom were women and children, and in the hospitalization of hundreds of others.[238]

These kinds of events significantly impacted public opinion in Georgia, and surveys found that Georgia had the lowest opinion of the Communist Party out of all the Soviet ethnic groups included in the survey.[239] 42% of Georgian respondents said that the Communist Party never makes decisions in the public interest, compared to a much lower average of 18% from all respondents.[240]

As a result, although Georgia was the last of the republics to hold parliamentary elections at the end of October 1990, it had already largely achieved de facto independence by the spring of 1991, because Communist Party membership

[236] Slider, "The Politics of Georgia's Independence." 62-67.

[237] Ibid., 64.

[238] Ibid., 64.

[239] Ibid., 66.

[240] Ibid., 66.

declined rapidly from 1989 to 1990, and many of the most prominent party members disavowed their memberships by the parliamentary elections at the end of that year.[241]

Now, even though the Soviet state was no more, that distrust and animosity towards authority continued to inform the attitudes and opinions of the public. By the end of 1991 into the beginning of 1992, the relationship between the state and society had become highly strained. The elites fractured amongst themselves and against Gamsakhurdia and his "mob" of supporters. Wary of the state, and heavily reliant on the informal economy, the general population itself splintered in its support or opposition to the president, creating societal cleavages that further destabilized the country.

*What Structures are in Place for Policy-Making & Policy Execution? (Domestic Institutions)*

The elections for the Supreme Soviet accelerated the rapid disintegration of the Communist Party in Georgia, but they also highlighted the serious cleavages that divided the opposition. These groups transformed themselves into political parties, often centred around a prominent figure. Amongst all the organizational and programmatic differences of these parties, long-standing personal rivalries between the leaders prevented the formation of any significant coalitional alliances.[242]

As the elections approached, several opposition groups advocated for a complete reworking of a new legislative body, and eventually the Georgian Supreme

[241] Ibid., 64-66.

[242] Feldbrugge, "The Law of the Republic of Georgia."369-373.

Soviet conceded to these demands by postponing the elections.[243] Around this time, the parliament also officially changed the constitution to end the monopoly of the Communist Party in politics, and a new law on elections was passed regarding the composition of the legislative body.[244]

Eleven parties or party blocs participated in the election, and even including the Communist Party, there was almost complete unanimity on the issue of Georgian independence.[245] However, these elections were boycotted by other parties that urged for a completely new legislative institution they entitled the National Congress.[246] These parties decided to hold their own elections, and although the parties did not have the support of large segments of the population, they were popular amongst the intelligentsia in major Georgian cities.[247]

However, this election was fraught with difficulties, and the overt hostility between these different opposition groups took on a violent nature, due in part to the support of various armed factions that backed different opposition leaders.[248] Election headquarters were firebombed, Gamsakhurdia's bodyguards were shot to

[243] Ibid., 369-373.

[244] Ibid. 369-373.

[245] Slider, "The Politics of Georgia's Independence." 69.

[246] Feldbrugge, "The Law of the Republic of Georgia." 369-373.

[247] Slider, "The Politics of Georgia's Independence." 69.

[248] Ibid., 70.

death at one of his offices, and Gia Chanturia, head of the National Democratic Party of Georgia, was wounded in an attack leading up to the elections.[249]

When Gamsakhurdia was elected as chairman of the Supreme Soviet, he moved to form a government comprised primarily of his own party coalition.[250] He later introduced direct elections for a new post of president of the Georgian Republic, which were held in May of 1991.[251] This made Georgia the first post-Soviet republic to hold a contested popular election for the presidential post, and Gamsakhurdia won with approximately 86% of the vote over five other candidates.[252]

Gamsakhurdia was primarily opposed at first by parties who either boycotted the elections, or failed to get their candidates into office, and was only rarely challenged from within the legislature, since opposition parties had too few deputies to pose any significant challenge.[253] However, growing cleavages and political polarization led to considerable enmity between these groups, with some calling Gamsakhurdia a 'fascist,' others claiming that there had been massive voter fraud, and Gamsakhurdia himself utilizing his significant control over the media to establish and consolidate his power.[254]

---

[249] Ibid., 70.

[250] Fuller, "Georgia since Independence." 343.

[251] Ibid., 343.

[252] Ibid., 343.

[253] Ibid., 343.

[254] Nodia, "Georgia's Identity Challenge," 109.

In short, the state was characterized by weak domestic institutions, which were the result of competing claims for legitimacy and the lack of a clearly defined political process. Gamsakhurdia was able to utilize this to consolidate presidential power, despite the opposition, giving him full control of the policy-making process up until his ouster.

## *Outcome*

*Foreign Policy*

**Key Points:**

1. **Antagonism toward Russia**
2. **Mercurial interactions with the West**
3. **Limited regional engagement**

Relations with Moscow were strained during this period, with representation from Georgia often absent at Gorbachev's Council of the Federation, and the new Georgian leadership firmly stating that Georgia would refuse to sign any treaties for the creation of a new Union.[255] Georgia time and time again chose to balance against Russia, rather than accommodate it, condemning the USSR as an occupying force, and deciding to break off all official relations with the Soviet Union for its refusal to recognize Georgian independence.[256] Georgia even went so far as to self-impose a blockade in March of 1991 in order to "exert economic influence on Russia."[257]

[255] Jones, *Georgia*. 68

[256] Slider, "The Politics of Georgia's Independence." 72.

[257] Gurgenidze, Lobzhanidze, and Onoprishvili. "Georgia." 263.

Meanwhile, despite initial overtures to the West, that path was not open to Georgia at this time, signalled by the refusal of many of these countries to give Georgia official recognition, and the criticisms from the West resulted in a response from Georgia that sometimes bordered on hostility.[258] After Bush's 'Chicken Kiev' speech to the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, for example, Gamsakhurdia accused Bush of supporting "communism, tyranny, and mock reforms."[259] Georgia continued to pay lip service to desiring Western integration, but the country began to pursue a regional strategy, seeking nearby alliances, such as with Jokhar Dudayev, the leader of the Chechen-Ingush autonomous republic.[260]

*Systemic Response*

Georgia's foreign policy during this time period can primarily be defined as *structurally divergent,* based on the punitive systemic response it provoked. Rather than Georgia's relative power being strengthened through foreign policy, the country's relative power was quantifiably weakened as a result of its behaviour.

The tangible results of this antagonistic balancing against Russia resulted in economic hardship. The self-imposed blockade is baffling on several fronts, perhaps most especially because it was disproportionately hurtful to the country imposing it, rather than the country against which it was directed.[261]

---

[258] Jones, *Georgia.* 73.

[259] Ibid., 68.

[260] Svante Cornell, "Religion as a Factor in Caucasian Conflicts." *Civil Wars* 1, no. 3 (1998): 59.

[261] Gurgenidze, Lobzhanidze, and Onoprishvili. "Georgia." 263.

This antagonistic approach to Russia also resulted, at least indirectly, in the weakening of Georgia's military and territorial power, as the country's foreign policy alienated the only potential ally that could realistically provide hard power assistance to the state. When armed factions attacked local police stations and Soviet military installations for weapons, Soviet troops moved against these groups in February 1991, but there was little cooperation with the Georgian state, although Gamsakhurdia did arrest the leadership of that armed faction shortly afterwards.[262] Likewise, as the Georgian state increasingly lost control of territories such as South Ossetia and Abkhazia, cooperation with Russia was limited, despite the latter's seeming interest in preventing conflict and instability on its borders.[263]

Although it might be initially assumed that Georgia balanced against Russia because it was bandwagoning with newly discovered Western allies, it would be more accurate to say that Georgia balanced against Russia from an increasing position of isolation. Georgia could not rely on the West to support them in balancing against Russia, and despite the country's attempts to gain some kind of regional support, it was left largely isolated and vulnerable.

In this situation, a structurally defined foreign policy would have recognized the strategic value of accommodating Russia, rather than balancing against Russia. Although Georgia's pursuit of regional allies was a step in the right direction, its foreign policy was primarily structurally divergent, as it sought to balance against

---

[262] Slider, "The Politics of Georgia's Independence." 72.

[263] Jones, *Georgia*. 71-73.

Russia, despite a significant imbalance in relative power between the two countries. This imbalance was only exacerbated by the lack of any real external support for Georgia's actions. This foreign policy choice provoked a costly systemic response, as Georgia's overbalancing led to a loss in the country's economic, military, and territorial power, thereby reducing the country's power relative to the international order.

*Theoretical Comparison*

The structural divergence of Georgia's foreign policy offers a direct challenge to any neorealist explanation of this case study. It is true that the dissolution of the Soviet Union certainly acted as a shock to the international system, and the subsequent shifts in relative power, together with the regional reshuffling of new states, arguably resulted in poor conditions for information signalling between states. The uncertainty of imperfect information could potentially be blamed for Georgia's overbalancing behaviour, and neorealists might argue that given a longer period of time, the country's foreign policy would take a corrective course.

As discussed in the next case study, Georgia does take a corrective course, but it is hard to argue that poor information alone is to blame for the country's misread of the international environment. The West was clear in its hesitancy to project power in the region, and although Russia's relative power was certainly weakened, it was still the only regional hegemon, and was the only viable option to help stanch the haemorrhaging of Georgia's economic and military power.

Turning to domestic variables therefore makes sense for trying to understand Georgia's behaviour, but a liberalist or materialist approach to understanding this case study also falls short. Georgia acted against its material interests in alienating its largest trading partner, in direct opposition to any theory of economic dependence.

Using the liberalist approach of relegating geopolitics to a secondary role diminishes the significance of the Soviet Union's dissolution to the development of Georgia's foreign policy. Therefore, it altogether misses the fact that Georgia's behaviour, though structurally divergent, was nevertheless informed by a structural premise, that of a newly independent state seeking to ensure its own survival against a much larger power.

Of these alternate theories, it is only a constructivist approach that provides a plausible answer for Georgia's foreign policy, by arguing that it is the product of social meanings that have developed out of the hostile and antagonistic interactions between Georgia and Russia throughout history. If this is indeed the case however, it is hard to understand why Azerbaijan, which had also experienced a history of similar antagonistic interactions with Russia, was far more accommodating than Georgia in its foreign policy during this period of time.[264] A socially constructed structure of international politics does not seem to answer this question so well as an approach that takes domestic variables, such as differences in leadership, into account.

[264] Zaur Shiriyev, *Azerbaijan's Relations with Russia Closer by Default?* (London: Chatham House, 2019), 6.

*Analysis*

Understood according to a neoclassical realist perspective, Georgia was acting within an anarchic structure as a newly independent state seeking to ensure its survival in an international order made uncertain by the upheaval that accompanied the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Yet Georgia perceived the *systemic stimuli* of the international system incorrectly, and its structurally divergent foreign policy was accordingly met with a punitive systemic response. But why was this the case?

