

The Territorial Expansion of Rising Powers

By Konrad Dalland

Seminar In International Relations

Professor Stephen Pampinella

December 5th, 2019

Abstract

This paper is concerned with why rising states choose to skirt international norms and expand their territory. As opposed to explaining territorial expansion as the result a need for material benefits and physical security (Realism); territorial expansion is seen as a practice states that see themselves as a great power will use when their identities are misrecognized. It examines the affects of status recognition on a rising state's identity in order to ascertain if and when a rising state will expand. Rising powers will attempt to have their identity as a great power recognized by established powers. If that identity is recognized then the rising power is accepted in their great power identity and joins the established powers as the leaders of the international order. If the identity of the rising power is misrecognized then the rising power will feel insecurity and mitigate that insecurity by reaffirming their identity. One of these ways of reaffirming ones identity is territorial expansion. My argument is that a rising power that has a great power identity will expand territorially only after it has been maximally misrecognized by established powers. I examine the relationship between the United States, NATO and Russia from 2000 onward to explore this theory.

Keywords

Great power identity, misrecognition, ontological security, revisionism, status recognition, territorial expansion

Introduction

Following the fall of the Soviet Union Francis Fukuyama proclaimed there was a “total exhaustion of viable systemic alternatives to Western liberalism.” This triumph of US liberal ideals left the US as the preeminent power in the international system. The new US position was proclaimed to be a “unipolar moment” (Krauthammer 1990). The United States asserted itself as the hegemon of this unipolar system projecting its power across the globe and spreading its liberal ideals through institutions and alliance systems. The global hegemony the US has enjoyed in the aftermath of the Cold War is under threat as this unipolar moment Krauthammer described comes to an end. The US has faced trying times over the past decade from the 2008 financial crisis to the “War on Terror.” These cracks in the once burgeoning US economy and the war weariness that has accompanied the endless wars in the Middle East have weakened the US position. The domestic breakdown of the US hegemonic hold over the world has been compounded by the rise of China and the resurgence of Russia. The international system the US once firmly controlled is no longer completely subject to its power as this system shifts towards multipolarity. The creation of a multipolar system raises a new set of questions for understanding how states, particularly rising states with hegemonic aspirations, interact with established powers in the international system. The recent resurgence of Russia has been marked with territorial expansion. Russian conquest in Crimea is an example of such expansion. Attempting to explain this expansion is an integral part of understanding the multipolar system and avoiding power transition war. The question these issues ultimately raise is why rising powers expand territorially?

The Treaty of Westphalia established state sovereignty as a norm among Western states. “The idea of territorial State was related to collective security of nations and to establish rule of law for the equal protection of sovereign States from indiscriminate use of force (Hassan 2006, 66).” The belief that states are sovereign means that they are autonomous and answer to no higher authority; territorial expansion is thus seen as revisionist and normatively bad. The norm of sovereignty established in the West expanded to the rest of the world as it decolonized. Sovereignty’s position as a key international norm grew as colonies adopted the idea of self determination and pursued their independence. Sovereignty’s strength as an international principle grew with its inclusion in Article 2(1) and Article 2(7) of the UN charter (Hassan 2006, 68). The spread of this principle across the world and its integration into international institutions should have made sovereignty an undeniable truth to all states. The adoption of this norm should have forced territorial expansion to be a practice of the past; however, revisionist states still pursue territorial expansion. This is why it is so important to understand why states, particularly revisionist states, pursue territorial expansion.

Revisionist states ignore international norms and pursue territorial expansion as a result of their struggle for recognition. When rising powers assert their identity as a major power they attempt to gain recognition of this identity from other established powers. Recognition is a social act in which a state is “constituted as a subject with legitimate social standing” and is therefore able to maintain a certain social status (Murray 2019, 23). For a rising power to assert their identity and status in the international order the established powers must recognize the identity of this aspiring major power. If the rising power has its identity recognized than its position in the international sphere will be consistent with that of a major power (Murray 2019, 24). The rising power will have then been accepted into the international order as a major power without any

conflict. However if the rising power's claim to a major power identity is not recognized by the established powers the rising power is then misrecognized. The rising power's major power identity is not recognized and their ambition is instead seen as a threat by the established powers. This misrecognition constructs the revisionism within rising powers that makes power transitions so destabilizing and leads to territorial expansion. When rising powers are misrecognized and seen as revisionist they will expand territorially in an attempt to reassert their identity as a major power.

This research is important because it aims to explain the United States' relationship with rising powers. Ultimately rising powers in this newly multipolar international system pursue territorial expansion because of how the US treats them. Since before the fall of the Soviet Union the United States has attempted to expand liberal democracy across the world; these efforts increased when the United States became the unipole of the international order. The United States by promoting democracy throughout the globe has institutionalized its hegemony; therefore, as multipolarity rises and US hegemony wanes the way the international system has been constructed makes the struggle for recognition difficult. In this system power who does not ascribe directly to the ideals of liberal institutionalism may struggle to gain the recognition they dream of without inciting conflict.

Literature Review

Explaining why these revisionist powers ignore international norms and laws to expand their territory is an increasingly poignant question that accompanies the rise of China and Russia. It is a question that many scholars from all perspectives of international relations theory have attempted to tackle.

