

# Russian ideas of peace and peacekeeping

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Emerging as a nuclear superpower after the Second World War, the Soviet Union was a contender for ideological world dominance almost until its breakup in the early 1990s. Generations of Soviet leaders interpreted their ideology as essentially conflictual, engaging with revolutionary and armed struggles across the world. In 1973, the Soviet Union participated in its very first peacekeeping mission, working under UNEF II in Egypt; however, no other missions of significant scope ever followed this instance. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia sent significant numbers of armed forces to participate in international peacekeeping in the Balkans, but Russia then left the Balkan missions in anger after the NATO forces had gone ahead with Operation Allied Force and bombed parts of Yugoslavia outside the UN mandate (Wimelius, Eklund, and Elfving 2018). Russia has participated in several other UN missions, including those in Chad, Haiti, and East Timor (Bratersky and Lukin 2017: 139). When violence erupted in the republics of Tajikistan, Georgia, and Moldova in the 1990s, Russia became the lead nation and the backbone of forces from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in response.<sup>1</sup> In four cases, Russia initiated and led peacekeeping without the UN: Transnistria (1992–present), Abkhazia (1994–2008), South Ossetia (1989–2009), and Tadjikistan (1992–2000). According to some commentators, ostensibly leaving its ideological past behind, Russia’s peacekeeping was successful in “bringing a relatively durable stability to conflicts in the former Soviet Union” (Heathershaw 2004: 188). Others have argued differently, noting that Russian peace operations were used to freeze conflicts and protect strategic interests (Allison 2013).

After the 1990s Russian peacekeeping evolved outside the UN framework and was met with international suspicion. In contrast to traditional ideas on peacekeeping (which frequently involve consent, impartiality, and a minimum use of force), Russian forces suppressed fighting, separated warring factions, and imposed peace in the post-Soviet sphere (Sagramoso 2003: 13). Russian peacekeeping operations, in vernacular Russian discussed as

*mirotvorchestvo* or *mirostroitelstvo*, were based on broad mandates, unclear rules of engagement, and – in comparison to UN operations – a less constrained legal framework. This approach allowed negative peace to be enforced in the regions mentioned above and then kept by Russia (Mackinlay and Cross 2003). As described by Bratersky and Lukin: “the fact remains that the majority of Russia’s operations have been effective insofar as, following the cessation of hostilities, they did not cause further instability – in marked contrast to the operations led by NATO member countries, for example, in Iraq and Libya” (Bratersky and Lukin 2017: 147).

According to Bratersky and Lukin, however, Russian peacekeeping should be understood against the backdrop of Russian elite perspectives on UN peacekeeping. The introduction of humanitarian interventions (or the responsibility to protect, termed ‘R2P’) is seen as an erosion of principles of territorial integrity, non-intervention, and state sovereignty (Bratersky and Lukin 2017: 132–133). The world order, as established after the Second World War, on the other hand “grants Russia the right to preserve its own position” (Bratersky and Lukin 2017: 134). In Bratersky and Lukin’s analysis, the current Russian leadership embraces a worldview based on competition between national interests, in which the UN is necessary as an arena for seeking compromise and providing world politics with some measure of stability and predictability. Sakwa, in his argument for the concept of cold peace, further contextualizes such ideas by saying that the institutions and rules set in place to manage the realities of a bipolar world are becoming increasingly dysfunctional in the post–Cold War era. As it has struggled to find its place without subscribing to American superpower and hegemony, Russia has contributed to a substitution of cold war for cold peace, which represents “an unstable geopolitical truce” where defeat of “the one side is not accepted as legitimate” and victory “of the other side cannot be consolidated” (Sakwa 2013: 206).

In the field of post-Soviet studies, much thought and research has been inspired by Russian exceptionalism among Russian elites (Tsygankov 2013, 2016; Humphries 2016). Swedish historian Jangfeldt has suggested that Russian elites vacillate between two extremes: on the one hand, a sense of isolation and belonging, felt through most of their modern history (Jangfeldt 2017: 5) and often carried over as an explanatory factor in current analyses of Russia’s path from experimentation with nascent liberal heterarchy in the 1990s, and, on the other hand, a stricter political hierarchy under the aegis of President Vladimir Putin (Grigas 2016; Sakwa 2017; Giles 2019). Whether or not they were motivated by exceptionalism, cyclic elite behavior, or illiberal political vision, little is known about Russian ideas of peace beyond the absence of war, and with Russia’s global influence on the rise,

more knowledge about how Russia understands peace and peacekeeping has been called for (Davies 2015). Are there ideas of peace that go beyond the absence of war and, if so, to what extent can they be interpreted as relational? In this chapter, we engage with contemporary sources in the Russian language in an endeavor to identify, analyze, and interpret ideas of peace. Our analysis is based on the elements of relational peace, and we have looked for expressions of these in our sources in order to explore Russian ideas of peace beyond the absence of war. Is peace described in terms of relationships that involve non-domination, deliberation, or cooperation? Are ideas of attitudes to counterparts those of recognition or trust? Are ideas of relationships based on notions of legitimate coexistence or friendship?

Our interest in Russian ideas of peace in Transnistria and Abkhazia is motivated first and foremost by the predominance and lingering influence of Russian troops on these territories, establishing de facto Russian political dominance. When Moldova declared sovereignty in 1990, Transnistria responded by declaring independence from Moldova. War followed, and the intervention of the 14th Soviet army stationed in Moldova was instrumental in contributing to the country's partition. Large-scale violence has not recurred since a peace agreement was signed on July 21, 1992. A security zone was created, and 6,000 troops from six Russian, three Moldovan, and three Transnistrian battalions were deployed under a Joint Control Commission (Dias 2013). Deadlines for the withdrawal of Russian troops have never been met, however, and in recent years Moldova has repeatedly expressed fears that Russia is about to annex Transnistria (BBC 2017b).