This particular 'moment' in Georgian history can be summed up as 'chaos' because the state was truly in a constant state of crisis from 1991-1992. A neoclassical realist analysis of intervening variables, therefore, must prioritize *leader image* as exerting the most pressure on the domestic variable of Georgia's *foreign policy*, followed by *strategic culture*, with *state-society relations* and *domestic institutions* exerting the weakest pressure on state behaviour.

A close examination of these variables, therefore, provides an answer for Georgia's structurally divergent foreign policy behaviour. Looking first at *leader image* and *strategic culture*, the obsession over the internal 'other' and the heightened rhetoric that informed Gamsakhurdia's decisions as the sole FPE, weakened the objectivity of Georgia's foreign policy-making process. The overarching paradigm of Georgian nationalism resulted in both the rejection of certain external strategic alignments, and contributed to an internal weakness that ultimately resulted in Russian intervention and a loss of state sovereignty. Although they exerted less pressure on the domestic

variable directly, the weakness of *domestic institutions* and the deep divisions between the *state and society* allowed Gamsakhurdia to act as the sole FPE, making decisions based on his own understanding of the international system with relative impunity.

Against this backdrop, the early rhetoric from Gamsakhurdia and fellow political leaders about the desire for Western integration can be understood, because "in the Soviet period," being European was defined by "the rejection of communism."[265] and thus "the country's new leaders" sought "integration into Western political and economic structures" on the basis of "Georgia's political and cultural identity with the West," no matter "how historically flimsy this connection." [266]

Put differently, "the choice" to pursue Western integration, even though that foreign policy choice was not structurally informed, was "largely identity-driven" despite the fact that the "country's social and historical experience with 'Westernness'" was "minimal."[267] The same post-colonial heritage and Soviet legacy that drove this kind of public discourse from political leaders and elites, also constrained the "social capital that Georgians could actually invest in the Westernizing project," because it was "limited by Georgians' anarchic understanding of freedom as a lack of restraint, their intuitive mistrust toward state institutions, and

[265] Fawn, *Ideology and National Identity in Post-communist Foreign Policies*, 92.

[266] Ibid., 92.

[267] Nodia, "Georgia." 69.

their reliance on personalistic networks."[268] Thus the non-conformist behavior that had characterized Georgia during the Soviet Union, also served to both propel and constrain Georgia's ability to seek Western integration.

The belief that Georgia could finally overcome its "historic loneliness," was undoubtedly a large part of this desire to form a national identity around Georgia as a European country against a Russian 'other.'[269] As a result, in the face of Western unwillingness to project power in the region, Georgia's foreign policy was incapable of making strategic adjustments to reflect the reality of the international system.

Georgia's persistence in balancing against Russia even to the point of near isolation and a loss of relative power, indicates the presence of these intervening variables distorting the foreign policy-making process. These intervening variables clearly had significant foreign policy implications, as the "failures to create workable administrative and political institutions led not only to the effective loss of important chunks of territory," but the impossibility of mobilizing the "population against new external and internal threats to national security."[270]

## 4.2. "Consolidation" 1992b-2003

### *Structural Context*

[268] Ibid., 70.

[269] Fawn, *Ideology and National Identity in Post-communist Foreign Policies,* 92.

[270] Jonathan Aves, "National Security and Military Issues in the South Caucasus." Sec 1. Electronic Legal Deposit (eLD.)

**Key Points:**

1. **Georgia experiences an *increase* in natural power potential**
2. **Georgia experiences an *increase* in actualized power**

Overall, Georgia moved from the category of a 'failed state' to a 'weak state' under Shevardnadze's tenure.[271] Apart from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the government did control the territory, and the political situation seemed relatively stable.[272] State institutions were strengthened, and paramilitary organizations were no longer a constant danger to the political order.[273] Yet although the state was strengthened relative to society, significant challenges remained.

Shevardnadze was endowed with a broad range of powers, first as the Chair of the State Council and Parliament, and then as president, but his political base was weak, he did not control a parliamentary majority, and parliament itself was more a platform for emotional statements than a law-making institution.[274] During his first years in office, Georgia's public revenues accounted for less than 20% of the GDP, and around 17% of its territory was outside of the central government's control.[275] Moreover, Shevardnadze was largely at the mercy of the coup-makers who had

[271] Ghia Nodia, "Putting the State Back Together in the Post-Soviet Georgia" In *Beyond State Crisis: Post-Colonial Africa and Post-Soviet Eurasia in Comparative Perspective*. ed. M. R. Beissinger and C. Young. (Washington, D. C.: Woodrow Wilson Center, 2002), 416-421.

[272] Ibid., 416-421.

[273] Ibid., 416-421.

[274] Stephen Jones, "Georgia: The Trauma of Statehood." *New States, New Politics: Building the Post-Soviet Nations* (1997): 523.

[275] Charles King, "The Benefits of Ethnic War: Understanding Eurasia's Unrecognized States." *World Politics* 53, no. 4 (2001): 535-536.

brought him into power, especially those who controlled armed factions.[276] In contrast, the state still had no army of its own, only small groupings of militia.[277]

Shevardnadze moved quickly to try and consolidate control. He managed to obtain Russian support to help achieve a ceasefire in Abkhazia by the autumn of 1993, with Russian troops serving as peacekeepers in the region.[278] He effectively defanged the paramilitary factions by politically outmanoeuvring their leaders and arresting their members, and when Gamsakhurdia returned from Chechnya to challenge him, Shevardnadze was once again bolstered by Russia, which used the pretext of securing essential railroads to enter Georgia and help suppress the riots.[279] From there, Shevardnadze oversaw the mass arrests and disarmament of Gamsakhurdia's followers, and the challenge to his leadership eased slightly with Gamsakhurdia's death in December 1993.[280]

On the other hand, attempts to build a "new Georgian national army" were "hindered by a very high percentage of draft evasion."[281] The pursuit of internal stability resulted in a significant Russian presence, including control of ports and

---

[276] Nina Dadalauri and Lars Johannsen, "Shevardnadze's Political Strategies: The Rise and Fall of the Incumbent." In *Pathways: A Study of Six Post-communistCountries. Edited by* Lars Johannsen and Karin Hilmer Pedersen, (Denmark: Aarhus University Press, 2009), 56.

[277] Ibid., 56.

[278] Ibid., 56.

[279] Ibid., 56.

[280] Ibid., 57.

[281] Darrell Slider, "Georgia." In *Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Country Studies*. Edited by Glenn Curtis, (Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1995), 227-228.

military bases, and a considerable land and maritime border.[282] Even after Georgia started to turn away from Russia and pursue other allies, it continued to need outside assistance to maintain internal security.[283] It sought US help in providing military training and support in dealing with Pankisi Gorge, and it relied heavily on international aid to forestall economic collapse.[284]

Georgia's economic struggles also continued to prove a significant challenge. The country's foray into privatization resulted in "persistent high inflation" which caused "increases in budgetary outlays, as higher costs of energy and grain imports" were subsidized by the government, and the budget became more and more strained by the growth of outlays on "wages, pensions, health, and education, as well as social benefits."[285] Contraction in domestic production, the increase in criminal activities and conflict, and trade shocks all played a role in the country's continued economic decline. By 1993, inflation hit a record 15,000%, and the country had become vastly more unequal, according to measures such as the GINI index.[286]

The extractive capacity of the state did slowly begin to increase, due in part to tax and budget legislation introduced in the beginning of 1992.[287] These measures

---

[282] Robert Larsson, "The Enemy Within: Russia's Military Withdrawal from Georgia." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 17, no. 3 (2004): 406-407.

[283] Rick Fawn, "Russia's Reluctant Retreat from the Caucasus: Abkhazia, Georgia and the US after 11 September 2001." *European Security* 11, no. 4 (2002): 137.

[284] Ibid., 137.

[285] Gurgenidze, Lobzhanidze, and Onoprishvili. "Georgia." 268.

[286] Dadalauri and Johannsen, "Shevardnadze's Political Strategies." 54.

[287] Gurgenidze, Lobzhanidze, and Onoprishvili. "Georgia." 268.

"broadened the revenue base considerably and brought the Georgian taxation system closer to that of market economies."[288] Nevertheless, this progress was undermined by the "tax administration and collective capacity of the authorities," which remained "very weak" due to "lack of adequate manpower and equipment, poorly trained staff," and tax evasion."[289]

By 2000, Georgia's political and economic development had met a dead end. The IMF threatened to call in its credits after negative assessments of Georgia's corruption and crime levels, foreign direct investment (FDI) slowed, and the Russian financial crisis of 1998 led to significant currency devaluation.[290] Georgia was heavily dependent on foreign aid, which covered between 45% and 86% of government expenditure between 1997 and 2001, a number that was continuing to rise with each passing year.[291] State capacity remained low, and central government debt spiralled quickly upward, from 43% to 72% of GDP between 1997 and 1999.[292]

In short, Georgia did experience an increase in natural power potential and actualized power. The state was able to dismantle and defang the paramilitary groups that had challenged the state's monopoly on violence, procure a ceasefire with Abkhazia, and increase its extractive capacity through revenue collection and external

---

[288] Ibid., 268.

[289] Ibid., 368.

[290] Vladimer Papava, "The Political Economy of Georgia's Rose Revolution." *Orbis* 50, no. 4 (2006): 659.

[291] Dadalauri and Johannsen, "Shevardnadze's Political Strategies. 63.

[292] Ibid., 63.

funding. Yet, although the state was comparatively stronger than before, it was still weak. It remained incapable of guaranteeing its own security or the security of its citizens without external assistance and continued to face serious economic challenges that constrained its ability to operate effectively.

### *Geopolitical Context*

**Key Points:**

1. **Russia's relative power increases overall, but fluctuates significantly**
2. **Gradual increase in Western, (and especially American,) willingness to project power in the region**
3. **Other states in the region demonstrate growing recognition of these changing power dynamics**

Russia was unable to formally articulate its first Foreign Policy Concept until 1993, due to an undeveloped foreign policy decision-making mechanism, coupled with competition among different institutions and ongoing internal political struggles.[293] The concept delimited the territories of the former Soviet Union as areas of special interest and "implied Moscow's right to intervene in those former Soviet Republics where its interests were deemed to be under threat."[294]More broadly, it served as a signal that Russia had "never ceased to be the regional power" and never

[293] Russian Federation. "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (1993)." In *Russian Foreign Policy in Transition: Concepts and Realities*, ed. Andrei Melville and Tatiana Shakleina. (New York: Central European University Press, 2005), 27-64.