Realism looks at territorial expansion as a result of a state's increase in power and influence (Kim 2015, Mearsheimer 2006). Offensive realism says that conflict occurs when rational states perceive power as the best source of security within the anarchic system. States want to maximize their prospects for survival (Kim 2015) and eventually dominate the international system (Mearsheimer 2006). Defensive realism relies on the security dilemma to explain the measures a state takes to avoid vulnerability and maintain their security (Kim 2015). Realism also explains the conditions under which states will not pursue expansion. Expansion can be costly and can lead to conflict between states. A state that is not prepared to deal with those costs or start a conflict will be deterred from expansion. Realists use the idea of an offense-defense balance to explain why states expand territorially as well as why they are deterred from expanding. They believe that when offense dominates the international system and conquest is easy that states will expand because it is easy to expand (Van Evera, 1999). The offense-defense balance also states that since self defense is more difficult when offense dominates, states are more apt to pursue defensive expansion to secure themselves (Van Evera, 1999). This framework better explains the aforementioned idea of deterrence. States will not expand when defense is dominant as such expansion would be extremely costly. If victory is seen as too costly or unattainable then states are deterred from aggression (Van Evera, 1999). Realism explains Russian territorial expansion as an attempt to increase its chance for survival by maximizing its power and influence.

Power transition theory offers an alternative to the assumptions of realism stating that a rising power dissatisfied with the status quo will become belligerent as it accumulates material power (Fravel 2010, Lemke and Werner, 1996). If the opportunity and the willingness for the revisionist state to disrupt the status quo is present then the power will initiate conflict (Lemke

and Werner, 1996). When a rising power with revisionist intentions reaches parity with a dominant state, power transition conflict can ensue. This conflict arises within the rising power's local region because the rising power is able to influence only the territory closest to it (Lemke and Werner, 1996). A state that wants to change the status quo may expand in the region and ignore the norm of sovereignty as it challenges the system over which the hegemon presides.

Constructivism counters realism's explanation that territorial expansion results from a state's increase in power and its search for security in the international system. Realism takes countries interests as a given; states will pursue power and influence in order to assure their security. Constructivism breaks from Realisms quest to examine "how the behavior of agents generates outcomes" (Wendt, 1992, 1999, p. 391); it instead focuses on the importance of normative structures and identity in explaining a state's interests and actions. Constructivists believe that structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces; the identities and interests of states are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature (Wendt, 1999). Constructivists see states as being motivated and shaped by their interactions with other states and international norms. "States will decide what they want based not only on material needs but also on social interaction" (Goldstein and Pevehouse 2017, p. 82). States' interests are thus subject to redefinition and transformation as they interact socially (Jung, 2019, p. 4). Constructivist theories stress broad social relations and the malleability of states interests; this theoretical context stands in stark contrast to the strict security interests that realism ascribes to states. Within this context revisionism is contingent on social interactions, and is not an inevitable end to a state's increasing military power (Murray 2019, p.196).

Status recognition is one of these social interactions that can affect a state's movement toward revisionism. Status recognition is about the accurate perception of a valued attribute, which becomes a defining feature of a states' social status (Murray 2019, 63). The recognition of one's status and identity is inextricably linked to the experiences of respect and disrespect (Wolf 2011, p. 3). Respect and disrespect are experienced by an actor through other states' treatment of that actor. The actor in question expects to obtain adequate consideration of their: physical presence, social importance, ideas and values, physical needs and interests, achievements, effort, qualities and virtues, and rights (Wolf 2011, p. 3). If one of these attributes is not given the "adequate consideration" an actor expects then the actor will experience disrespect. "Adequate" is a subjective term because an "actor's subjective expectations and understandings... are strongly affected by cultural settings" (Wolf 2011, p. 11). What constitutes inadequate consideration and causes disrespect varies on a case to case basis; therefore, the "identification and measurement of disrespect cannot be guided by universal criteria" (Wolf 2011, p. 11). Since there are no universal criteria to guide when a state feels disrespected, then understanding a state's cultural setting is the key to understanding when a state will feel disrespected.

The constructivist literature on states' narratives and their national biographies explains how states construct narratives about themselves. These stories structure a state's orientation in the world (Berenskoetter 2014, p. 263) and play a critical role in the construction of political behavior (Subotić 2016, p. 612). These narratives are "highly selective and purposefully constructed. Any narrative will omit some parts of the story while emphasizing the other" (Subotić 2016, p. 612). This process of creating a biographical narrative through the omission of certain events effectively infuses the story a state tells with ideology and emotion (Subotić 2016, p. 612). The state is effectively designating an "experienced space (giving meaning to the past)

intertwined with an envisioned space (giving meaning to the future)” to “structure the image of the self and create a worldview where collective interests come from” (Berenskoetter 2014, p. 264; Subotić 2016, p. 612). National biographies “establish the foundation not only for what once was, but for what ought to be...they carry a desire for a particular social order and a particular set of social practices and policies” (Subotić 2016, 612). They conversely offer “an image of ‘what could happen if’, they narrate a being-in-the-world that should be averted” (Berenskoetter 2014, p. 273). These biographies direct state actions driving them towards a certain future that is informed by their past. The power of narratives is not in “providing linear causality of political action, but instead of making action possible, allowing for some practices and policies, while foreclosing possibility for others” (Subotić 2016, p. 613). Narratives are the foundational building blocks for states’ political actions; they are integral to the identity of states and provide states with ontological security.

Constructivist research believes that “states care as much about their ontological security, the security of a consistent self, as about material, physical security” (Subotić 2016, p. 613). Gaining recognition, the mechanism for validating a state’s identity and providing it with ontological security, is as important as the physical security of the state. These “struggles for recognition’ may affect the dynamics of social transformation just as profoundly as contests fought solely for material benefits” (Wolf 2011, p. 8). Ontological security is so important that “states may be willing to compromise some aspects of their physical security in order to maintain their identity” (Subotić 2016, p. 614). That is why when states experience misrecognition they “almost immediately respond with efforts to redress the situation” (Wolf 2011, p. 29). The experience of misrecognition is a shock to the identity of a state and requires a reaction to reassert the state’s identity and narrative.