When the Georgian parliament declared secession from the Soviet Union in 1991, the then Georgian region of Abkhazia responded with fierce military resistance. Outright war in 1992–1993 ended in Georgia losing control and led to the separation of ethnic groups. Under the auspices of the UN, a ceasefire was signed in 1994. The UN also set up an observer mission, the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), while the CIS deployed troops dominated by Russian units to uphold a buffer zone between Abkhazia and Georgia. After the defeat of Georgian guerilla fighters in the region of Gali, a peace agreement was reached in the city of Gagra on May 25, 1998. In 2008, however, Russia and Georgia once again clashed, this time over South Ossetia. Russian troops not only moved through Abkhazia but decided to keep a large military force there and, in 2009, they vetoed an extension of the UNOMIG. Having claimed its independence since 1999, Abkhazia is often considered a de facto state by the international community but remains unrecognized by a vast majority of countries (Johnson 2015; BBC 2017a). Because of the strength of Russian dominance, both Transnistria and Abkhazia have become increasingly isolated, but as Russia continues its *mirotvorchestvo*

and *mirostroitelstvo* in what it terms peacekeeping missions there, what do we know about relevant Russian definitions of and ideas of peace?

### **Descriptive ideational analysis and the relational approach**

Ideational scholars hold that ideas – often defined as products of cognition or causal beliefs – are guides for action and that we must identify, interpret, and understand the ideas that shape the world around us in order to make sense of it (Béland and Cox 2010; Gofas and Hay 2010; Vedung 2018). In other words, ideas about what peace is, what it should be, and how it can be built inform decision-making, affect negotiations and agreements, shape policy, help build institutions, and underpin peacebuilding efforts. From this perspective, it is crucial to identify sources that contain ideas which have an impact. Our sources here consist of Russian governmental publications as well as academic and popular reference texts. The texts, which were mostly published after 2010, encompass developments from the early 1990s onward. The sources used in this chapter are valid as a cross-section of Russian publications during and after Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea. Events and any ensuing ideational change after 2020 are not covered by these sources, however. We leave the ideational underpinnings of more recent Russian military operations, namely in Nagorno-Karabach and in Kazakhstan, as topics for future research. Russian actions in Donetsk and Luhansk in the wake of Russia's 2022 war on Ukraine also raise questions concerning Russian views on peacekeeping and peacebuilding, but we refrain from observations about them as well since all-out war still rages in Ukraine at the time of this writing, and again our sources do not speak to this time period. Of course, our findings here may still inform our understanding of current events. Thus, we do not claim or argue that there is only one set of ideas of peace in Russia, but our interest here is to identify those ideas which not only shape current elite thinking but are also publicly conveyed as underpinning state policy.

Governmental sources are readily available on the internet, and some but not all of them are available in English. The homepages of the Russian government and its ministries, particularly the Ministry of Defense, provide institutional and doctrinal information with regard to current Russian policy and related usages concerning the concepts of peace and peacekeeping. These we refer to as the declarative sources. Another type of source analyzed in this chapter is expounding sources, by which we mean such running or explanatory commentary as can be found in the Russian media, particularly in state-controlled outlets such as TASS and Ria-Novosti, by prominent political figures and analysts. These are descriptive of ideas that matter

because they reflect thinking in wider elite circles and explain intentions of government doctrine to the Russian public. Expounding sources also include books whose authors are either founding fathers of government doctrine (such as the minister of defense Gerasimov) or official interpreters and conveyors of doctrine (such as General Vladimirov). Expounding sources in the form of media outlets are freely accessible online for Russian speakers.

By including academic and popular reference texts, we want to explore the intersection of research-based Russian ideas of peace, declarative governmental positions, and popularized ideas that influence public debates. Can elements and depictions of relational peace be extracted from the four categories of sources? Reference books were sought out in major bookstores in Moscow and Riga, which indicates that these sources are widespread and available to Russian speakers both inside and outside Russia. This, however, also means that the book search was limited by commercial availability and in no way intended as exhaustive. Looking across all four categories, it also means that we are analyzing a cross-section of widely accepted contemporary Russian ideas, as opposed to looking at their roots and evolution through history. Table 1.1 lists our sources according to category; each cell contains works in chronological order of publication.

Table 1.1 Sources according to type

Type of source	Specific sources
Governmental/ declarative	<i>Military Encyclopedic Dictionary</i> 2007; Russian Federation Military Doctrine 2014; Russian Federation National Security Strategy 2015; Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2016; Russian Defense Terminology 2018; Ministry of Emergencies 2019.
Expounding	Azyavin 2009; Gerasimov 2013; Vladimirov 2013; Popov and Chamzatov 2016; Kovalev 2017; Moskovskij Komsomolets 2018; Ria Novosti 2019; Averin 2019; Gazeta.ru 2019; TASS 2019.
Academic	Antsupov and Shipilov 2000; Zhirokov 2012; Burdyog 2012; Trushin 2012; Lebedeva and Khakevich 2013; Tsygankov 2013; Guseynov 2014; Gromyko and Feyodorov 2014; Blishenko and Solntseva 2014; Lasutin 2015; Kovalchuk 2015; Igritsky et al. 2015; Starodubovskaya and Sokolov 2015; Smirnov 2017.
Popular reference	Kvasha 2011; Kozlov and Chernobriviy 2015; Starikov 2015; Primakov 2016; Delyagin 2016; Zhirokov 2016; Satanovsky and Kedmi 2017.