[294] Oskanian, "The Balance Strikes Back," 634.

truly ceased to possess "the relevant autonomy to influence the dynamics of processes."[295]

Russia's loss of "great power status at the level of the international relations system" was less relevant than its position as "the only pole in its regional security complex," which it certainly was, even during this period of relative weakness.[296] As Russia re-established its 'right' to a sphere of influence in the former Soviet republics, the United States, and the West more broadly, chose against any 'hard' power balancing to contain Russia.

"Neither Europe nor the US had any clear or consistent policy for the region in general," and under the Clinton administration, the United States was especially reluctant to project power in the region, instead allowing Russia to remain the dominant power in the region.[297] Russia exercised this regional hegemonic presence, mediating a cease-fire agreement that divided Georgia into government and separatist controlled areas.[298] Russian "peacekeepers" were posted in the separatist regions, formally under the authority of the CIS, OSCE, and the UN.[299]

However, the overall power projection of the West did slowly begin to increase from previous years. Georgia was officially recognized, economic assistance

---

[295] Abushov, "Policing the near Abroad." 200.

[296] Ibid., 201.

[297] Koiava and Baghaturia, "Georgia and Russia in Between Closeness and Confrontation." 14.

[298] Neil Macfarlane, "On the Front Lines in the near Abroad: The CIS and the OSCE in Georgia's Civil Wars." *Third World Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1997): 520-522.

[299] Ibid., 514-520.

offered, and the door opened to Georgia's integration into structural institutions such as the UN.[300] Moreover, although Clinton's administration spent much of its first term pursuing the doctrine of "democratic expansion" in relation to Moscow, by the beginning of his second term, such efforts were yielding diminishing returns.[301] The 1998 Russian economic crisis and the 1999 intervention into Kosovo, not to mention Moscow's attitude towards NATO expansion and disagreements between the powers regarding Chechnya, all resulted in a significant cooling off period between Moscow and Washington.[302]

While the EU and NATO did not propose efforts to expand into Russia's "near abroad," the West did begin to circumvent Russia economically, through the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Çeyhan (BTC) pipeline that avoided the country altogether.[303] By 1998, the US National Security Strategy argued for the full integration of most CIS states into Western-led economic and political structures.[304] The United States prioritized the safeguarding of Azerbaijani oil reserves through the BTC, making Georgia, as a politically feasible transit country, decidedly more important than in previous years.[305]

---

[300] Slider, "Georgia." 221-222.

[301] Alton Frye, "The New NATO and Relations with Russia." Journal of Strategic Studies no. 23 (2000): 92–110.

[302] Ibid., 92-110.

[303] Oskanian, "The Balance Strikes Back," 635.

[304] *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*, (Washington, DC: The White House, 1998), 37-40.

[305] Fiona Hill, "Pipelines in the Caspian: Catalyst or Cure-all?" *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*5, no. 1 (2004): 17-25.

By the time of the Bush Administration, the United States was increasingly willing to expand its involvement in the former Soviet space, especially after 9/11.[306] The National Security Strategy of the United States featured an explicit inclusion of Central Asia and the Caspian Basin in relation to issues of energy, terrorism, and the containment of Iran, and the US military became directly involved in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Georgia.[307] Moreover, it explicitly opened up NATO membership to former Soviet states, and expressed a willingness to engage in state-building and democracy promotion across the region.[308] As a result, increased balancing with the West appeared to offer a clear alternative to bandwagoning with Russia.

Even though Russia's relative power was comparatively stronger than it had been in the initial aftermath of the Soviet Union's dissolution, it was not strong enough to counter increasing Western power projection in the region. Although Russia continually expressed discomfort with the degree of regional involvement by the United States, and to a lesser extent Europe, it did not directly challenge this engagement, and other states in the region took notice.[309] As Russia's relative power was especially affected by the 1998 economic crash, other post-Soviet states appeared

---

[306] Svante Cornell, "US Engagement in the Caucasus: Changing Gears." *Helsinki Monitor* 16, no. 2 (2005): 111-19.

[307] United States Security Council, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," (Washington D.C.: The White House, 2002), 19-20.

[308] Jonathan Monten,"The Roots of the Bush Doctrine: Power, Nationalism, and Democracy Promotion in U.S. Strategy." *International Security* 29, no. 4 (2005): 112-56.

[309] Oskanian, "The Balance Strikes Back," 636.

to act on this by quietly exiting Moscow's orbit and participating in groups such as GU(U)AM, in a form of collective strategic balancing.[310]

## *Domestic Context*

**Key Points:**

1. **Shevardnadze is the sole acting FPE, advised by a relatively unified political elite**
2. **Soviet legacy of patronage shapes strategic culture**
3. **The state-society relationship is characterised by ethnic and economic divides**
4. **Constitutional change increases the institutional strength of the presidency**

*Who Securitizes? (Leader Image)*

The identifiable FPE during this time is Eduard Shevardnadze. Despite being viewed as a source of stability by many of the elite, he had to tread carefully to consolidate his political control. By 1995, with a new constitution in place, elections lending him legitimacy, and having outmanoeuvred most of his domestic opponents, Shevardnadze was left with a significant foreign policy price to pay for his newly acquired domestic power.[311]

His leadership choices did not merely cost him concessions to Russia, but also in support from domestic politicians, to whom Georgia's newly acquired membership in the CIS was an unthinkable betrayal.[312] However, by the end of 1995,

---

[310] Roy Allison, "Regionalism, Regional Structures and Security Management in Central Asia." *International Affairs* 80, no. 3 (2004): 475-477.

[311] Dadalauri and Johannsen, "Shevardnadze's Political Strategies. 56.

[312] Ibid., 57.

Shevardnadze was credited with the rebuilding of state capacity and economic growth, giving him a significant degree of political capital.[313]

Shevardnadze was able to restore order and a degree of economic stability after the chaos of the early 1990s, but his leadership relied heavily on constructing "ad hoc coalitions consisting of different ideological and interest groups," and he disliked "arrangements that restricted his room for manoeuvre."[314] He exerted a "strong and direct influence on Georgia's foreign policy prior to the 1992 election," and after the election, his position gave him "the right to conduct negotiations with foreign governments and to sign international treaties and agreements."[315] But he was not solely responsible for foreign policy decision-making, and The Council for National Security and Defense was created near the end of 1992, to "formulate strategic and security policy under the chairmanship of the head of state."[316]

Interviews of Council members conducted during this period reflected a relatively unified perspective on foreign policy that aligned closely with Shevardnadze's views on pursuing a balanced foreign policy approach. When interviewed, Zurab Lomashvili stated that "Georgia must remember that Russia is our closest neighbour and Russian troops are still temporarily on Georgian territory,"

[313] Ibid., 58.

[314] Ibid., 65.

[315] Slider, "Georgia." 221.

[316] Ibid., 221.

therefore "Georgia must balance the interests of NATO and Russia."[317] Tedo Japaridze noted pragmatically that, "although Georgia would like to join the Euro-Atlantic community, until the West takes a greater interest and becomes more involved in Georgia, the republic will have to remember that it lies in the historical zone of competition of three great regional powers," and "since even a democratic Russia will have its own policies and interests, Georgia must always keep in mind these interests."[318]

Nodia writes that the "centrepiece of Shevardnadze's approach was his ability to walk a tightrope among fierce contending forces," which "helped him through grave political crises, but in no way" filled "the need for a long-term strategy based on a clear vision of Georgia's future."[319] His leadership style reflected his past as a skilled Soviet politician, and he utilized traditional Soviet measures to maintain control, but while they were a rational construct that served specific interests and provided short term stability, these strategies proved dysfunctional in the long run.[320] The state's inability to provide core services for citizens allowed NGOS to fill the void, providing "core state functions" and thus "commanding loyalty and legitimacy." [321] When Shevardnadze could no longer accommodate this segment of elite

---

[317] Phillip Petersen, "Security Policy in Post-Soviet Transcaucasia." *European Security* 3, no. 1 (1994): 5-6.

[318] Ibid., 5-6.

[319] Nodia, "Georgia's Identity Crisis." 114.

[320] Dadalauri and Johannsen, "Shevardnadze's Political Strategies. 52-53.

[321] Ibid., 66.

reformists, they were able to draw a picture of a "credible alternative" to the patron-client system, which ultimately resulted in the Rose Revolution and a new government administration.

In short, therefore, the Foreign Policy Executive can be identified first and foremost as Shevardnadze himself, assisted and advised by a council of relatively likeminded elites. Shevardnadze took full responsibility for most foreign policy decisions, such as joining the CIS, when "no national referendum was held and the matter was not even properly debated in parliament."[322] Yet although this Soviet-informed approach to leadership resulted in domestic dysfunction in the long-term, it kept Georgia on a balanced foreign policy path during this period of time.

*Are the Right Things Being Securitized? (Strategic Culture)*

Although Georgian nationalism undoubtedly continued to play a role in shaping the perceptions of Georgian society, Shevardnadze moved away from the radical religious and ethnic nationalism of his predecessor. Under his presidency, it was clientelism, rather than nationalism, that shaped the policy-making process.

Elements of liberal democracy offset serious democratic deficiencies, as Shevardnadze utilized his position to establish an "elaborate patron-client" system, whereby others were dependent upon him for resources, and he could balance

[322] Gurgenidze, Lobzhanidze, and Onoprishvili. "Georgia." 264.

different domestic factions against one another.[323] In other words, the Soviet legacy of patronage came to define the entire political process, and served both as a means of consolidating control, and as a mindset that prioritized balancing competing interests, both on the international and domestic level.

The state could not provide a living wage to "the vast majority of its employees," meaning that "salaries were delayed for months" and "corruption and bribery engulfed every level of the state apparatus."[324] A working group in 2000 found that 184 of 384 high level public officials had amassed properties worth over GEL 1 million, a clear indicator that money was being moved through informal channels given the low salary these officials publicly received.[325] Extortion and the embezzlement of funds, together with widespread bribery resulted in the World Bank listing Georgia among the countries that had the least control over corruption.[326]

Despite paying lip service to combating corruption, Shevardnadze looked the other way while it "greased the wheels, supplemented salaries, and created a channel of communication between citizens and the state."[327] Most arrests of civil servants or officials for corruption were generally perceived to be politically motivated rather than an actual effort to combat the corrupt practices that permeated every layer of

---

[323] Dadalauri and Johannsen, "Shevardnadze's Political Strategies. 59.

[324] Alexander Kupatadze, "Explaining Georgia's Anti-corruption Drive." *European Security* 21, no. 1 (2012): 22.

[325] Dadalauri and Johannsen, "Shevardnadze's Political Strategies. 61.

[326] Joel Hellman, Geraint Jones, and Daniel Kaufmann. "Seize the State, Seize the Day: State Capture, Corruption and Influence in Transition," (Washington, D. C.: World Bank, 2000), 12.