Theory

The question that stands to be answered is why do rising powers pursue territorial expansion? I hypothesize that it is the misrecognition of a rising power's identity by an established power that will lead rising states to pursue territorial expansion. Answering this question will involve explaining the dependent variable territorial expansion as it relates to the independent variable of misrecognition.

My theory is informed by Michelle Murray's work on status recognition. I have adopted Murray's causal mechanism of misrecognition for my research. Murray states that "rising powers seek to establish and thus gain recognition of their particular identities as major powers" (Murray 2019, p. 53). Major power identity is a social status that relies on "the *social structure of knowledge* that exists among states for its meaning" and requires "the *normative affirmation* of a rising power's aspirant identity by the established powers" (Murray 2019, p. 53). States in the international system have effectively created an understanding that certain qualities are indicative of great power identity. Great power identity is comprised of three characteristics; a great power voice, exemplary military capabilities and spheres of influence (Murray 2019, p. 54). To realize this identity rising powers must be recognized by established powers as possessing these qualities.

This attempt at power transition is conceptualized by Murray as a "struggle for recognition" (Murray 2019, p. 53). This struggle submits rising powers to a great amount of social uncertainty as they attempt to achieve great power status. Social uncertainty stems from the possibility that the rising power will not be recognized by the established powers. In an attempt to insulate themselves from social uncertainty rising powers will "conform to the

recognitive practices constitutive of the status they seek” (Murray 2019, p.56). Rising powers will adopt the characteristics of a great power and will act how “the states that occupy this social position should act” (Murray 2019, p. 57). They provide themselves with ontological security by grounding their identity in the recognitive practices of great power voice, exemplary military power and spheres of influence. It is important here to recognize that while territorial expansion is not an explicit recognitive practice linked to great power identity, it can be a tactic used to assert a sphere of influence. Since rising powers will attempt to assert their great power status by controlling a sphere of influence their identity can be reinforced after misrecognition by expanding (Hurrell 2006). Gaining territory is therefore a key recognitive practice in a rising state’s attempts to protect its identity and mitigate the social insecurity.

Rising powers must adopt these recognitive practices if they are to attain great power status. By taking up these recognitive practices the rising power makes itself recognizable to other states as a possible great power (Murray 2019, p.66). Recognition of a rising powers’ aspirant great power identity is conditioned on how their recognitive practices are interpreted by established states (Murray 2019, 66). Established great power states act as gatekeepers to recognition. They “have the authority to decide the boundaries of the particular identity group” (Murray 2019. p.55). How a rising state’s adoption of recognitive practices is interpreted by these gatekeeping states determines whether or not the rising states’ identity as a great power is recognized.

If established powers recognize a rising state’s identity as a great power the rising state’s identity will be affirmed. “Major power recognition *authorizes* a rising power to play the role of major power in international society and in doing so enables it to sustain its identity in practice”

(Murray 2019, p. 68). This authorization of the rising power's great power identity effectively legitimates both the state's "social power" and military power in the international system. "A recognized rising power can exercise great power voice, build exemplary military power, and establish a sphere of influence without provoking the suspicions of the established powers" (Murray 2019, p. 69). The recognition and legitimation of a rising power as a major power will "routinize the recognitive practices that ameliorate social insecurity" (Murray 2019, p. 69-70). These "routinized relations of recognition provide rising powers with the ontological security they need to have confidence in their identities" (Murray 2019, p. 70). Ultimately recognition of a rising power's assumed great power identity will legitimate that identity and the power that comes with it to facilitate a peaceful power transition.

The "struggle for recognition" does not always end in a peaceful power transition; "states are likely to engage in status competition if their status has been called into question by an instance of disrespect or by a humiliating international event" (Barnhart 2016, p. 386). If a rising power is misrecognized and seen as revisionist then there will be a destabilizing power transition. Murray describes the process of misrecognition and the social construction of revisionism as unfolding in four steps that when engaged can destabilize the international order. The first step of this system, initial misrecognition by the established powers, begins when a rising power makes its claim to great power status (Murray 2019, p. 72). The established powers then either affirm this identity, which leads to the aforementioned recognition and peaceful power transition, or they deny the states bid for recognition. If this bid for great power identity is denied then the rising power is "described and acted toward in ways that differ from its self-image" (Murray 2019, p. 71). When a rising power is misrecognized by an established power it will experience increased ontological insecurity and social uncertainty. As a result of

misrecognition the rising power will realize that it is not in control of its identity and its confidence in that identity will be shaken.

The second piece of this process is the experience of disrespect. Murray states that rising powers experience misrecognition and social insecurity as a type of disrespect by the established powers. She quotes Reinhard Wolf who states that disrespect is “an unjustifiable denial of social rank” (Murray 2019, p. 73). The disrespected rising power will orient their behavior to mitigate misrecognition and assert its social status. The misrecognized state is thus forced to choose between accepting the status ascribed to it or resisting the status it has been assigned. If the state doesn’t contest the act of disrespect and misrecognition, then it signals an acceptance of the inferior social position it has been assigned (Murray 2019, p. 73). This constitutes an abandonment of the rising power’s current identity which is an extremely costly endeavor that affirms that this state is not in control of its own identity. Resistance to this ascribed identity “at a minimum perpetuates the illusion that a rising power can establish its identity independent of social interaction and at most compels the recognition it desires from the established powers” (Murray 2019, p. 74). The disrespect the rising power is resisting forces it to adhere to recognitive practices to reaffirm its identity (Murray 2019, p.65). These recognitive practices separate the state’s identity from misrecognition, and attempt to affirm its identity in the face of ontological insecurity (Murray 2019). Recognitive practices rearticulate the rising power’s claim to great power status by materializing the identity of a great power into an observable fact for established powers to consider. By resisting the identity forced upon it the rising power is intensifying its demand for recognition.