Ideas of course do not exist in a vacuum, but are part of a historical, political, economic, and social context, and that context is often helpful for interpreting them (Bergström and Boréus 2000). Although our aim here is to identify, describe, and analyze ideas related to peace in the Russian-language context as such, we also approach and interpret them against the backdrop of the post-Soviet context and draw not only on the first and third authors' extensive knowledge about Russian affairs but particularly on their linguistic proficiency. Our interpretation of Russian ideas is also inspired by practical hermeneutics according to which interpretation starts with a direction and a set of questions, uses specific analytical tools, and is a continuous process of going back and forth between parts of the texts or sources and the texts or sources as a whole (Alvesson and Sköldbberg 1994: 156). The texts we analyze are all in the Russian language, and all quotations below have been translated into English by the first author. Overall, the approach has been to search across the governmental, expounding, academic, and popular reference source categories and look for unifying Russian ideas of the relational components of peace.

Before sharing the results of our analysis, we should mention that even a cursory reading of Russian sources reveals ideas of peace that are heavily conditioned by structures in the form of states, governments, international organizations, institutions, norms, rules, and geopolitical contexts together with ideas about how relationships flow to and from them (see for example Antsupov and Shipilov 2000; Blishenko and Solntseva 2014; Kovalchuk 2015; Kozlov and Chernobriviy 2015; Starodubrovskaya and Sokolov 2015; Zhirovkov 2016). Particular relationships take precedence over others. Exterritorial relations are a case in point: the Russian government defines one of its key tasks as that of protecting Russian minorities in other countries as if they were citizens of the Russian State (Russian Federation Military Doctrine 2014). The Russian government also reserves the right to take unilateral peacekeeping action without a UN mandate (Russian Defense Terminology 2018). In the sources we have studied, there is no critical discussion of these topics or, for example, of the Russian practice of expanding its populations in geopolitically desirable areas by handing out passports to motivate intervention, as for example in Crimea in 2014 (Averin 2019; Gazeta.ru 2019). Our sources can all be subdivided into three broad themes: the first concerns the international system, the second macro-regional geopolitical complexes in *Bolshoy Kavkaz* or Greater Caucasia, and the third conflicts and resolutions in Transnistria and Abkhazia. The first of the three themes tries to pinpoint the workings of global and international systems in the post-Soviet era and pays particular attention to the significance of Russia's emergent role as a (mere) great power in world politics. The second focuses on macro-regional geopolitical complexes. It seems to clarify

the political thoughts and reasons behind Russian views of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. Particularly interesting and relevant for our study is the concept of *Bolshoy Kavkaz* (Guseynov 2014), which translates as Greater Caucasia. The third theme deals directly with conflicts and resolutions in Transnistria and Abkhazia.

In what follows, we describe our findings first with regard to carrier ideas, i.e., ideas that recurred in all of our sources and which somehow provide an ideational platform which forms a baseline on which the other ideas are situated. We then proceed to explore ideas of peace relating to the international system; this section is followed by an exploration and analysis of ideas of peace with regard to the *Bolshoy Kavkaz* and with regard to Transnistria and Abkhazia. Table 1.2, in the conclusion of this chapter, summarizes our findings from the ideational analysis.

### Carrier ideas

Looking across all sources analyzed here, we find some first-order ideas on the basis of which other ideational expressions are situated. Here, these are referred to as *carrier ideas*, and they are important in setting the stage for our descriptive analysis of ideas concerning the particular elements of relational peace (Jarstad et al., this volume, Introduction). In our analysis, carrier ideas thus refer to an ideational baseline or a set of assumptions about the world and the people who live in it. Peace, in other words, may be discussed by sources in relational terms, but how and to what extent will be guided by certain carrier ideas. The first carrier idea in the sources we have studied here concerns the Russian perspective on history. Conflict is seen as an intrinsic part of the human condition. In the sources we analyzed, war and peace are seen not only as two sides of the same coin, but as intrinsically linked (Antsupov and Shipilov 2000; Vladimirov 2013). It is seen as pointless to argue that peaceful conditions devoid of elements of war can be achieved. Rather, more or less peaceful conditions are viewed as cyclic with warlike conditions all the way through human history. Humanity's perpetuation of violence and the threat of violence lie at the core of social life. Cultures, if left alone, can establish reasonable levels of mutual social understanding and thereby achieve equally reasonable levels of violence in social life. This means that a modicum of peace or a more peaceful condition is achievable. But peace is contingent. In Russian eyes, history teaches us that cultures are rarely left alone. Global relationships are imposed or enforced. Cultures compete, and in the modern world states must act as cultural agents, assumptions which form a carrier idea about cultural agency and state-centrism.

Table 1.2 The components of the relational approach in relation to Russian ideas of peace

<b>Carrier ideas</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. War and peace are intertwined, interlocked, and cyclic throughout history.</li> <li>2. Cultural agency and competition lead to repetitive cycles of violence, war, and peace.</li> <li>3. The breakup of the Soviet Union resulted in the <i>Semena Raspada</i>, a scattering of cultural seeds evocative of a broken family of nations.</li> </ol>		
Themes in the sources	International system	Macro-regional geopolitical complexes in <i>Bolshoy Kavkaz</i> or Greater Caucasia	Conflicts and resolutions in Transnistria and Abkhazia
Behavioral elements of relational peace	<p>Peace between states must rest upon state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-intervention.</p> <p>A global forum for peaceful cooperation and deliberation is needed; the UN is failing in both regards.</p>	<p>Structures that promote the behavioral components of relational peace are largely lacking.</p> <p>Macro-regional partnerships are needed to address this and step in where the UN fails to do so.</p>	<p>Transnistria and Abkhazia are unique cultural communities. Historically they have enjoyed relative autonomy and should continue to do so, either as states (Abkhazia) or as protected communities within states (Transnistria in Moldova).</p>
Subjective elements of relational peace	<p>The UN is increasingly being by-passed by other actors, for instance NATO, that cannot be trusted.</p>	<p>A current general lack of mutual respect and trust partly due to cultural competition and external actors' interventions.</p>	<p>Mutual recognition and trust are linked both to positions in the state system (Abkhazia) and to respect for cultural communities (Transnistria).</p>
Ideational elements of relational peace	<p>States need not be friends for there to be peace but they must approach each other as legitimate entities and adhere to principles of state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-intervention.</p>	<p>The family is broken; ideas about peace based on legitimate coexistence and friendship are important but not realistic at this point.</p>	<p>Abkhazia and Transnistria should be recognized as unique cultural entities and allowed to coexist on a legitimate basis, Abkhazia as a state and Transnistria as a protected community.</p>