[327] Dadalauri and Johannsen, "Shevardnadze's Political Strategies. 61.

society.[328] Some experts estimated that somewhere between 50% to 60% of international aid money was pocketed by corrupt officials in the late 1990s, and in 2001, the amount paid in bribes to state officials was estimated to be between USD 75 and 105 million, a striking figure considering that the state budget revenues for that same year were only USD 499 million.[329]

At the same time, this corruption encouraged "major players" to remain "interested in the preservation of the status quo," and it increasingly became a method by which Shevardnadze was able to maintain stability, as the corruption fed into the patron-client network he developed during his tenure as president.[330] Shevardnadze utilized the patron-client legacy of the Soviet Union to manoeuvre the intricacies of domestic politics, balancing different factions and interests in a way that allowed the government to function with relative unity in the policy-making process.

It was this domestic system of control that allowed Shevardnadze to bring Georgia into the CIS, despite significant protests to the contrary, and it was this process that allowed him to maintain unilateral control in managing competing domestic interests. His strong executive power and control of the patronage system allowed him to quiet any other voices within the government that could have influenced the foreign policy-making process.

---

[328] Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution: Delayed Transition in the Former Soviet Union*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 106.

[329] Kupatadze, "Explaining Georgia's Anti-corruption Drive." 22.

[330] Ibid., 22.

*How Divided is the State? (State-Society Relations)*

Even though Shevardnadze distanced himself from Gamsakhurdia's overt nationalism, and all residents were assured of citizenship in the "Law on Georgian Citizenship" in March 1993, there were very few efforts to reintegrate minorities into the socio-political life of the country.[331] Georgians continued to dominate key state positions, and there was no concrete minority policy in place. Minority issues were either "denied or subordinated to state consolidation," continuing the societal divisions that had existed under Gamsakhurdia.[332]

Moreover, other divisions, such as those between "privileged officials" and the "masses," between "Tbilisi and the province," and between "rich and poor" presented "profound reasons for the continuing instability of the new political structures."[333] Shevardnadze used his wide-ranging powers as a president to "appoint high-ranking officials and build a political system designed to reward supporters and punish defectors."[334] By 2003, the "state administration had moved away from society."[335] Although it had "its internal disagreements and rivalries" it had "become

[331] Oliver Reissner, "Georgia and its New National Movement." In *Nationalism in Late and Post-Communist Europe*, (Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft: Baden-Baden, 2009), 257.

[332] Ibid., 257.

[333] Ibid., 257.

[334] Dadalauri and Johannsen, "Shevardnadze's Political Strategies. 60.

[335] Zurab Chiaberashvili and Gigi Tevzadze. "Power Elites in Georgia: Old and New." In *From Revolution to Reform: Georgia's Struggle with Democratic Institution Building and Security Sector Reform*. ed. Phillip Fluri, and Eden Cole, (Vienna: National Defence Academy, 2005), 199.

one big clan" as the "small size of the country and lack of resources made its creation and extent of control easier."[336]

Even as the elites closed ranks, however, the patron-client system that pervaded Georgia, and the relations between citizens, and between citizens and the state were "characterised by a complete absence of social capital."[337] This system has been described as "deliberately created legal chaos" in which "rules are made to be broken and people feel compelled to use underhand methods in order to get around them."[338] A "lack of will to implement the laws passed by parliament" combined with the "vagueness of the rules" left citizens at the "whim of the bureaucrats."[339] The quantity of rules and regulations subject to "arbitrary decisions by public officials" meant that "the majority of people, bribe takers and givers alike, had engaged in moral wrongdoing which they wanted to keep secret."[340]

Eventually, however, the consequences of this system of corruption began to overshadow the benefits Shevardnadze and the political elite gained from propagating such a system. The economy stagnated, international investments slowed, and public opinion began to shift against the regime.[341] Frozen conflicts and

---

[336] Ibid., 199.

[337] Dadalauri and Johannsen, "Shevardnadze's Political Strategies. 62.

[338] Ibid., 62.

[339] Ibid., 62.

[340] Ibid., 62.

[341] Henry Hale, "Caucasian Regime Dynamics in Comparative Perspective." *Taiwan Journal of Democracy* 12, no. 1 (2016): 85.

government inability to facilitate economic growth for the average citizen, furthered the overall dissatisfaction of the general population.[342] On the elite level, numerous NGOS were springing up to form a non-governmental sector, often led by young, western-trained reformers who had received an education outside of Georgia.[343]

Although Shevardnadze was initially able to accommodate these reformers with positions in government, he began to struggle to balance their interests within the larger patronage system. As the number of these reform-minded elites grew, they began to defect, and the reform-oriented elite began to form their own parties in preparation for the parliamentary elections of 2003.[344]

Moreover, Shevardnadze's personal inner circle was beginning to split apart, eroding his power base.[345] Shevardnadze was no longer able to balance the interests of elite groups, and as a result, multiple power centres began to emerge that weakened his grasp on power.[346]For the first time in his tenure as president, Shevardnadze actually faced an organized opposition, and when the OSCE found that the election process was flawed and failed to meet international standards, the opposition, led by Mikheil Saakashvili, called for public protests.[347] Demonstrators

---

[342] Ibid., 85.

[343] Jaba Devdariani, "Georgia: Rise and Fall of the Façade Democracy." *Demokratizatsiya* 12, no. 1 (2004): 97.

[344] Ibid., 101-102.

[345] Ibid., 102.

[346] Ibid., 104-106.

[347] Ibid., 106.

stormed the opening of parliament, resulting in Shevardnadze's forced exit as a state of emergency was declared, and unrest threatened to turn into violence.[348]

Shevardnadze did have control over the military, but the significant level of military defectors who joined the protestors meant that utilizing the military to gain control would most likely have resulted in conflict.[349] His decision to resign as President the next day, and the Supreme Court decision to annul the parliamentary elections, allowed new presidential and parliamentary elections to be called in 2004 and brought a peaceful end to this 'Rose Revolution.'[350]

Ultimately, although the patronage system helped to unify the elite under Shevardnadze's tenure, it also reduced "trust in state institutions and political actors."[351] Society remained largely at odds from the political establishment, divided along numerous ethnic, religious, and economic cleavages, and when new political elites rose up to challenge Shevardnadze, they were backed by much of the general population.

*What Structures are in Place for Policy-Making & Policy Execution? (Domestic Institutions)*

In 1992, the decision to adopt the 1921 Constitution was "largely a formality, meaning little in practice because it bore no particular relation to the recent practice

[348] Miriam Lanskoy and Giorgi Areshidze. "Georgia's Year of Turmoil." *Journal of Democracy* 19, no. 4 (2008): 154.
[349] Dadalauri and Johannsen, "Shevardnadze's Political Strategies. 64-65.

[350] Ibid., 64-65.

[351] Reissner, "Georgia and its New National Movement." 260.

of government in Georgia."[352] The 1995 Constitution, however, established a "strong presidential republic in which the president heads the government."[353] Under this constitution, the president submitted the ministerial candidates for parliamentary approval, and parliament could not dismiss the government but could only vote for "no-confidence," meaning that "the final word" belonged "to the president."[354]

Moreover, the constitution "moved Georgia away from a unitarist central state to a federal structure of the country," and a "two-house system" was introduced based on the American model.[355] In theory, this meant that the president had the executive powers of a prime minister, while parliament was left with the major legislative powers. A Constitutional Court was set up to "adjudicate between the two as well as to interpret other constitutional questions."[356] In practice however, this largely left Shevardnadze free to pursue his own policy agenda, since he was not subject to "the confidence or the formal approval of the legislative assembly."[357] As Zurabishvili noted at the time, "taking into account the composition of the Georgian

[352] Lincoln Allison, Alexander Kukhianidze, Malkhaz Matsaberidze, and Valeri Dolidze. "Problems of Democratization in the Republic of Georgia." *Democratization* 3, no. 4 (1996): 523.

[353] Devdariani, "Georgia: Rise and Fall of the Façade Democracy." 95.

[354] Ibid., 95.

[355] Reissner, "Georgia and its New National Movement." 258.

[356] Allison, Kukhianidze, Matsaberidze, and Dolidze. "Problems of Democratization in the Republic of Georgia." 524.

[357] Max Bader, "Party Politics in Georgia and Ukraine and the Failure of Western Assistance." *Democratization* 17, no. 6 (2010): 1092.

Parliament and the spectrum of political forces, practically everything depends on the personality factor of President Shevardnadze."[358]

This was compounded by the general impermanence of Georgian political parties, and the existence of parties based not on political issues, but on accommodating interests. Shevardnadze relied on the Citizens Union of Georgia (CUG), which had been created in November of 1993 as his formal political base in elections.[359] Over time, it took on the role of the "party of the establishment" by infiltrating "state institutions through appointments based on membership of and loyalty to the establishment rather than merit."[360]

In other words, just like in the Soviet system, "membership of 'the party' became a requirement for career advancement and the members controlled most of the political, social, and economic life in the country."[361] CUG became an "elite hub" that encompassed regional *apparatchiks,* state enterprise managers, former members of the Communist party, intellectuals, and a group that would eventually be known as "the young reformers."[362]

Put simply, Shevardnadze's accommodation of multiple interests in wide-ranging political parties, together with the strong executive authority vested in

---

[358] Leila Alieva, "Reshaping Eurasia: Foreign Policy Strategies and Leadership Assets in Post-Soviet South Caucasus." *Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies.* (1999-2000): 19.

[359] Dadalauri and Johannsen, "Shevardnadze's Political Strategies. 67.

[360] Ibid., 67.

[361] Ibid., 67.

[362] Ibid., 67.

him by virtue of the 1995 Constitution, resulted in a government that remained fairly unified around the patronage system, and therefore around Shevardnadze. It was only in the last few years before his resignation that this system began to unravel, and accommodating these domestic interests became increasingly difficult.

## *Outcome*

### *Foreign Policy*

**Key Points:**

1. **Initial accommodation of Russian interests**
2. **Increased cooperation with the West**
3. **Continued regional engagement**

Georgia practiced accommodation of Russia during the mid to late 1990s, granting significant concessions, such as allowing Russian troops to guard the border with Turkey, appointing a Russian favourite to be head of the Ministry of Defence, and joining the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS.)[363] However, while accommodating Russia, Georgia also sought Western assistance in reforming and rebuilding the Georgian economy.[364] With the assistance of the IMF, a strict fiscal policy was adopted for a budget, inflation was starting to decrease, and the Lari, the new Georgian currency, was introduced.[365] Moreover, Shevardnadze oversaw an

[363] Nodia, "Putting the State Back Together in the Post-Soviet Georgia." 418.

[364] Dadalauri and Johannsen, "Shevardnadze's Political Strategies. 57.