The third part of this cognitive struggle involves identification or securitization of the rising power by the established powers. Established powers react to the renewed intensity of identity claims from the rising state in two ways; they can reverse misrecognition and affirm the great power identity that the rising power has reasserted, or they can continue to deny the rising power's recognition claims (Murray 2019, p. 75). If the established powers reverse their misrecognition then the rising power will experience recognition as a major power as if they had never been misrecognized in the first place. If the established powers deny these intensified claims to great power status then the rising power will experience stronger feelings of disrespect (Murray 2019, p. 76). Continuing disrespect amplifies the rising power's already rampant social insecurity; this increase in insecurity makes the state more uncompromising and forceful in its assertion of a great power identity (Murray 2019, p. 76). Rising states are more confrontational when misrecognition persists and they engage cognitive practices once again to mitigate the increase in insecurity they feel. These practices affirm their identity in the material world and provide the social security they require to survive (Murray 2019, p. 77). While this aggressiveness gives the rising power security it threatens the established powers. These powers engage in the process of securitization which outlines the rising power as "a threat to itself and the international order" (Murray 2019, p. 77). The rising power is "othered" and its experience of misrecognition is reinforced as it is no longer a part of the "socially constructed collective 'us'" (Murray 2019, p. 76). Established powers engagement in securitization paints the rising power as an existential threat that must be contained.

The social construction of revisionism is the last step in Murray's theoretical framework. "Securitization constructs the rising power as revisionist" through the processes of Othering and reification (Murray 2019, p. 78). Once a rising power is seen as revisionist and innately

aggressive established powers will attempt to contain the rising power's capabilities and influence. Containing these capabilities makes the rising power feel inferior; containment policies thus increase the rising power's social insecurity and experience of disrespect. This creates a self-fulfilling prophecy of insecurity. The rising power will act aggressively and utilize recognitive practices to affirm its identity in the face of increased insecurity; the usage of recognitive practices by the rising power will only increase its appearance as a revisionist power and will justify containment. "Containment creates a feedback loop that perpetuates the dynamic of misrecognition" (Murray 2019, p. 79). Securitization and the ensuing construction as revisionist also forces the blame for the failure of cooperation on the rising power. By maintaining that the rising power is revisionist and must be contained the established powers forces the responsibility for cooperation on the rising power. The established powers are exonerated from any blame for not cooperating with the rising power. As a result of this construction the only way for the rising power to bring about peace is "the abdication of its own aspirations for major power status" (Murray 2019, p. 79).

I look to increase the specificity of the temporal chain of events of Murray's causal mechanism to prove my hypothesis. Murray allows for territorial expansion, through the assertion of a sphere of influence, to happen anywhere throughout the "struggle for recognition." I argue that territorial expansion will occur only after a rising power has been misrecognized by an established power. Great power characteristics in rising states, like the buildup of advanced military technologies, may occur before misrecognition, but territorial expansion will come only after a state has been misrecognized by an established power. I believe this expansion will come specifically after the third step in Murray's causal mechanism, "identification or securitization." I believe territorial expansion will only come after a state experienced the maximal

misrecognition that stems from securitization. Because of how normatively bad territorial expansion is seen in the international system I believe states will not resort to expansion as a recognitive practice until they have been Othered and expunged from the collective identity. Territorial expansion thus follows the securitization of the rising power.

Research Design

The international system's shift towards multipolarity and rising powers' expansion of their territories coincides with US hegemonic decline. Understanding the reasons that these states choose to pursue policies of expansion is key to maintaining stability in the multipolar system and avoiding war. The question that stands to be answered is why do rising powers pursue territorial expansion? I will perform a qualitative case study analysis of Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014 to investigate my theory that rising powers will expand territorially after they are misrecognized.

I will test the validity of my hypothesis through the use of process tracing, the execution of hoop tests and a smoking gun test. Misrecognition must be *necessary* to territorial expansion in my case study in order to prove my hypothesis true. (Mahoney 2015, p. 203). Important steps toward proving that necessity include the passing of a hoop test; a hoop test will not prove a hypothesis but it will solidify its validity (Mahoney 2015, p 207-208). The failure of a hoop test will vastly discredit a hypothesis. On the other hand passing a smoking gun test strongly supports a hypothesis as true, though the failure to pass the smoking gun test does not eliminate the hypothesis as false (Mahoney 2015, p. 211).

To execute this initial hoop test I must take my hypothesis and ask basic questions about the nature of the relationship between X and Y; X being misrecognition and Y being territorial expansion (Mahoney 2015, p. 208). I will ask questions like “did misrecognition and expansion both occur? Did misrecognition occur before territorial expansion? Was it even possible for misrecognition to affect expansion? “If the answer to any of these questions is ‘no’ then the hypothesis fails a hoop test and must be rejected” (Mahoney 2015, p. 208). If my hypothesis withstands these preliminary hoop tests then I can analyze the mechanisms that may link X and Y (Mahoney 2015, p. 208).

Within my theoretical framework misrecognition is necessary for territorial expansion. To test this hypothesis through a more rigorous hoop test I will examine the intervening steps between misrecognition and territorial expansion (Mahoney 2015, p. 209). I will attempt to identify a plausible chain of events connecting misrecognition of Russia to its expansion in Crimea (Mahoney 2015, p. 209). The successful creation of a plausible chain of events would allow my hypothesis to survive this more in depth hoop test.

I will attempt to create this chain of events by investigating the interactions between Russia and the rest of the international system. The data I will focus on are the public statements of Russian leaders, and Russian policy statements leading up to the 2014 invasion and annexation of Crimea. I will look for a connection within these statements between identity and specific pieces of territory.