Another carrier idea which is particularly recurrent in the Russian literature on conflict resolution in post-Soviet countries (see Blishenko and Solntseva 2014; Kovalchuk 2015) concerns the post-Soviet geopolitical sphere. According to this, the Soviet Union was a peaceful geopolitical entity. With the disintegration of the union, however, came outright conflict and war. This idea is nowhere more apparent than in historian Mikhail Zhirovkov's book *Semena raspada* (2012). The title translates as "Scattered Seeds," evocative of a broken family of nations. A recurrent argument is that armed post-Soviet conflicts generally (and even specifically, for example in Abkhazia and Transnistria) have been wrongly labeled interethnic (Zhirovkov 2012: 670–671). Rather, Zhirovkov says, the collapse of the union simply liberated violent forces and interests, some of which may prove impossible to manage without macro-regional organization, such as the CIS. The author points out that he is not simply rehashing earlier Soviet literature (see Kim et al. 1976) in which peoples and nationalities of the Soviet Union were labeled as siblings. Zhirovkov is in effect critical of Soviet imperialism, but nevertheless argues that all post-Soviet peoples are bound together in a special cultural relationship which is also driven by a common interest in security.

The carrier idea of cultural seeds unable to grow together, indeed another metaphor for a broken family of nations bound together by historic experience and geopolitical reality, also precludes the idea that post-Soviet states are truly independent. Rather, their interrelationship is characterized by extended family ties. Most of the surveyed literature seems to echo the title of Zhirovkov's book, even if some ideas might differ concerning particular aspects of what we might term post-Soviet family relations.

### Ideas of peace in the international system

We interpret Russian ideas of peace in the international system as strongly linked to the behavioral components of relational peace. In our sources, non-domination translates as state sovereignty, non-intervention, and territorial integrity, and the UN is portrayed as a (failing) arena for deliberation and cooperation. However, Russian governmental sources, such as the Ministry of Defense, rarely if ever define the concept of peace. This absence is not unique to Russia if it is compared for example with NATO (NATO 2019). Yet despite this lack of explicit definitions, much can still be garnered from such sources about (military) peacekeeping operations. A formal two-part Russian definition of peace can nevertheless be found in the *Military Encyclopedic Dictionary*. According to this definition, peace is first of all about "relations between peoples, states and social groups within a country characterized by the absence of war" which also "presupposes not only the

absence of war but also a broad multifaceted cooperation between states in international politics built on partnership between them in economy, politics, culture, and other areas.” Secondly, peace can refer to an “agreement between warring parties to end the war and reestablish peaceful conditions” (*Military Encyclopedic Dictionary* 2007: 560).

Looking for examples of how relational elements of peace are used in the Russian sources, we find them joined with either global or macro-regional terms. It is not so much a question of political or social relationships inside Russia, or in areas of ongoing peacekeeping operations, as it is about geopolitics and international relations:

The sovereignty of one government is interwoven with that of another, and it follows that it must be coordinated in line with international law. [...] The principle of territoriality is intimately connected with other fundamental principles of international law, in the first case such as the non-use of force or threats to use force, the permanence of borders, the equality and right to self-governance of nations. (Lasutin 2015: 124–126, our translation)

Regardless of what one thinks about this interpretation of international law, this kernel of thought as it pertains to statehood, national boundaries, and rights is recurrent in the Russian literature. However, Trushin suggests that, whereas there is basically nothing wrong with the idea of the UN as a global forum for peaceful cooperation, the ability of that organization to perform its broad peacekeeping mission has been curtailed by the inability of some major powers to hold back and wait for negotiations before starting a unilateral or multilateral military intervention. Writing in 2012, Trushin points his finger at NATO, exemplifying his argument with failed UN negotiations over the Balkans, Iraq, and Afghanistan only to conclude that over the past thirty years, NATO seems to have become a more functional and important international organization than the UN in resolving conflict and enforcing negative peace (Trushin 2012: 16–41).

In the literature in question, a recurrent idea is that neither the UN nor any other global organization can politically safeguard for states a level playing field that is based on principles of non-domination, deliberation, and cooperation. Listing examples from her study of the UN, Burdyog concludes that in the 2000s different countries and regions in the world are moving further apart politically, economically, and socially and that the typical *mirotvorchestvo* of the UN must be complemented by macro-regional partnerships. In her analysis, she enumerates several shortcomings of the UN system that point in this direction. Some of these shortcomings are: increasing tendencies toward multilateral interference in the internal affairs of states, regional military involvement, relinquishing the UN mandate to specialized forces or governments, expanding the gray area between keeping

peace and enforcing peace, and a lack of political solutions beyond the military phase of interventions. Non-domination, deliberation, and cooperation must therefore be sought in other political arenas, signified by more closely aligned political interests between governments and, above all, some obvious geopolitical affinities. Burdyog believes that the CIS provides one such organizational alternative with a particular view to safeguarding peaceful relations in cooperation with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (Burdyog 2012: 88–90). Lasutin (2015: 122–139) goes even further, stipulating how less institutionalized bilateral and multilateral agreements on cooperation and reassurance in Asia might provide deliberative mechanisms for such cooperation.