[365] Ibid., 58.

agreement to convey Azerbaijan's oil exports through Georgia, and he also turned his attention to establishing economic ties with Turkey and Iran.[366]

Georgia's relations with NATO also became more active, as it joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council and the Partnership for Peace Program in 1994, and then became part of a peace planning and review process in 1999.[367] The country also joined the Council of Europe in the same year, and as the United States and Europe signalled increasing willingness to engage within the region, Georgia gradually moved away from fully accommodating Russia.[368] At an OSCE summit in Istanbul, the Russian Federation agreed to remove military bases and border guards from Georgian and Moldovan territory, and Georgia refused to prolong the CIS Collective Security Treaty.[369] By 2002, at the NATO summit in Prague, Georgia's official foreign policy line explicitly included Georgia's interest in becoming a member of NATO.[370]

In other words, when the West expressed "benign disinterest" in the region, Georgia sought to accommodate its near neighbour through carefully limited bandwagoning.[371] An increase in US and European interest in the region however,

---

[366] Oskanian, "The Balance Strikes Back," 635.

[367] Travis Bounds and Ryan C. Hendrickson. "Georgian Membership in NATO: Policy Implications of the Bucharest Summit." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 22, no. 1 (2009): 23-24.

[368] Lanskoy and Areshidze. "Georgia's Year of Turmoil." 156.

[369] Cory Welt, "Balancing the Balancer: Russia, the West, and Conflict Resolution in Georgia." *Global Dialogue* 7, no. 3/4 (2005): 24.

[370] Bounds and Hendrickson. "Georgian Membership in NATO." 23-24.

[371] Mithat Çelikpala, "From a Failed State to a Weak One? Georgia and Turkish-Georgian Relations." *Development* 24 (2004): 168.

meant that by 2002, when Putin expressed a desire to carry out a joint Georgian-Russian military operation to eliminate terrorists in Pankisi Gorge, Georgia was able to decline, turning instead to the United States for assistance in dealing with the crisis.[372]

*Systemic Response*

Unlike the foreign policy of the previous era, Georgia's foreign policy during this time was largely *structurally defined* based on the systemic response. Georgia's relative power was strengthened through foreign policy, compared to its previous place in the international order, although it continued to be constrained by its status as a weak state.

Zurabishvili wrote in 1996, "Shevardnadze, being a realist, made all pro-Russian steps not because he is an incurable Russophile, but because he does not see any realistic or military alternative."[373] He went on to predict that if "Western political interest in Georgia increases," Shevardnadze's policy towards Russia would also shift, which indeed proved to be the case.[374]

Georgia utilized a bandwagoning policy with Russia to increase state power vis a vis society, allowing the state to become far more stable by the end of the 1990s. Then as the US and the West developed "distinct interests in Georgia," Georgia was

---

[372] Fawn, "Russia's Reluctant Retreat from the Caucasus." 137.

[373] Alieva, "Reshaping Eurasia." 19.

[374] Ibid., 19.

able to gradually move away from bandwagoning, and instead balance a weaker and geographically closer aggressive state, using a more powerful and distant state.

Ultimately, Georgia's foreign policy did not weaken the state, but made it stronger, even if domestic politics undermined those gains in relative power. Although it remained a weak state, due in large part to those domestic factors, its foreign policy behaviour reflected a realpolitik assessment of the international order, and resulted in an increase in state power, despite the mitigating domestic circumstances.

*Theoretical Comparison*

Because Georgia's foreign policy is structurally defined, both a neorealist and a materialist explanation are sufficient for explaining state behaviour, unlike in the previous case study. This research would make the argument that neoclassical realism is able to more thoroughly account for the way in which domestic variables enhance the state's ability to act according to the structural premise, but either of these theories are entirely capable of explaining Georgia's foreign behaviour, since it aligns with both neorealist and materialist predictions.

This is not the case, however, for a liberalist or constructivist approach. These are relatively weaker in providing an answer for Georgia's foreign policy behaviour during this time. Since liberalism prioritizes domestic factors and constructivism prioritize norms, over the geopolitical context of shifting power projection in the region, both perspectives risk missing the way in which Georgia's

foreign policy reflected the availability of new alignment opportunities that arose due to external *systemic stimuli.*

*Analysis*

Although the intervening domestic variables continued to exist during this time, they did not detract from the state's ability to act as a unitary rational actor in the same way as they did in the previous period. Indeed, this case study reinforces the argument that these intervening variables can also enhance structurally defined behaviour by increasing the state's ability to act as a unitary rational actor.

Now, again, within a neoclassical realist model, *leader image* is the most important variable in the short-term, and particularly in times of crisis, and other variables become increasingly important over the long run. Thus, although *leader image* was the most immediately important variable as Shevardnadze stepped into power and had to manage a time of crisis, other variables, such as *strategic culture*, *state-society relations*, and *domestic institutions* would take on a greater role and exert more pressure as the crisis abates, the years pass, and the state consolidates power.

For example, looking at *domestic institutions,* the constitution that was adopted in October of 1995 was based around a strong presidency, giving Shevardnadze significant freedom to act as the Foreign Policy Executive as the country moved out of crisis to a period of stability.[375] On the subject of *leader image,* Shevardnadze's past as a Soviet bureaucrat and diplomat made him especially adept at balancing both on

[375] Devdariani, "Georgia: Rise and Fall of the Façade Democracy." 95.

the international and domestic stage, and under his presidency, the Soviet legacy of patronage that informed the *strategic culture* allowed him to reinstall "moderate intellectuals and former apparatchiks who pursued a much less abrasive foreign policy, less influenced by utopian goals."[376] By the end of 1995, the political atmosphere had shifted to one of moderate unity among elites, due to the careful balancing of interests attained through the patronage system, although other divides between the *state and society* remained significant.[377]

As a result, rather than undermine the state's ability to operate as a unitary, rational actor, some of these intervening variables actually served to positively reinforce structurally defined foreign policy, by enabling Shevardnadze, informed by his bureaucratic and diplomatic experience, to operate as the primary FPE, with the advice and counsel of a like-minded group of elites. As stated previously, it is not the presence of these domestic variables that results in structurally divergent foreign policy, but the degree to which they distort the state's ability to act as a unitary, rational actor. In this case, these variables largely acted not to distort that ability, but to reinforce it, creating an environment in which structurally defined foreign policy could flourish.

## 4.3. "Control" 2004-2012

[376] Jones, "The Role of Cultural Paradigms in Georgian Foreign Policy." 88.

[377] Chiaberashvili and Tevzadze. "Power Elites in Georgia." 199.

## *Structural Context*

**Key Points:**

1. **Georgia experiences an initial *incline* in natural power potential and actualised power**
2. **This is followed by a subsequent post-war *decline* in natural power potential and actualised power**

Overall, this period was marked by a significant *increase* in the state's power, even though that increase did not necessarily translate into an increase in the state's power relative to the international order. While the state increased its extractive capacity and its military power, it experienced a significant *decrease* in territorial power and sovereignty, thereby mitigating much of the power the state had accumulated during this time.

By increasing state revenue, the new administration addressed a budgetary crisis that had been long in the making, and was subsequently able to pay off all accumulated debts to pensioners and public sector employees.[378] Beyond internal reform, the Georgian economy was also significantly bolstered by external financial aid.[379] Moreover, this financial assistance was accompanied by significant levels of expert support, and both the US and the EU provided training programmes for civil service and state functionaries, not to mention the hundreds of development projects

[378] James Wertsch, "Georgia as a Laboratory for Democracy." *Demokratizatsiya* 13, no. 4 (2005): 522-523.

[379] Maciej Falkowski, *Georgian Drift. The Crisis of Georgia'sWay Westwards*, (Poland: Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich, 2016,) 19.

that were implemented in Georgia during this time by Western development agencies, embassies, and NGOs.[380]

Militarily, Georgia procured battle tanks, drones, artillery, anti-air systems, and helicopters from the United States, alongside other forms of assistance, such as financial support and training, to bring Georgian military capabilities up to NATO standards.[381] Georgia signed a transit agreement that allowed NATO to transport troops and equipment through Georgian space, and the United States trained two Georgian battalions for service in Iraq.[382]

Shortly before the war with Russia, the US participated in a joint military exercise with Georgian troops, and in 2008, Georgia's military expenses were equal to a quarter of the state budget.[383] After the war, the United States continued to conduct training programmes, but this assistance no longer included the transfer of weapons. [384] The war with Russia resulted in a net loss of power, as previous Western assistance was scaled back from pre-war levels.

Beyond the military and the economy, the government did increase the administrative capacity of the state, and managed to broaden control over territory

---

[380] Ibid., 18-20.

[381] Vicken Cheterian, "The August 2008 War in Georgia: From Ethnic Conflict to Border Wars." *Central Asian Survey* 28, no. 2 (2009): 158.

[382] Maria Dinesen, and Anders Wivel. "Georgia and Moldova: Caught in the Outskirts of Europe?" In *Small States and International Security*. Edited by Archer Clive, Alyson Bailes, and Anders Wivel, (London: Routledge, 2014), 8.

[383] Cheterian, "The August 2008 War in Georgia." 158.

[384] Jim Nichol, "Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and US Interests." (Washington, D. C.: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, 2013), 31-33.

such as Adjara, and Javakheti, where previously central government control was barely more than a formality.[385] This resulted in a significant consolidation of state power vis a vis the society, both over government controlled territory, but also in territories that previously had largely eluded central government control.[386] However, the war of 2008 represented a significant setback from this progress, and resulted in a permanent loss of territory, as Russian peacekeepers enforced newly defined borders, and the state lost all control over the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[387]

### *Geopolitical Context*

**Key Points:**

1. **Expanded Western engagement of the region, followed by a sharp decline in power projection**
2. **Increased Russian containment of Georgia and confrontation with the West**
3. **Regional recognition and accommodation of Russia's resurgence**

After the Rose Revolution, The United States expanded military cooperation with Georgia, by increasing direct military aid, helping the country adopt NATO standards, and actively calling for Georgian membership in the alliance.[388] Although European programmes like the European Neighbourhood Policy registered at significantly lower levels of interest both on the part of Brussels and Tbilisi, the

[385] David Aphrasidze and David Siroky. "Frozen Transitions and Unfrozen Conflicts, Or What Went Wrong in Georgia?" *Yale Journal of International Affairs*5, no. 2 (2010): 131.

[386] Ibid., 131.

[387] Ibid., 133-134.

[388] Dov Lynch, *Why Georgia Matters*. vol. 86. (Paris: Institute for Security Studies, 2006), 29-31.