When investigating a theory it is almost always possible to find evidence that supports that theory (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006, p. 11). Evidence that is consistent with a theory is only so helpful and should be treated with scepticism as it may not actually support the validity of a

hypothesis. Evidence that effectively tests the theory is much more important to validating a hypothesis. This specific kind of evidence can be ascertained through two related strategies; eliminating rival explanations for events, and deliberately seeking evidence that disproves the theory (Kirsheblatt-Gimblett 2006, p. 11). I will examine my null hypothesis as a way to ascertain this further evidence. Questioning if misrecognition had no effect on territorial expansion allows for investigation of some other necessary conditions that may have caused this expansion. An investigation into the realist explanation to why Russia would expand territorially would be beneficial to this questioning. Realists would say the pursuit of physical security and material power led to territorial expansion. As I examine the statements coming from Russia prior to their expansion into Crimea I should look out for these realist mechanisms. If the Russians expanded into Crimea solely to maintain control of their port in Sevastopol then my theory is significantly less supported. On the other hand if these mechanisms do not exist in the statements leading up to Russia's expansion then my theory will be more plausible as realist explanations failed to explain expansion.

Once I have ascertained the plausibility of my hypothesis I will perform a smoking gun test. The passing of this smoking gun test is *sufficient but not necessary* for the validity of my hypothesis (Mahoney 2012, p.7). In order to execute this test I will attempt to find evidence that acts as a "smoking gun;" a statement by a Russian official that links the action of territorial expansion to the misrecognition of Russian identity, or a document that calls for territorial expansion as a way to reaffirm Russia's status. If my hypothesis passes this test then it will count heavily in favor of the truth of my hypothesis (Mahoney 2015, p. 211).

Process tracing is incredibly thorough; the “search for decisive clues and the use of other diagnostic evidence makes process tracing somewhat like the method of discovery employed by detectives” (Mahoney 2015, p. 207). This thoroughness allows for a single observation within a case to decisively support a hypothesis even when countless other observations do not (Mahoney 2015, p. 206). Hoop tests are helpful in their ability to prove hypotheses are not invalid, but their biggest weakness comes from their inability to prove that a hypothesis is true. By not proving the sufficiency of an independent variable it cannot obtain truthfulness. Smoking gun tests are helpful in their ability to prove hypotheses are true, but there is often not enough evidence that can fully support a smoking gun test in the social sciences (Mahoney 2015, p. 211). This makes ascertaining concrete proof of truthfulness difficult.

Analysis

To analyze my theory on misrecognition I will investigate instances of territorial expansion performed by Russia since 2008. In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union and after the turmoil of the 1990s, a resurgent Russia attempted to assert its identity as a world power. Russian President Vladimir Putin hoped to create a Russian state that was no longer seen as a threat by the rest of the world. He stated in an interview with David Frost in 2000 that Russia’s position was that of “a strong, powerful state, a capable state, effective, in which both its citizens of the Russian Federation and all those who want to cooperate with Russia could feel comfortable.” He stressed that Russia should not be seen through the Cold War lens that presents

it as a potential aggressor. Putin underlines that his vision for Russia is non-aggressive and for Europe to see it otherwise would get in the way of developing normal relations (Putin 2000). Putin effectively sought to establish the Russian Federation as a great power after its decay in the initial post-Soviet Era.

In this interview he utilizes the recognitive practice of great power voice to signal Russia's assumption of a great power identity to the US and Europe. When asked his views on NATO Putin responded "Russia is part of the European culture... so it is hard for me to visualize NATO as an enemy"(Putin 2000). Putin further said to Frost "we can talk about more profound integration into NATO but only if Russia is regarded as an equal partner. You are aware we have been constantly voicing our opposition to NATO's eastward expansion" Russia calls for consideration and respect through the discussion and opposition of NATO's eastward expansion. By calling for an end to NATO's expansion Putin attempts to be conveyed respect from the established powers. He is trying to have Russia's concerns listened to; if these concerns are heeded by established powers then it is indicated that Russia has a great power voice and affirms Russia's great power identity. It is also important to note that Putin is actively attempting to receive recognition of Russian identity by assuming markers of the established powers' identities. He takes a non-aggressive stance toward NATO as he does not outline them as an enemy to Russia he just asks for a stoppage of their expansion eastwards. He also says that Russia is European; he is aligning Russia's identity with the western identity of the established powers. This identity is one that is not based in the Soviet past; it instead looks toward a cooperative European future. Putin seeks recognition of this new identity from the US and NATO through his remarks.

Putin's claim that concerns over NATO's eastward expansion should be heard and respected is not an inherently aggressive move. By doing so Putin is seeking recognition and does not yet feel that he has been denied this recognition; however, his words expose Russia to the possibility of misrecognition. He exercised Russia's assumed great power voice and their sphere of influence in an attempt to sway established powers from continuing NATO's expansion. Russia is misrecognized when NATO continued expansion in Eastern Europe in 2004 by including the Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in the alliance. The attempt by Russia to assert its great power identity is ultimately met with rejection. This "misrecognition connotes that the established powers see the rising power as an actor different from them" (Murray 2019, p. 72). Russia sees this rejection by the established powers within NATO as an act that is wholly incompatible with its identity as a great power. This compromise of Russia's great power identity leads Russia to experience ontological insecurity and social uncertainty. Misrecognition increases social uncertainty as it makes it clear that Russia is not in control of its own identity and that Putin cannot just construct a favorable identity for Russia. Russia experiences a lack of confidence in its identity as a result of being misrecognized. Being treated as subordinate to the whims of the NATO alliance system denigrates confidence in their great power identity.