Consequently, we argue here that elements of relational peace are indeed present in the selected sources but subsumed thematically by ideas of relationships between states. In fact, what shines through is the Russian support for the principles of non-intervention, state sovereignty, and territorial integrity. International peace is understood as relational in the sense that ideally, no state should be allowed to dominate others, to use force, coercion, manipulation, or arbitrary power in its pursuit of national interests. The key term here is of course “allowed,” which ties back to what earlier research has demonstrated about the Russian wish to preserve Cold War principles, institutions, and interpretations of international law. From a Russian perspective, the UN would be the arena that states would need for deliberation and cooperation if it continued operating as it used to. However, structures and methods that uphold non-domination and provide for deliberation and cooperation are crumbling, and other states and organizations make up new rules as they go. This prompts countries to establish new, regionally based arenas for safeguarding peaceful relations, a move that is potentially very complicated against the backdrop of the *semena raspada* or, as it were, the broken family of national cultures unable to grow together.

### Ideas of peace in the *Bolshoy Kavkaz*

The ideas that we have identified express that structures promoting non-domination, deliberation, and cooperation are largely lacking and regional partnerships are seen as more viable arenas for cooperation than the UN. As far as the subjective and ideational elements of relational peace are concerned (Jarstad et al., this volume, Introduction), we find that they are closely linked with the behavioral elements in our ideational material. Mutual recognition and trust between states hinge upon respect for state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-intervention. These very principles, however, are undermined by the UN itself and by other actors. In the *Bolshoy Kavkaz*

there is a general lack of mutual respect and trust; it is seen, by and large, as a broken family. For example, an academic reader published in Moscow (Guseynov 2014) deals with Nagorno-Karabakh, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Chechnya, and Dagestan and how the situations there relate to developments in Georgia. Its overarching research question is how we can understand the recurrent patterns of conflict between nations, subregions, and social groups in the more than twenty years which have passed since the breakup of the Soviet Union. While paying attention to the longer history of imperial and Soviet military activity in the region, including the forced resettlements of some ethnic groups, Guseynov makes the initial observation that the essentially conflictual nature of relationships in the region spills over into the present:

The Caucasus region was also a theater of Cold War military activity from the 1940s through the 1980s. The enormous conflict potential consequently exploded both in the south (the war between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh) and in the north (the so-called Chechen wars on the territory of the Russian Federation, also war on Georgian territory leading to the separation from that state of South Ossetia and Abkhazia), and it continues to threaten the inhabitants of the region with its extension through the first decade of the twenty-first century. (Guseynov 2014: 8–9, our translation)

A multitude of analyses and perspectives are supplied by several Russian academics surveyed for this study, ranging from political strategies, collective traumas, and Islamist and other religious movements to migration and diaspora in the region. The authors are bound together in their search for indicators of collective identities in the region, which may or may not provide the conflict-ridden Greater Caucasia with commonalities. The rather bleak common message, however, is that the only truly macro-regional commonality seems to be the experience and political consequences of the breakup of the Soviet Union (Guseynov 2014: 17–19).

This conflictual image of the peoples and countries of the Caucasus region is mirrored in how governmental sources define the relational roots of peace. According to the Russian Ministry of Emergencies (2019), peace can be the result of either of the following contexts, or of a combination of both. On the one hand, one of the warring parties in a conflict may emerge victorious because of the other party's exhaustion or the introduction of a bilateral or multilateral agreement. On the other hand, peace may be enforced by outside military actors. According to the ministry, the art of making peace, or *mirotvorcheskiy deyatelnost*, is focused upon the collective actions of states and international organizations which aim to prevent the outbreak of armed conflict by peaceful means (Ministry of Emergencies 2019). As already observed, however, Russian governmental sources are unclear about

the territorial extension of their unilateral choices. The negative definition of peace as resulting from enforcement provides no answers either. The Chief of the General Staff Gennady Gerasimov reported to the Russian Academy of War Sciences on the blurring of boundaries between peaceful and belligerent relations in what, rightly or wrongly, has since been dubbed the “Gerasimov Doctrine” (Gerasimov 2013). This idea is a cornerstone of current Russian thought about the need to preserve peace through non-peaceful means. This blurring of boundaries between peace and war has been expounded upon by Russian observers as creating a demand for new instruments of peacekeeping, not least in the light of terrorism, hybrid warfare, and cyber warfare (Popov and Chamzatov 2016).

In the *Bolsheoy Kavkaz*, the interference of the US, NATO, and the European Union (EU) is complicating matters. Although the US and NATO are the primary targets of Russian critique, the EU also figures as a major source of political imbalances and uncertainties. Macro-regions consequently evolve as geopolitical spheres within the confines of larger similar spheres. In other words, geopolitics from the outside spills over to the inside of post-Soviet macro-regions:

Moscow moves forward on the basis of agreed positions in international affairs within the framework of international organizations. The EU tries to extend the usage of norms it has worked out for itself to Russia, which means that it plays double roles: on the one hand as a continental power and global player, and on the other hand as a source of regional regulation, competing with the regimes established by international organizations. (Kovalchuk 2015: 103, our translation)

According to Kovalchuk, the first decade following the breakup of the Soviet Union taught Russian decision-makers to be wary of different understandings of (international) integration. The Russian view is that integration is “an objective process, which cannot be wholly controlled or steered,” which is why:

Russian leadership applies to different institutional pathways: within the broad framework of the CIS, in some tighter organizations (the Customs Union, the Eurasian Economic Cooperation) [...], it supports official participation in the frozen Union of Belarus and Russia, intermittently contributes with reinforcement to softening the bilateral relations with Moldova and Ukraine, enticing them with the “good neighbors” project. (Kovalchuk 2015: 109, our translation)

With regard to macro-regional relations, nevertheless, Kovalchuk reinforces her argument that there is a lack of unifying ideas among actors within and across Russian boundaries, and argues that what can be seen as “objective” differs widely between regional settings. In some cases (Armenia, Belarus, Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine), the relative levels of economic development

and dependence upon Russia are key. In others (Tadzhikistan, Uzbekistan), it is a question of relative independence. Regardless, Kovalchuk suggests that both present and potential relationships in the *Bolshoy Kavkaz* evolve around multiple and complex patterns of external interests and internal conflicts (Kovalchuk 2015: 108–110).