United States' willingness to deploy forces and project power in the former Soviet Union remained relatively significant. [389]

However, from 2003-2008, Moscow regained much of its "economic and political composure," and began signalling its dissatisfaction with the current levels of power projection from other states in its "sphere of special interest."[390] Sergei Lavrov called Georgia, America's "pet project" and Putin's regime expressed its disapproval of NATO membership for former Soviet states.[391] Indeed, after the colour revolutions, "any talk of Russia being 'receptive' to Western involvement in the former Soviet Union ceased."[392]

Relations between the United States and Russia were further affected by the former's recognition of Kosovo in 2008. Russia responded that if Kosovo was fully independent, why not Abkhazia and South Ossetia?[393] As Dmitri Simes argues, "great powers – particularly great powers in decline – do not appreciate such demonstrations of their irrelevance."[394]

The United States increasingly paired power projection in the region with hostile rhetoric towards Russia, and Russia clearly sought to demonstrate that its

---

[389] Mark Leonard and Charles Grant. *Georgia and the EU: Can Europe's Neighbourhood Policy Deliver?* (London: Centre for European Reform, 2005), 6-7.
[390] Oskanian, "The Balance Strikes Back," 638.

[391] Ibid., 637.

[392] Ibid., 638.

[393] Igor Romanov and Ulyana Makhkamova. "Parlamentarii Zagovorili o Kosovo." *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, August 11, 2008.

[394] Dimitri Simes, "Losing Russia: The Costs of Renewed Confrontation." *Foreign Affairs* 86, no. 6 (2007): 42.

great power status had not diminished by responding with equally combative rhetoric and diplomatic actions.[395] Towards Georgia, this hostility took the form of containment, as Russia applied economic pressure on the country through visa restrictions, informal economic sanctions, energy diplomacy, and the removal of sanctions on Abkhazia.[396]

At the same time, Russia's growth in relative power was recognized by numerous states in the region which sought to temper their formerly pro-Western alignments with a more cautious stance towards Moscow.[397] Uzbekistan, for example, left GU(U)AM in 2005, and Azerbaijan moved its "multivectoral policies" into closer alignment with Russia.[398] At the same time, a similar recognition of Russia's increased willingness to exercise power in the region seems to have resulted in less willingness, at least from Europe, to directly contest this power projection. NATO refused to grant Georgia a Membership Action Plan in 2008, despite Washington's lobbying, and NATO membership was continually blocked by several European states.[399] When war did break out between Russia and Georgia, the United States demonstrated the full extent of its willingness to project actual hard power in the region, and that willingness was feeble at best. Direct military action was signalled to

[395] Ibid., 42-45.

[396] Randall Newnham, "Georgia on My Mind? Russian Sanctions and the End of the 'Rose Revolution'." *Journal of Eurasian Studies*6, no. 2 (2015): 164-170.

[397] Oskanian, "The Balance Strikes Back," 639.

[398] Ibid., 639.

[399] Martin Malek, "NATO and the South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia on Different Tracks." *Connections* 7, no. 3 (2008): 35-36.

be clearly out of the question, despite numerous domestic calls for Russian aggression to be countered with American action.[400] The United Kingdom, and numerous Eastern European states called for sanctions against Russia, and for the acceleration of Georgia's NATO membership, but others, such as Germany advocated a more cautious stance, and still others, such as Italy, took on an openly pro-Russian stance.[401] Outside of acting as a mediator, with France negotiating a cease-fire between Tbilisi and Moscow, Europe's engagement with Georgia remained firmly economic, rather than in any traditional military-strategic sense.[402]

In many respects, the 2008 war provided the clearest information about the willingness of Russia, Europe, and the United States to project power in the region. Russia's capabilities and commitment to active power projection was demonstrated against the relative lack of commitment from the West to directly and forcefully challenge that presence. After the war, Russia had little incentive for any improvement in relations with Georgia, such as loosening the economic blockade it had placed on the country, and remained largely unchallenged in its power projection within the region.[403]

---

[400] Helene Cooper and Thom Shanker, "After Mixed US Messages, a War Erupted in Georgia." *New York Times*, August 12, 2008.; Larr Downing, "Cheney: 'Russian Aggression Must Not Go Unanswered.'" *Reuters*, August 10, 2008.

[401] Svante Cornell, and Fredrick Starr. *The Guns of August2008: Russia's War in Georgia.* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe. 2009), 111-115.

[402] Oskanian, "The Balance Strikes Back," 641.

[403] Koiava and Baghaturia, "Georgia and Russia in Between Closeness and Confrontation." 26-27.

When the Obama administration came into power, the trajectory of American foreign policy was based on a "reset" with Russia, rather than the expansion of NATO.[404] Obama signalled these intentions clearly, stating that "the North Atlantic Alliance should seek cooperation with Russia, not confrontation."[405] As a result, talk of actual NATO membership for Georgia quickly ceased having any real meaning from the United States, and EU membership similarly seemed to be out of reach.[406]

### *Domestic Context*

**Key Points:**

1. **Saakashvili inherits and develops a strong presidency as the FPE**
2. **Civic nationalism is the guiding ideological narrative in the strategic culture of the state**
3. **State-Society relations are characterised by ideological unity, but personal and economic polarisation**
4. **Several constitutional and institutional reforms strengthen domestic institutions, often at the expense of the democratic process**

*Who Securitizes? (Leader Image)*

The strength of the presidency was only further established during this time due to several constitutional changes, and as a result, Saakashvili was the primary FPE, advised by "an informal group involving the president's close confidants."[407] As

[404] Koiava and Baghaturia, "Georgia and Russia in Between Closeness and Confrontation." 26.

[405] Ibid., 26.

[406] Falkowski, *Georgian Drift.* 43.

[407] Svante Cornell and Niklas Nilsson. "Georgian Politics since the August 2008 War." *Demokratizatsiya* 17, no. 3 (2009): 254.

one observer noted, "many decisions" seemed to "be based on Saakashvili's personal whims," and "most of the government's decisions were made by a small group of advisers – most of whom were younger than Saakashvili himself," in "meetings held after midnight."[408]

Saakashvili was Western educated and highly charismatic, with significant ties to both the United States and Europe, but critics argued that his "decision-making procedures were haphazard, and that he was negligent about maintaining a record of his government's deliberations."[409] This decision-making process "lacked institutional basis and accountability," and when it came to critical decisions of security and foreign policy, "Saakashvili's informal system could not cope with the strain."[410]

Moreover, the evidence of Saakashvili's primacy as the FPE is reinforced by the revolving door of advisors and ministers who moved in and out of government positions constantly. Some referred to this as Saakashvili's "game of musical chairs" in which officials in high ranking ministries were constantly pushed out, often due to some personal disagreement with Saakashvili himself.[411] In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, six different ministers held office under Saakashvili's leadership,

---

[408] Ishiyama, Mezvrishvili, and Zhgenti. "An Oasis of Democracy in an Authoritarian Sea?" 22; Thomas De Waal, "So Long Saakashvili: The Presidency That Lived by Spin--And Died by It," *Foreign Affairs*. October 29, 2013, 3.

[409] De Waal, "So Long Saakashvili." 3.

[410] Ibid., 3.

[411] Cornell and Nilsson. "Georgian Politics since the August 2008 War." 255.

a clear indicator that the latter's strong executive control of the government allowed for little disagreement or divergence from his policy decisions.[412]

Ultimately, even during periods of crisis, Saakashvili retained his primacy as the FPE. There were periods of high opposition to Saakashvili, but the super presidentialism of the Georgian political system allowed him to largely maintain control of the government, and thereby the policy-making process.[413]

*Are the Right Things Being Securitized? (Strategic Culture)*

Numerous scholars have written at length about the role of ideology and identity during this period of Georgian foreign policy. Under the Saakashvili administration, a new kind of civic nationalism was promoted, that built on past narratives about Georgian uniqueness and even its religiosity, while integrating "Georgia's claim to Europeanness" deeply into claims of state identity.[414]

This narrative was present both in public rhetoric, but also through tangible expressions of this sentiment, such as the adoption of a new flag that "stressed Georgia's Christian character with not one, but no fewer than five crosses of Saint George," while the EU flag was flown outside all major government institutions in Tbilisi.[415] Saakashvili referred to this in his inaugural speech stating that "Georgia's

[412] Ibid., 255.

[413] Jones, *Georgia*. 150.

[414] Donnacha Ó Beacháin, and Frederik Coene. "Go West: Georgia's European Identity and Its Role in Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy Objectives." *Nationalities Papers* 42, no. 6 (2014): 930.

[415] Ibid., 930.

flag" embodies a "vision for the future of Georgia," for "Georgia is not just a European country, but one of the most ancient European countries."[416]

This ideological narrative was rooted in a degree of pragmatism, of course. Domestically, this rhetoric towards the West and against Russia was "immensely popular among large sections of Georgian society," and even those who disagreed with Saakashvili did not dare challenge the narrative that Georgia was European and under threat from Russia, since doing so was "tantamount to political suicide."[417] This narrative was politically useful, and Georgia sought to portray itself both domestically and internationally as important and useful to the West, both as "a consumer of international security, but also the provider of one."[418] At the same time, the Georgian government was trying to relocate the country's regional identity from the Caucasus to the Black Sea so that it could be identified with countries like Turkey, Ukraine, Moldova, Bulgaria, and Romania.[419]

It is difficult to know the extent to which the Saakashvili administration actually believed this ideology. However, scholars noted the "intentionality" of public discourse, and the way in which it was mediated "between international and domestic

---

[416] Martin Müller, "Public Opinion toward the European Union in Georgia." Post-Soviet Affairs 27, no. 1 (2011): 64.

[417] Cornell and Nilsson. "Georgian Politics since the August 2008 War." 262.

[418] Salome Minesashvili, "Narrating Identity: Belongingness and Alterity in Georgia's Foreign Policy." In *Values and Identity as Sources of Foreign Policyin Armenia and Georgi*a. ed. Kornely Kakachia and Alexander Markarov. (Tbilisi: Universal, 2016), 19.

[419] Ibid., 25.

audiences in order to draw the two closer by sharing the same narrative."[420] On the domestic level, this rhetoric took on life as part of a broader nationalism, by further invoking "the idea of the country's importance by adding to the cultural uniqueness argument," while also seeking to "convince the nation that the West needs Georgia and their support" was "inevitable."[421] On the international level, it was the "Western audience" that was "targeted for persuasion in providing this support by employing more than emotional assertion," and supplementing that with attempts to demonstrate Georgia's worth to international security, such as being the highest non-NATO contributor of troops.[422]

Even if the origins of this ideological narrativewere pragmatic in nature however, it soon took on a less pragmatic function, preventing Georgian foreign policy from recalibrating towards Russia when the structural incentives demanded such a shift.[423] Whether or not the Saakashvili administration actually believed this rhetoric, the government's decision to identify itself so deeply with this ideology meant that any shift away from the narrative would have "required such a fundamental restatement of the regime's legitimising parameters," both "at home and abroad," that any attempt to do so would be "impracticable without a significant loss

[420] Ibid., 19-20.

[421] Ibid., 20.

[422] Ibid., 20.