The social and ontological insecurity that stems from misrecognition is experienced by the Russians as disrespect. Established powers effectively humiliated Russia by expanding NATO against Russia's wishes and encroaching on its sphere of influence (Matsaberidze 2015, p. 79). The expansions into the Baltics in 2004 elicited feelings of anger from Russian politicians and commanders (Myers 2004). To them the meaning of this expansion was clear, NATO still saw Russia as their enemy (Myers 2004). As a result of the expansion Russia's parliament

adopted a resolution that denounced NATO expansion and called for Putin to reconsider Russia's agreements with NATO (Myers 2004). This disrespect and insecurity of having NATO soldiers on Russia's border is said by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to have "created a kind of paranoia in Russia" (Myers 2004). The expansion of NATO is clearly seen by Russians as the posturing of an aggressive military alliance that sees Russia as a threat. This forced Russia's identity into a subordinate position to the rest of the established powers. They were at the mercy of NATO decisions as opposed to being part of the NATO decisions. This misrecognition and disrespect creates a feeling of us versus them and fractures the attempts by Putin to maintain Russia's "European" identity that is loosely allied with NATO. Putin addressed this disrespect saying that "they have lied to us many times; made decisions behind our backs... this happened with NATO's expansion to the East" (Putin 2014). The established powers misrecognition of Russia's great power identity made Russia adopt recognitive practices in an attempt to address this disrespect and misrecognition.

Russia doubled down on their identity after NATO expansion into the Baltics and the ensuing militarization of area. They did so through the recognitive practices of maintaining an exemplary military capability and using their great power voice. Vladimir Putin pursued rearmament of Russia's military, specifically a modernization of the state's nuclear arsenal. A state having a nuclear arsenal is widely understood as being indicative of having exemplary military capabilities (Murray 2019). Thus Putin's modernization of these capabilities reiterates Russia's military exemplariness and reaffirms its identity as a Great Power.

Russia used its great power voice to attempt to influence the actions in the Baltics. They called for the Baltic states to ratify the CFE (Conventional Forces in Europe) Treaty which limits

the ability of any state to amass the forces needed to launch an offensive war (Adomeit 2007). If this treaty was to go unratified then theoretically NATO would be allowed to move unlimited quantities of troops into the Baltics (Thalis 2018). In calling for NATO to ratify this treaty the Russians once again called for the consideration and respect of established powers in its use of its great power voice. The CFE treaty was never signed by the new NATO allies causing Putin to criticize CFE's "pitiable condition" and NATO states' refusal to ratify CFE even as NATO itself grew. Because the Baltic states don't ratify the CFE treaty Russia feels misrecognized as it abides by the rules outlined in the CFE and the Baltics don't. NATO and the Baltics ignore Russia's great power voice; Russia feels misrecognized in its identity as a great power and abandons this treaty as a result.

Once again Russia's attempts at asserting a Great Power identity are misrecognized. Russia's mitigation of the initial NATO expansion into the Baltics failed. The attempts to reduce the threats of a rapid armament of the Baltic States on the border of Russia were also met with failure. These failures of Russia's ability to assert their great power voice and sphere of influence were compounded with the movement toward further NATO expansion into Georgia. Before the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, Russia's NATO envoy, Dmitry Rogozin, warned of the dangers of extending alliance membership to Georgia. Rogozin said that "Russia is trying to persuade the NATO members, first of all the Americans, that they shouldn't joke around not just with Georgia but with the whole perspective for the future of NATO...the question is whether they hear us or not" (Associated Press 2008). During the summit in Bucharest NATO stated that Ukraine and Georgia would be admitted into the alliance and said they would review the requests for MAP (membership action plans). This action was in direct opposition to the stated interests of Russia and another instance of disrespect. Putin's closing remarks at the Bucharest summit

acknowledged these instances of disrespect and the insecurity that they generated for Russia.

Putin directly addressed the continued expansion of NATO.

“We view the appearance of a powerful military bloc on our borders, a bloc whose members are subject in part to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, as a direct threat to the security of our country. The claim that this process is not directed against Russia will not suffice. National security is not based on promises. And the statements made prior to the bloc's previous waves of expansion simply confirm this. The lack of clarity concerning the prospects for NATO's transformation makes it hard to build trust. By this I mean the Alliance's aspirations to play a global role in the area of security, moving beyond the zone of its geographical responsibilities and extending its activities into areas such as energy security, cyber security, etc. In addition, the criteria for the use of military force by NATO remain unclear, as does its relationship with the United Nations Security Council” (Putin 2008).

Rogozin questioned before the Bucharest summit if NATO would “hear” Russia. It is clear through Putin's remarks that they did not. They have failed to since 2000. Throughout the interactions between Russia and NATO the struggle for recognition has raged with the misrecognition of Russia worsening as time goes on. Russia felt misrecognized after the expansion of NATO into the Baltics; they felt more misrecognition after the Baltics' failure to ratify the CFE treaty. The possibility of Georgian and Ukrainian NATO membership is the last straw. Russia' great power identity is once again disrespected as their great power voice continues to be ignored. The incursion of NATO “beyond the zone of its geographic responsibility” also ignores Russia's sphere of influence with each wave of expansion east. These continued instances of disrespect have maximized the insecurity in Russian identity and at this point the misrecognition of Russia is fully realized.

This continuing misrecognition and refusal of the West to see and interact with Russia as an equal makes Russia more risk acceptant as it continues to feel increasing amounts of social insecurity. Russia is effectively “othered” by its position outside of the major power club that

comes from these established states misrecognition of its identity. The securitization that accompanies the “othering” of Russia by NATO powers can be seen in NATO’s plans to deploy anti-ballistic missile postures in Eastern Europe. The plans to implement this missile defense system in Poland combined with the increased expansion of NATO make it clear that the established powers see Russia as a threat and one that must be contained. Russia is thus seen as a revisionist state.