To conclude, the challenges in establishing structures conducive to the components of relational peace (Jarstad et al., this volume, Introduction) are spelled out in the sources we analyzed. The usage, however, is clearly guided by carrier ideas and carry-overs from ideas of peace in the international system, as described in the foregoing. External actors keep intervening, according to our sources, and there is an overarching lack of mutual respect and trust in the *Bolshoy Kavkaz*, this particular part of the broken family of post-Soviet states. Macro-regional partnerships, in the form of state-based international organizations, are depicted as one way out of this political conundrum. Another seems to be for Russia to keep advocating complete international recognition of Transnistria and Abkhazia.

### Ideas of peace in Transnistria and Abkhazia

To the extent that they deal directly with Transnistria and Abkhazia, our Russian sources regard them as true cultural communities. Ideas of the prerequisites for peace express that the UN has become irrelevant and resolutions have been made more difficult by the interventions of other external actors. There is, as we interpret the Russian view, no behavioral elements of relational peace present since Abkhazia is not recognized as an independent state and Transnistria not acknowledged as a cultural community that needs protection within Moldova. Whereas there can be no doubt of an ideational Russian determination to safeguard the independence of these territories, however, a baseline idea under this theme is also full dependence upon Russia for support. In their academic report on crises and conflicts in the post-Soviet sphere, for example, Blishenko and Solntseva conclude: “Obviously, the optimal position for Russia concerning Transnistria must be that of neutral arbiter, returning to multilateral cooperation with the EU, to the Istanbul declarations of 1999. It appears that this would correspond with Russian interests as well as wider European interests on the whole” (Blishenko and Solntseva 2014: 286, our translation). When it comes to Abkhazia, the analysts believe that the basis for relationships can be expressed in even more straightforward terms:

In the press release on the results from Russo-Abkhaz high-level talks on October 6, 2011, President D. Medvedev said that the declarative moment of independence and establishment of diplomatic relations between Russia and

Abkhazia [...] forms the two-sided international basis for the relationship between Russia and Abkhazia [and] strengthens the authority of Abkhazia as an independent state. (Blisshenko and Solntseva 2014: 177, our translation)

The nub of the problem, as well as the reason for Russia's special relationships with Transnistria and Abkhazia, is partly to do with a re-reading of modern history and partly related to the idea that both international and macro-regional relationships are by nature dyadic. Perestroika in the Soviet Union is held up as a precursor to armed conflict in Abkhazia in the 1990s, and the authors refer to how the messy breakup of the Soviet Union and unpreparedness for nationhood in countries like Georgia and Moldova initially led to multilateral political interest, in the case of Abkhazia even leading to military intervention under UN sanction. Over time, up to the present and according to their reading of official UN documents, international negotiations, and governmental declarations, Russia is the only discussion partner that has remained valid in the long term (Blisshenko and Solntseva 2014: 142–178, 271–286). In the case of Transnistria, the authors point specifically to uncertainties and unfinished legal affairs in the Soviet system as the root causes of Russian long-term involvement but, by extension, also argue that international interest in solving problems of independence and freedom in Transnistria and Abkhazia has waxed and waned. On the contrary, in Russian thinking about southeast Europe and Greater Caucasia, the idea remains a longstanding pillar (see also Gromyko and Feyodorov 2014: 579–598, 619–637; Igritsky et al. 2015). In the words of another Russian observer:

Through the inception of regionalized thinking about security a new way of definition was rooted, one in which conflicts in the ex-USSR became defined as interethnic. On closer inspection it becomes clear that this is not altogether true. When it comes to regions like Karabakh, South and North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Chechnya, Gagauzia, where the opposing forces were mainly monoethnic, then the idea is more or less applicable. But if one looks at multinational contexts, such as Abkhazia and Transnistria, it doesn't work, and even much less so in the case of Tadjikistan. (Zhirokov 2012: 671, our translation)

The Russian idea is that both Abkhazia and Transnistria represent historically unique and culturally delimited political entities. The source of territorial uniqueness, then, is defined as thick and successfully managed multiethnic relations in the region which have evolved through modern history. In the Russian literature, the territories are depicted as having withstood even Soviet and earlier Tsarist dominance, in effect preserving internal cultures that are not signified by dyads but by ethnic pluralism. In the case of Transnistria, for example, dyadic relations were never inherent to the

region but were the result of mistakes made as the Soviet Union began to disintegrate:

The region of Transnistria was the most developed part of the Moldovan SSR and populated by approximately equal proportions of Russians, Ukrainians, and Moldovans. [...] Particular to Moldova is the real existence of two languages, Russian and Moldovan. Bilingualism emerged in these parts already toward the end of the seventeenth century [...] Many Moldovans also considered Russian to be their native language. (Blishenko and Solntseva 2014: 271, our translation).