[423] Oskanian, "The Balance Strikes Back," 642-643.

of social capital."[424] In other words, this ideology "amplified distortions in Tbilisi's perceptions of the balance of power," and "served to limit its margin" for "manoeuvre in response to a different regional-international environment," simply because this narrative had become the basis for regime legitimacy both domestically and internationally.[425]

*How Divided is the State? (State-Society Relations)*

Saakashvili's drive for reform was often carried out without regard for democratic principles such as contestation and citizen input, and the lack of debate over the reforms left many Georgian citizens in the dark about the new laws that were being put in place.[426] This democratic deficit was largely tolerated by both elites and society during Saakashvili's first term, on the justification that "the government made progress in key areas such as poverty and unemployment."[427]

However, this progress did not happen, and Georgian society was negatively caught up in Saakashvili's complete power over the justice system. Many people "found themselves incarcerated for even minor crimes" as Georgia witnessed a conviction rate of 99.6% and a per capita incarceration rate of 531/100000.[428] From

[424] Ibid., 642-643.

[425] Ibid., 642-643.

[426] Robert Austin, "Confronting the Soviet and Post-Soviet Past in Georgia." In *Transitional Justice and the Former Soviet Union: Reviewing the Past, Looking Toward the Future.* Edited by Cynthia Michalski Horne, and Lavinia Stan. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 245-247.

[427] Ibid., 247.

[428] Ibid., 247.

2003-2012, the prison population in Georgia grew by 300%, and it was not unusual to hear Georgians claim, (albeit wrongly), that every family had at least one person in prison.[429]

While public support for NATO and EU membership was high during this time, and there was little division about the course that Georgian foreign policy should take, huge divisions remained between the state and society, particularly in relation to jobs and the economy, along with the increasingly authoritarian tendencies exhibited by the Saakashvili regime. In 2007, mass protests resulted in the government declaring a state of emergency and shutting down opposition media.[430]

After the war, though Saakashvili's popularity did not fall much initially, the subsequent economic instability, together with the repressive nature of the state, began to result in unrest, especially as opposition against Saakashvili became more organized, and more well-funded.[431] Unlike Shevardnadze, who had sought to accommodate and balance domestic interests, Saakashvili was personally divisive, and although the extent of his executive power gave him nearly full control of the government, Georgian politics were "strongly polarized and acrimonious, with little trust or respect between the government and the opposition."[432]

---

[429] Ibid., 247.

[430] Jesse Tatum, "Democratic Transition in Georgia: Post-Rose Revolution Internal Pressures on Leadership." *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*3, no. 2 (2009): 156-71.

[431] Newnham, "Georgia on My Mind." 167-169.

[432] Cornell and Nilsson. "Georgian Politics since the August 2008 War." 257.

Some of this hostility was arguably unavoidable given Saakashvili's relentless drive to strengthen state institutions, which resulted in thousands of government jobs being cut, and former Soviet intelligentsia, who had worked under Shevardnadze, being replaced with a newer, younger generation.[433] Such a move was bound to create enemies, but the animosity often went beyond politics, and into the personal. Saakashvili alienated numerous allies across his tenure as president, and took harsh measures against these former allies, using the tool of the state, such as the anti-corruption measures, to make their lives miserable.[434]

In other words, the unity of the elite in government was not simply a reflection of shared values, but also of Saakashvili's commanding control of the state, and his ability to dismiss or replace ministers or government officials who disagreed with his vision for Georgia. This meant that the elite became highly fractured across his tenure, and the opposition, although largely powerless to provide a check on Saakashvili's power, were highly antagonistic towards his administration. As a result, once this opposition was supported and funded by Bidzina Ivanishvilli, another former Saakashvili ally turned enemy, they were able to mobilize not only an elite coalition against Saakashvili, but also the public itself, by promising jobs and a government that respected human rights.[435]

---

[433] Ibid., 254.

[434] Ibid., 255.

[435] Newnham, "Georgia on My Mind? 167-169.

*What Structures are in Place for Policy-Making & Policy Execution? (Domestic Institutions)*

Under Saakashvili, the executive branch was reorganized and streamlined, with the introduction of a cabinet style of government.[436] The regulatory framework for the business sector was simplified, major tax reform implemented, and public finances managed through the adoption of a medium-term expenditure framework (MTEF), a single treasury account for the central government, and the strengthening of oversight institutions.[437]

But, as some scholars noted, "from the beginning of its time in office, the government de-emphasized democracy, even weakened democratic institutions, by shifting power away from the legislature, undermining the independence of the judiciary and restricting media, as part of an attempt to hasten state-building efforts."[438] The Constitutional changes of 2004 had made Georgia "a highly centralized presidential republic with extraordinary power in the president's hands," and "decision-making was limited to Saakashvili and his inner circle."[439]

By Saakashvili's second term, it was evident that although he had unquestionably strengthened Georgian state institutions and improved state services, his reputation as a democratic reformer was certainly subject to dispute. Realizing that he could not legally run for a third presidential term, he secured a 2010

---

[436] Austin, "Confronting the Soviet and Post-Soviet Past in Georgia." 245-246.

[437] Ibid., 245-246.

[438] Lincoln Mitchell, "Compromising Democracy: State Building in Saakashvili's Georgia." In *War and Revolution in the Caucasus: Georgia Ablaze*. ed. Stephen Jones. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 86.

[439] Austin, "Confronting the Soviet and Post-Soviet Past in Georgia." 246.

Constitutional reform that gave the prime minister more power relative to the president.[440] This led many analysts to think he was hoping to achieve something akin to the Putin-Medvedev switch.[441]

However, this backfired when his party lost the 2012 parliamentary election to Bidzina Ivanishvili's Georgian Dream. As one observer wrote, "Saakashvili and his lieutenants found that they had imprisoned themselves in a box of democratic rules," forcing them to recognize the opposition's victory.[442] Ivanishvili retained his position as prime minister until the November 2013 presidential election, when his party's candidate won the election with 62% of the vote.[443] This marked the first (relatively,) peaceful, electoral transition of power since Georgia's independence, and it also signalled a shift away from the executive dominated government of Gamsakhurdia, Shevardnadze, and Saakashvili, towards a system in which the legislature would play an increasingly important role.

## *Outcome*

*Foreign Policy*

**Key Points:**

1. **Initial accommodation of Russian interests followed by hostility and balancing behaviour**

[440] Charles Fairbanks Jr. and Alexi Gugushvili. "A New Chance for Georgian Democracy." *Journal of Democracy* 24, no. 1 (2013): 119.

[441] Ibid., 119.

[442] Ibid., 121.

[443] Newnham, "Georgia on My Mind?" 169.

2. **Increasingly exclusive bandwagoning with the West**
3. **Limited regional engagement**

Shortly after the Rose Revolution, Saakashvili paid his first official visit to Moscow.[444] In this meeting, he spoke against the deployment of US military bases in Georgian territory, and indicated a readiness to consider Russia's interests in the region.[445] This included discussions on the restructuring of Georgia's energy debt, the revival of the 'Sochi Process," to deal with conflict in Abkhazia, and a bilateral trade commission.[446] Georgia pledged to work with Russia on "combating terrorism, drugs, trafficking, illegal migration, and arms smuggling," and even agreed to deploy shared checkpoints and joint policing, while Russia provided support for Georgia's reestablishment of control in Adjara.[447]

However, Georgia soon turned away from these bandwagoning efforts to a foreign policy almost exclusively comprised of balancing against Russia. When Russia resisted efforts for Georgia to deal with South Ossetia similarly to how it dealt with Adjara, Georgia called out Russia for double standards, and it was soon made clear that appeasing Russia was no longer a priority.[448] Georgia's 2005 National Security Concept called for "integration into European and Euro-Atlantic political, economic, and security systems," along with "NATO and EU enlargement" as a "top priority of

[444] Koiava and Baghaturia, "Georgia and Russia in Between Closeness and Confrontation." 19.

[445] Ibid., 19.

[446] Ibid., 19.

[447] Ibid., 19.

[448] Andrei Tsygankov and Matthew Tarver-Wahlquist. "Duelling Honors: Power, Identity and the Russia–Georgia Divide." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 5, no. 4 (2009): 311.

Georgian foreign and security policy."[449] It also downgraded Georgia's relationship with Russia from "strategic," the word used to describe partnerships with Turkey and Ukraine, stating only that "Georgia would welcome the transition of Russia into a stable democratic state with a functioning market economy and respect for European values."[450] The era of accommodation was over, or in the words of the rapper Ice Cube, it was "on like Donkey Kong" between Georgia and Russia.[451]

After that, moments of cooperation, such as the opening of a Russian-Georgian railway ferry link, or Russia's decision to pull out its two military bases in Batumi and Akhalkalaki on an "accelerated time frame," were far and few between.[452] Saakashvili claimed he was offering Russia a hand of friendship that was "hanging in the air," but openly hostile rhetoric from Georgia indicated a fundamental unwillingness to accommodate Russia to any significant degree.[453]

Georgian authorities arrested four Russian Military Intelligence Service officers, handing them over to the OSCE with, as Petre Mamradze notes, "a truly fantastic performance which aimed to insult Russia's political elite as much as possible."[454] Georgia also sought to formally end Russia's peacekeeping mandate in

---

[449] Republic of Georgia. "National Security Concept of Georgia." Tbilisi, GA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, 2005, 7.

[450] Ibid., 9.

[451] Ice Cube. "Now I Gotta Wet'Cha." Spotify, track 5, *Predator,* UMC, 1992.

[452] Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist. "Duelling Honors." 311.

[453] Ibid, 311.

[454] Koiava and Baghaturia, "Georgia and Russia in Between Closeness and Confrontation." 23.

Abkhazia, accused Russia of continued airspace violations, characterized Russian peacekeepers as "threatening," and accused Russian officials of "complicity in a series of bombings."[455]

This posturing was directly antagonistic towards Russia, and resulted in significant economic pressure being exerted against Georgia, as Russia stopped issuing visas, enacted embargos, suspended the pull out of its troops, severed transport and postal links, and deported numerous Georgians living and working in Russia.[456] Georgia was also given explicit warnings about the consequences of this hostility, when Russia stated that it would not "remain on the sidelines" but would "use military force" if Russians were threatened in the South Caucasus.[457] Meanwhile, it established official ties with both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, leading Georgia to condemn Russia's actions as "de facto annexation."[458]

By August, the situation was quickly approaching conflict, and eventually led to full scale military engagement.[459] A full analysis of the conflict is obviously beyond the scope of this research. However, it was quickly apparent that Russia would indeed "intervene in the conflict," while the West "was not ready to fight for Georgia,"

---

[455] Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist. "Duelling Honors." 311.

[456] Ibid., 311.

[457] "Abkhazia ready to sign military agreement with Russia." *RiaNovosti.* April 28, 2008.

[458] "'Revise Decision' - Saakashvili Tells Moscow," *Civil Georgia.* April 17, 2008.