After being recognized as a revisionist state Russia is seen as inherently aggressive. Russia’s use of recognitive practices to reassert its great power identity is seen as the actions of a revisionist state. The continued militarization and encroachment upon the Russian sphere of influence by NATO forces it to use the recognitive practice of asserting a sphere of influence to affirm its great power identity. After Russia has been othered and securitized these instances of encroachment by NATO are reacted to by not only asserting a sphere of influence but expanding territorially. The invasion of Georgia in August 2008 after the Bucharest Summit is an example of territorial expansion as a result of misrecognition.

Under the pretense of a peacekeeping mission, the Russian invasion of Georgia began the Five Days War. Their intervention in the tumultuous situation between Georgia and the Russian-backed separatist states of Abkhazia and South Ossetia was a stage for the reassertion of their great power identity. After facing countless instances of disrespect from NATO and being “othered” from the international order Russia engaged in territorial expansion to reassert its great power identity. It did so through the use of its great power voice and sphere of influence. In five days Russian forces stopped their advance 30 miles from the Georgian capital and with French mediation orchestrated a ceasefire with the Georgians.

This instance of “peacekeeping” was an aggressive move made by Russia to reaffirm their identity as a great power. This cognitive action was meant to constitute major power status and mitigate Russia’s social insecurity. Disrespected states may instigate international crises to garner the attention of international powers and practice great power management (Murray 2019, p.77). The situation in Georgia was partially brought about through instigation by Russia. This in turn forced the established powers of NATO, specifically France who acted as mediator, to engage with Russia on this matter. Engaging in matters related to the international order with established powers bolsters an aspirant power’s identity and provides a rising power with the opportunity to extract concessions (Murray 2019, p. 77). In the case of Russia, they saw their great power voice acknowledged on the world stage with the signing of the ceasefire and established their sphere of influence through the conflict and ensuing diplomatic relations.

Russia’s actions were not without consequence. While its aggressiveness soothed its mounting social insecurity it also appeared threatening to the established powers (Murray 2019, p.77). This is a result of its securitization and identity as revisionist. Russia is seen as innately aggressive and its cognitive practices are seen as threatening to NATO. Days after the ceasefire of the Russo-Georgian war the plans to place an anti-ballistic missile system in Poland that Russia had opposed so heavily were finalized. The placement of these batteries in such close proximity to Russia coupled with the ever present possibilities of NATO expansion into Ukraine and Georgia once again misrecognized Russia’s aspirant identity as a great power. In an attempt to reassert Russia’s sphere of influence and provide security to its great power identity they turned once more to territorial expansion.

Upon the backdrop of Ukrainian-NATO relations increasing, when the Pro-Russian President of Ukraine was ousted from power in the midst of mass protests Putin saw this as just another western encroachment on Russia's sphere of influence (Pinkman 2017). He stated that "we understand that these actions were aimed against Ukraine and Russia and against Eurasian integration" (Putin 2014). He sees the unrest in Ukraine as a logical extension to the West's continued treatment of Russia as a lesser power.

This misrecognition by the West of Russia's sphere of influence in Ukraine led to Russia annexing Crimea. Russia's interest in territorial expansion was driven by the need to reaffirm their identity of a "Third Rome." The humiliation that Russia has experienced as NATO expanded into the post Soviet Bloc in the wake of the "broken promises" of the West is the background for expansion (Matsaberidze 2015). This territorial expansion is explained by Putin as a result of the failure of the West to recognize Russian identity. He says that "Russia is an independent, active participant in international affairs; like other countries, it has its own national interests that need to be taken into account and respected" (Putin 2014). As territorial expansion can create and reaffirm a sphere of influence, Russia's annexation of Crimea materially provides Russia with its great power identity in the face of misrecognition by the established Western powers.

The case of Russian expansion into Crimea effectively validates my hypothesis that states will expand territorially after being misrecognized by established powers. Through my research however I also found support for the realist explanation of expansion. With the possibility of Ukrainian acceptance into NATO, Russia invaded to protect its security interests. Russian access to the Black Sea and its ability to project force is contingent on maintaining a naval base in

Sevastopol, Crimea. When discussing Sevastopol and the annexation of Crimea, Putin proclaimed “that NATO’s navy would be right there in this city of Russia’s military glory, and this would create not an illusory but a perfectly real threat to the whole of southern Russia” (Putin 2014). Russia expands into Crimea to protect its security interests in the region from possible subversion by NATO.

Through the examination of this case of Russian expansion my hypothesis that rising powers will expand territorially after being misrecognized is valid and true. It is certainly true that the continued misrecognition of a state, which causes rising insecurity and feelings of disrespect, leads to territorial expansion. This case study of Russia shows that the growing feelings of insecurity generated by their interactions with NATO led to them feeling completely misrecognized in the months leading up to the Russo-Georgian war and caused them to utilize territorial expansion into Georgia as a way to reaffirm their great power identity. My hypothesis is proven by this case study although it is made less valid by the fact that Russian expansion can also be explained by realists’ ideas of maintaining physical security.

Conclusion

The main takeaways from this study are as follows. Rising powers will assert their great power identities by adopting the characteristics that are indicative of established great powers. If this identity of the rising power is misrecognized they will engage in recognitive practices to assuage feelings of disrespect and misrecognition. If this misrecognition continues the rising power’s identity will be constructed as revisionist by the established powers. Once a state is seen as revisionist they will utilize everything in their power to regain their great power identity, including employing the normatively bad practice of territorial expansion.

This understanding of how rising powers might implement territorial expansion during a power transition is incredibly important to understand in the new multipolar system that has arisen in the past decade. As rising states like China and Iran attempt to assume their “place in the sun” established powers must understand the implications of misrecognizing their identities.

My research’s strength comes from the data. The ability to see how Russia’s identity is affected by its interaction with NATO directly from the mouth of President Vladimir Putin provides extremely credible evidence. The biggest weakness of my research is that it is only supported by the findings of one case, not the findings of many cases.