Nationalism inspired by the wish of some social groups in the Moldovan SSR to integrate with Romania was, according to this literature, what brought negative dyadic thinking and eventually war to an essentially multiethnic territory. Russia's self-proclaimed role as a neutral arbiter in Transnistria, as described in the preceding section of this chapter, is thus based on the idea that Russia continually protects culturally thick, historically evolving multiethnic relations in that region:

The Abkhaz coastline along the Black Sea was known in practically all of the Soviet Union as a region for recreation, "the golden beach." Therefore, it is no surprise that the Georgia–Abkhazia war of 1992–1993 became one of the most gruesome (and at the same time most forgotten) of all the conflicts in the post-Soviet sphere. (Zhirokhov 2016: 3, our translation)

Very similar to the above reasoning on Transnistria, the Russian idea is that Abkhazia used to be a region which enjoyed peaceful multiethnic relations. Similarly, dyadic nationalist sentiments erupting in conjunction with the gradual disintegration of the Soviet Union were picked up on and fueled by the interests of an external power. In the case of Abkhazia, however, the Russian literature pins the blame on the burgeoning Georgian nation and its geopolitical interests as different from the case of Transnistria in relation to Romania. The long history of cohabitation between the Abkhaz people proper and other nationalities in the region is nevertheless an important aspect of Russian ideas in this case (Zhirokhov 2016: 20–23).

Nevertheless, Russian ideas about the prerequisites for a peaceful restoration of Abkhazia have changed over time. The change is due less to how actors and relationships within Abkhazia have evolved since the 1990s and more to how the relative interest in peaceful relations between Georgia and Abkhazia can be gauged (Blishenko and Solntseva 2014: 142–178; Zhirokhov 2016: 163–194). Despite the perhaps idealized Russian historical imagery that depicted Abkhazia as a naturalized multiethnic context, the Abkhaz struggle for independence from Georgia was heavily criticized by Russia during the 1990s and well into the first decade of the 2000s. This is partly explained in the Russian literature by Georgia's political vacillation between



security-political structures in the post-Soviet sphere, such as the CIS, and Western structures such as NATO that still remained in the 1990s. Another factor is the recalcitrance toward Russian influence of the early presidents of the young Georgian republic, while the Russian leadership still had faith in the informal (former Soviet) leadership networks centered on Moscow. Originally, Russia was an outspoken opponent to Abkhaz separatism and a proponent both of international intervention in the conflict and of finding a political solution for Georgia along federalist political lines. Gradually, as the relationship between Georgia and Russia soured in the early 2000s, and particularly after Georgia applied for NATO membership, the Russian idea about Abkhazia manifestly changed:

But it is interesting to note that as the Abkhaz–Georgian conflict started to grow, the United States showed little interest in how it could be regulated, regardless of the many initiatives to form a closer relationship with Washington on the part of Eduard Shevardnadze. From the viewpoint of Abkhazia’s geo-strategic interest for Russia, there is a huge interest: the republic is located directly on the Black Sea, it has good agricultural lands and coal reserves, and many popular holiday resorts are located on its territory. (Zhirovkov 2016: 181, our translation)

Despite the similarities between Russian ideas about Transnistria and Abkhazia as culturally unique and, in relational terms, thick entities, there is a more blatant ideational turn toward strategic thinking in the latter case.

To the extent that peacekeeping operations can be defined as attempts to establish relational peace, Russian governmental and expounding sources are relevant here. The Russian Federation National Security Strategy (2015) and the Russian Foreign Policy Concept (2016) both stipulate that Russian peacekeeping should be initiated and supported first and foremost under UN or other multilateral umbrellas. The Russian Federation Military Doctrine (2014), however, stipulates that peacekeeping is a matter for the armed forces, whether in peacetime or wartime. The military doctrine also skews its ideas to be concerned above all with the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) countries and territories related to the former Soviet Union. Peacetime military units are earmarked and budgeted for activities such as the simple matter of peacetime military planning, not least as part of the CSTO Rapid Deployment Forces, which may act to restore peace, eliminate threat, or suppress aggression on the basis of either a UN or other mandate. There are no signs of geopolitical change in governmental or expounding sources with regard to Russia’s self-image as a guarantor of peace in the post-Soviet or CSTO spheres. At the CSTO summit meeting in Bishkek in November 2019, Russian president Vladimir Putin rather stressed the need for all participating countries to increase capabilities with regard to peacekeeping (RIA Novosti 2019).

In the relational approach (Jarstad et al., this volume, Introduction), the question of legitimate coexistence (and friendship) has to do with the acceptance of and association with counterparts. On the one hand, it could be argued that Russian ideas of peace and peacekeeping in Abkhazia and Transnistria involve many potential counterparts – Georgia, Moldova, the EU, and the US for instance – and that the relationship to each of these (or those between Abkhazia and Georgia and Transnistria and Moldova as seen from a Russian vantage point) could be assessed. On the other hand, it could also be argued that from the Russian perspective, the carrier idea of a broken family subsumes the potential of relational peace, particularly when supported by observations of the armed conflicts that erupted in tandem with the fall of the Soviet Union. Under this theme, the idea becomes that historically unique cultural communities which enjoyed relative autonomy within the union ideally should continue to do so within the boundaries of newly established states. When this does not happen, the idea of the communities' legitimate right to coexist, either as separate states (Abkhazia) or as protected communities within states (Transnistria), becomes the ideational path for Russia and one that (conveniently enough) fits Russian geopolitical interests.