[459] Tsygankov and Tarver-Wahlquist. "Duelling Honors." 322.

especially after the White House publicly called on Georgia to "refrain from escalating the conflict."[460]

After the war, Georgia participated in the Geneva Discussions with Russia, set aside a budget towards building dialogue, and even publicly stated that Tbilisi would commit to the non-use of force against occupied territories.[461] However, these half-hearted measures were overshadowed by Georgia's decision to withdraw from the CIS, cut off diplomatic ties with Moscow, and denounce Russia as an occupying force in the conflict regions.[462] In a speech to the European Parliament, Saakashvili reaffirmed his commitment to integration with the West, labelling Russian politics as "reptilian," and claiming that "the further we stay away from this crocodile, the sooner we will reach the Promised Land."[463]

Even as the US and Europe became less willing to provide that foreign policy option, Georgia continued to push away from any accommodation of Russia. The country did seek to diversify its foreign policy after 2008, relying less on US support, and reaching out to its near neighbours such as Turkey and Azerbaijan, but it also continued to try and balance against Russia.[464] Most notably, it recognized the

---

[460] Koiava and Baghaturia. "Georgia and Russia in Between Closeness and Confrontation." 20.; "U.S. Calls for Avoiding Further Conflict in South Ossetia." *Civil Georgia.* August 13, 2004. https://old.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=7613&search=%2010

[461] Koiava and Baghaturia, "Georgia and Russia in Between Closeness and Confrontation." 27.

[462] Ibid., 27.

[463] Ibid., 27.

[464] Newnham, "Georgia on My Mind? 164-165.

Circassian genocide, instigating a significant amount of controversy not only in Russia, but also among Western political analysts.[465]

*Systemic Response*

The systemic response to Georgia's foreign policy during this time was severely punitive. Put simply, although Georgia's foreign policy resembled structurally defined foreign policy at the beginning, it gradually shifted to structurally divergent foreign policy, culminating in the war of 2008, and the continued weakness of the state after the war.

Now, this research does not claim that Georgia's behaviour alone was responsible for the war in 2008. Indeed, as noted previously, stimuli such as the recognition of Kosovo certainly shaped the international dynamics in which such a war was possible. Nevertheless, there is little question that Georgia's open antagonism towards Russia in the years leading up the war undermined the state's ability to increase its relative power.

This was not so immediately obvious. Georgia had initially pursued a structurally defined foreign policy that sought to balance between accommodating Russia and developing closer ties with the US and Europe. Moreover, even as Georgia's foreign policy became increasingly structurally divergent, the systemic punishment was primarily economic at first, so that the negative effects of Georgia's policy towards Russia was masked by the economic benefits of the country's policy

[465] David Siroky and Valeriy Dzutsev. "Rational or Reckless? Georgia's Zugzwang in the Caucasus." *Nationalities Papers* 40, no. 3 (2012): 7-8.

towards the West. In other words, Georgia's open hostility towards Russia reduced the degree to which the country could increase its relative power, but this was largely overlooked because the country was still able to achieve gains in its relative power, at least in the short term.

However, as the threat from Russia increased, particularly after 2006, Georgia's foreign policy did not reflect this changing reality. Even once the punitive systemic response became openly apparent, no longer hidden by the economic cloak of relations with the West, the country still did not change course from its structurally divergent foreign policy.

Georgia's structurally divergent foreign policy undermined its overall security, both by antagonizing Russia, but also by increasing its status as a liability to the US and Europe, thereby undermining its relationship with the West. As a result, the long-term systemic response of this structurally divergent foreign policy was incredibly harsh, at first inhibiting the degree to which Georgia could increase its relative power, and then ultimately, reducing that relative power altogether.

*Theoretical Comparison*

This is an important case study, because it demonstrates the bridging capacity of neoclassical realism, and the strength of its applicability to these cases. On the one hand, taking a constructivist or liberalist approach to this case would fail to acknowledge the significant systemic level factors that contributed to the international environment in which this war took place. It would be difficult to argue

that the recognition of Kosovo was not a driving factor behind Russia's increased willingness to engage militarily in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, or that most states in the region acted similarly in response to Russia.

On the other hand, if the Georgia-Russia war of 2008 was simply a result of poor information and structural limitations in the international environment, as neorealism would suggest, or if it was simply a matter of economic interest as a materialist perspective would expect, then the war would have acted as a corrective course for Georgian foreign policy by providing clear information about relative power and power projection in the region. However, as Girgi Khleashvili notes, although the "Russian-Georgian war could have brought in realistic elements to the country's foreign policy," this "did not happen."[466]

*Analysis*

This period contains both times of crisis and of calm, so it is important to start with *leader image* as the primary intervening variable. Saakashvili's consolidation of executive power, together with changes in *domestic institutions* that strengthened the presidency and weakened parliament, left him in almost sole command of the foreign policy-making process, making it especially vulnerable to his perceptions of the international order.

[466] Koiava and Baghaturia, "Georgia and Russia in Between Closeness and Confrontation." 26.

However, Georgia's foreign policy was not simply a result of Saakashvili himself and his leadership style, but also a reflection of the*strategic culture* that informed his decision-making process. Now, the degree to which Saakashvili and his advisors truly believed the ideological narrative of Euro-nationalism they espoused is difficult to tell, but the fact that the legitimacy of the regime was rooted so heavily in this narrative distorted the FPE's ability to diverge from it, even when the narrative overrode pragmatic foreign policy choices. This narrative also served to help unify *state and society* relations, amidst growing economic and political tensions both with the general public and the opposition. To go against this narrative would weaken the government relative to its critics and would erode the popularity and legitimacy of the regime relative to the public.

In sum, this particular period was marked by an ideological narrative that began with relatively pragmatic intentions, to establish international and domestic support for Georgian statehood and thereby increase power, that then took on a life of its own when the pressures of changing structural constraints took away the narrative's pragmatic utility. Because the legitimacy of the regime was so intertwined with this narrative, it could not easily be cast aside to make way for a more accommodating narrative, and as a result, the importance of maintaining the regime's power took priority over the power of the state. Thus, the state continued to pursue a foreign policy informed by this narrative, even as the foreign policy dictated by this narrative became more and more structurally divergent, and more and more systemically punitive.

## 4.4. Discussion

Each of the three case studies presented in this paper can be explained by one or more theories of international relations when examined individually. However, this research suggests that neoclassical realism offers a superior framework for explaining all three of these case studies collectively. While a neorealist or materialist approach can provide an answer for Shevardnadze's structurally defined and economically aligned foreign policy, it lacks an adequate explanation for the structurally divergent and economically dubious foreign policies of Gamsakhurdia and Saakashvili. Georgia's foreign policy under Saakashvili is especially difficult to explain, since it goes against the overall patterns of state behaviour in the region during this time. The fact that other states were acting in accordance to changes in Russia's relative power makes it difficult to understand Georgia's divergent behaviour without incorporating an analysis of domestic level variables.

On the other hand, a constructivist or liberalist approach can point to ideas and norms, or domestic politics to explain these foreign policies, but these fall short of explaining why these regional patterns of behaviour seem to respond to changes in Russia's relative power as a hegemon. Georgia's foreign policy behaviour under Shevardnadze was part of a larger trend in state behaviour in the region, which is difficult to explain solely from a domestic perspective. The fact that most states were acting in a similar way to similar *systemic stimuli*, indicates that state behaviour is not

simply a result of norms or domestic politics, but must in some way be answerable to a larger structure that incentivises certain behaviours.

However, although these theories cannot provide a comprehensive answer for Georgia's foreign policy behaviour, neoclassical realism offers a theoretical framework that can explain each of these three case studies. Georgia was operating within a structural context in which it was incentivised to act as a unitary, rational actor, but its ability to act was constrained by its power relative to the international system. The geopolitical context shaped the *systemic stimuli* to which the state responded, but the domestic context allowed intervening variables to act on the foreign policy-making process, and depending on the nature of that influence, Georgia's *foreign policy* behaviour was either structurally defined or divergent, and invoked either a positive or negative systemic response.

Ultimately, this research has presented a model of neoclassical realism that can be applied to historical narratives through a process-tracing approach that involves a set of specific questions applied equally to each case. It has assessed the difference between the expected and observed values of the dependent variable in each case study and has compared these observations to the predictions of other alternate theories. In doing so, it has sought to demonstrate that the intervening variables of *leader image, strategic culture, state-society relations*, and *domestic institutions*, have been present in each of the three case studies examined in this research, and that whether or not the state's foreign policy was structurally defined or divergent was

dependent on the degree to which these variables enhanced or detracted from a state's ability to function as a unitary, rational actor.

## 4. Conclusion

The Georgian Dream coalition won the 2012 elections and won an even more decisive mandate in the 2016 elections. In 2016, Georgia implemented constitutional reforms that reduced the powers of the presidency and implemented an electoral college system, making the Georgian Dream aligned candidate Salome Zurabishvili the last directly elected president to take office in Georgia in 2018. This has been, in many respects, a new era of Georgian politics, headed not by a strong, easily identifiable political leader, but rather by a political party, chaired by the reclusive billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili.

Despite a revolving door of prime ministers in leadership over the past seven years, Georgian Dream has remained fairly securely in power and has pursued a relatively consistent course of both domestic and foreign policy. Whether that is the result of Ivanishvili's influence on the party, a sign that this increasingly parliamentary system has led to the establishment of a consensually unified elite, or perhaps a combination of both, is undoubtedly a subject for further research.

So far, however, it seems as if Georgia has moved back to a more structurally defined foreign policy, carefully balancing between accommodating Russia and strengthening ties with Europe. It has adapted to changes in *systemic stimuli*, for example, utilising the strategic space provided by the crisis in Ukraine and Syria to get

closer to the West as Russia's attention is focused elsewhere, yet at the same time, its latest National Security Concept is clear that "Georgia remains committed to the non-use of force obligations" and desires "good-neighbourly relations with the Russian Federation."[467]

If the findings of this research are correct, it suggests that the utility of this neoclassical realist model goes beyond simply explaining historical narratives and could potentially be used to predict and assess the future trajectory of a state's foreign policy. This paper argues that the degree to which a country's foreign policy is structurally defined depends on the degree to which domestic factors distort the state's ability to act objectively as a unitary, rational actor. Should the objectivity of the state's foreign policy-making process be compromised, the neoclassical realist model presented in this research would expect Georgia to once again experience the consequences of structurally divergent behaviour through a punitive systemic response. If these findings are true, future research that uses the intervening variables presented in this model to evaluate Georgia's current domestic situation could indicate the conditions that will make the state more or less likely to pursue a structurally defined foreign policy in the future.

[467] Republic of Georgia. "National Security Concept of Georgia." (Tbilisi, GA: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, 2012), 11-12.