Further research on this topic should examine the affect of US hegemony on the system of misrecognition. Since rising powers need to have a sphere of influence and that sphere of influence must be recognized by established powers in order for the rising power to ascend to their coveted great power status. The United States’ dedication to international liberal hegemony could force rising powers to engage in status recognition struggles as they cannot carve out their own sphere of influence without conflict. United States’ hegemonic domination of rising powers’ self identified spheres of influence assures that rising powers maybe unable to acquire recognition as a great power. This is important because the US will have to formulate a policy to respond accordingly with China’s rise and provide it with recognition.

Bibliography

Adomeit, Hannes. "Inside or outside? Russia's policies towards NATO." In *The Multilateral Dimension in Russian Foreign Policy*, pp. 111-134. Routledge, 2008.

Associated Press. *Russia's NATO Envoy Says Offering Georgia Membership Track Would Bolster Separatists*. 11 Mar. 2008,
web.archive.org/web/20080917213218/www.iht.com/articles/ap/2008/03/11/europe/EU-GEN-Russia-NATO.php

Barnhart, Joslyn. "Status Competition and Territorial Aggression: Evidence from the Scramble for Africa." *Security Studies* 25, no. 3 (July 2, 2016): 385–419.
<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09636412.2016.1195620>.

Berenskoetter, Felix. "Parameters of a national biography." *European journal of international relations* 20, no. 1 (2014): 262-288.

Fukuyama, Francis. "The end of history?." *The national interest* 16 (1989): 3-18.

Goldstein, Joshua S., and Jon C. Pevehouse. "International relations." *New York: Pearson & Longman* (2017).

Hassan, Daud. "Rise of Territorial State and the treaty of Westphalia." *Yearbook of New Zealand Jurisprudence* (2006).

- Hurrell, Andrew. "Hegemony, Liberalism and Global Order: What Space for Would-Be Great Powers?" *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 82, no. 1 (2006): 1-19.
- Jung, Hoyoon. "The Evolution of Social Constructivism in Political Science: Past to Present." *SAGE Open*, (January 2019). doi:[10.1177/2158244019832703](https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019832703).
- Kim, Jihyun. "Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea: Implications for Security in Asia and Beyond." *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 9, no. 2 (2015): 107-41.
<http://www.jstor.org.libdatabase.newpaltz.edu/stable/26271078>.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. "Part 1, what is research design." *The Context of Design*.
Internet: Available: <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/bkg/methods/005847ch1.pdf>. (Accessed: 16 April, 2012) (2006).
- Krauthammer, Charles "The Unipolar Moment," *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 1 (1990/ 1991): 23– 33;
William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," *International Security* 24, no. 1 (1999): 5– 41.
- Lemke, Douglas, and Suzanne Werner. "Power parity, commitment to change, and war." *International Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 2 (1996): 235-260.
- Mahoney, James. "The logic of process tracing tests in the social sciences." *Sociological Methods & Research* 41, no. 4 (2012): 570-597.
- Mahoney, James. "Process tracing and historical explanation." *Security Studies* 24, no. 2 (2015): 200-218.

- Matsaberidze, David. "Russia vs. EU/US through Georgia and Ukraine." *Connections* (18121098) 14, no. 2 (2015).
- Mearsheimer, John J. "China's unpeaceful rise." *CURRENT HISTORY-NEW YORK THEN PHILADELPHIA*- 105, no. 690 (2006): 160.
- Murray, Michelle K. *The struggle for recognition in international politics: Security, identity, and the quest for power*. ProQuest, 2019.
- Myers, Steven Lee. "As NATO Finally Arrives on Its Border, Russia Grumbles." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 3 Apr. 2004, www.nytimes.com/2004/04/03/world/as-nato-finally-arrives-on-its-border-russia-grumbles.html.
- Pinkham, Sophie. "How annexing Crimea allowed Putin to claim he had made Russia great again." *The Guardian* (2017).
- Putin, Vladimir. "Interview: BBC breakfast with Frost." *Kremlin. ru* 5 (2000).
- Putin, Vladimir. "Press Statement and Answers to Journalists' Questions Following a Meeting of the Russia-NATO Council." *President of Russia*, 4 Apr. 2008, en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24903.
- Putin, Vladimir. "Putin's prepared remarks at 43rd Munich conference on security policy." *The Washington Post* 12 (2007).
- Putin, Vladimir. "Speech on Crimea" (speech, Moscow March 18th, 2014), Prague Post, <https://www.praguepost.com/eu-news/37854-full-text-of-putin-s-speech-on-crimea>

Subotić, Jelena. "Narrative, ontological security, and foreign policy change." *Foreign policy analysis* 12, no. 4 (2016): 610-627.

Thalis, Alexander, Benjamin Habib, Stephan Frühling, Andrew O'Neil, and Elizabeth Buchanan.

"Threat or Threatened? Russia in the Era of NATO Expansion - AIIA." Australian Institute of International Affairs, June 3, 2018.

<http://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/australianoutlook/threat-or-threatened-russian-foreign-policy-in-the-era-of-nato-expansion/>.

Van Evera, Stephen. "Offense, defense, and the causes of war." *International Security* 22, no. 4 (1998): 5-43.

Ward, Steven. "Race, status, and Japanese revisionism in the early 1930s." *Security Studies* 22, no. 4 (2013): 607-639.

Wendt, Alexander. "Anarchy Is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics." *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 391-425.
www.jstor.org/stable/2706858.

Wendt, A. (1999). *Social theory of international politics*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Wolf, R. (2011). Respect and disrespect in international politics: the significance of status recognition. *International Theory*, 3(1), 105-142.

Wolf, Reinhard. "Rising powers, status ambitions, and the need to reassure: What China could learn from Imperial Germany's failures." *Chinese journal of international politics* 7, no. 2 (2014): 185-219.