## Conclusion

Applying ideational analysis to a variety of open Russian sources, the relational approach has enabled us to describe an intricate web of thought on peace in the post-Soviet sphere. Such an ideational analysis is important, not only for us to understand Russia's positioning on the world stage in relation to the cases discussed here, but also perhaps in relation to recent events in Ukraine or Nagorno-Karabach, for instance. Relationships and their qualities are important ingredients in Russian ideas of peace as expressed in our sources; these ingredients are used but not explicitly discussed as elements of a relational peace per se. In our ideational analysis, we throw the analytical net across a wide variety of public Russian sources, looking for correspondence with the relational peace framework. We find, for example, that war and peace are seen as cyclically relational. There is no end state, no linear view of history; the human condition is rather one of perpetual competition and repetition. War and violence tend to be the outcome of competition between states, and therefore there must be rules that everyone abides by. The rules are pivotal when it comes to the terms on which states engage with each other. From the Russian standpoint, when rules are not adhered to, peace is at risk and Russia will not stand idly by and allow others to break the rules as they see fit. However, as our analysis has demonstrated (see Table

1.2), the thresholds for when rules are to be considered broken are deeply subjective and framed by original notions of structures, institutions, and agreements. The dialectic nature of Russian interpretations, however, turned out in our analysis not to be a typically Western notion of Russian thought. Rather, it comes across as what we refer to in this chapter as a *carrier idea*, one that pervades the Russian sources analyzed here. We can consider this alongside the idea that relational components of peace, at least in Russian sources referred to, should be understood as being embedded in institutional structures (institutions and agreements) that prescribe and enforce certain behaviors, attitudes, and ideas. Such an understanding produces a highly flexible political platform for the achievement of subjective peace. We can but refer to how one of our Russian sources spells this out: “The element of conservative values, clearly declared as principles for foreign policy by the Russian president at the beginning of his new term, has a chance to fill the ideational vacuum pertaining to the project of integration in Central Asia” (Kovalchuk 2015: 105, our translation).

With regard to carrier ideas, we interpret these as flowing from a relational view of war and peace. We also interpret ideas of peace in the international system as strongly linked to the behavioral components of relational peace. Non-domination translates as state sovereignty, non-intervention, and territorial integrity. Our sources express the idea that the world today is largely lacking in structures promoting non-domination, deliberation, and cooperation. For this reason, regional partnerships are seen as more viable arenas for cooperation than the UN, particularly given those Russian carrier ideas which have been analyzed and described in this chapter.

As regards behavioral elements – non-domination, cooperation, and deliberation – we find that they figure prominently in our sources. From a Russian perspective, however, non-domination translates as state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-intervention. Again, the idea is that states are key actors on the international scene; they act as cultural agents and protect the interests of their peoples. From a Russian point of view, it seems that traditional forms of UN peacekeeping are being replaced by more far-reaching and complicated missions, some of which have taken place without Security Council authorization. The introduction of new international norms, such as the *responsibility to protect*, means that the UN must increasingly be replaced by macro-regional arrangements. Thus, the behavioral components or relational peace are better served by the CIS and similar, macro-regional organizations. With regard to the conflicts in Transnistria and Abkhazia and their resolutions on the ground, we find an ideational caveat. Although both territories are discussed in our sources as original cultural entities, historically approximating the right blend of what would be the behavioral, subjective, and ideational elements of relational peace, these are subsumed

by at least one carrier idea. The idea of post-Soviet territories as parts of a broken family of nations takes precedence in our sources, and the ideational effect is regret concerning how Abkhazia is not internationally recognized as an independent state on the one hand, and how Transnistria needs protection within Moldova on the other.

As for the subjective elements of relational peace, mutual recognition, and trust, we interpret some of the ideas that concern macro-regional geopolitical complexes, involving the *Bolshoy Kavkaz*, in those terms. Again, the carrier idea of the broken family serves as a general frame of reference. Peace, understood as relationships between family members, was effectively destroyed as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Ties were severed to the extent that some sources are pessimistic about the prospects for family reunification, or even re-establishment of some, if not all, ties.

As far as the subjective and ideational components of relational peace are concerned, we find prominent ideational linkage with the behavioral ones. Mutual recognition and trust between states hinge upon respect for state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-intervention. These very principles, however, according to our sources, are undermined by the UN itself and by other international actors. To illustrate, on the theme of the *Bolshoy Kavkaz*, we find our sources talking not only about a general lack of mutual respect and trust on the ground but also about a significant linkage with international interference and how the region is tied to the broken post-Soviet family of nations. Therefore, as mentioned above, peace, relational or otherwise, hinges upon, for example, Abkhazia being recognized as a unique cultural entity and allowed to coexist on a legitimate basis with other countries.

As regards the ideational components of relational peace, these might seem unnecessary given the overall methodology of this chapter. We have, nevertheless, searched for ideas expressing legitimate coexistence and friendship. In effect, these come out as prominent ideational elements of relational peace in the Russian sources studied here. In relation to Abkhazia and Transnistria, we find that our Russian sources make the idea of legitimate coexistence a prerequisite for durable peace. Abkhazia and Transnistria should, from a Russian standpoint, be recognized as unique cultural communities, either through statehood or through protection by special international status. There is, however, no clear roadmap or signposting in our sources with regard to how these elements of relational peace might be achieved.

Having engaged with openly available Russian-language sources from a methodological standpoint of ideational analysis, we cannot claim knowledge about the ideas of peace among ordinary Russians. Rather, our approach paints a picture of the ideas those citizens are confronted with as they

consume Russian governmental documents, topical books, academic reports, or popular renderings in their own language. There is an intricate web of ideas flowing from what we have referred to in this chapter as carrier ideas in the Russian context. In post-Soviet studies this is one important piece of the puzzle, and we have especially looked for ideas pertaining to cases where peacekeeping and peacebuilding are prominent in the post-Soviet sphere. Another significant piece of the puzzle is what people make of these ideas on the ground, but this falls outside our approach here. Coming full circle in this chapter, we are reminded of another Russian expression related to peace, one which does not figure in such public sources as analyzed here but which might still inspire study of Russian sources closer to the ground: *pokoy*. It is commonly used in the Russian vernacular and is interpreted by the authors of this chapter as an even stronger connotation of negative peace, which is simply to be left well alone.

### Note

- 1 The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is a regional intergovernmental organization in Eastern Europe and Asia, formed following the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. Today it has nine member states: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

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