From status inconsistency to revisionism: Russian foreign policy after color revolutions

Esmaeil Mazloomi1, Emile Kok-Kheng Yeoh2 and Mohd Aminul Karim3

1Asia-Europe Institute (AEI), University of Malaya (UM), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 2Department of Administrative Studies and Politics, Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya (UM), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and 3Asia-Europe Institute (AEI), University of Malaya (UM), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Corresponding author. Email: e.mazloomi@siswa.um.edu.my

Abstract
This paper delves into the shifts in the foreign policy of Russia, considering what has determined Russia’s grand strategy orientation after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It also attempts to offer an explanation of why Russia becomes discounted with the ‘constitutive and normative structure’, and how its foreign policy shifted toward the anti-status quo orientation, especially after the color revolutions. The main purpose of this paper is to explain the shift in Russia’s foreign policy, from the search for the ‘greatpower’ status via different enhancement strategies in light of status quo in the ‘revolutionary decade’, to revisionism after the color revolutions in Commonwealth of Independent States region (2003–2005). To substantiate this, the study uses process-tracing and document analysis to show the changes in Russia’s foreign policy.

As demonstrated in this paper, power rendered is unable of directing or disinclined to direct its policies toward status quo, due to internal effects of perceived ‘status immobility’ resulting from the failure of several status enhancement strategies. Accordingly, the shift in Russia’s foreign policy was a result of changing the Russian perception from status inconsistency to status immobility.

1. Introduction

After the color revolutions in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), and Kyrgyzstan (2005), Russian grand strategy began to shift from collaboration to open competition with the West (Raś, 2009; Gretskiy et al., 2014). In the first years of the Soviet collapse, Russian leaders adopted reassurance toward the Western-dominated order, to re-establish great power status. The lack of perceived obvious threat to Russia’s historical status or at least the hope to re-establish the great power status was the key aspect to the absence of aggressive behavior in Russia’s orientation toward the West. However, when the historical status was seen as directly challenged, and the hope to re-establish the equal status faded out, Russia’s foreign behavior changed. More constant U.S. actions intending to reinforce its status in Russia’s ‘sphere of influence’, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expansion (1997–2007), and especially the ‘color revolutions’ intensified the Kremlin’s accumulated dissatisfaction, moving Russia toward the reincarnation of an imperial attitude and beginning swiftly to claim for equal rights (Torosyan and Vardanyan, 2015: 566). This means that after the color revolutions Russia was unable or unwilling to succumb to the status quo-oriented grand strategy, although Russian liberals-moderates had preferred such a course.

Russia started to search for a radical renovation of the existing interactions model with the West in late 2006 and early 2007, to find a new position in the international scene. The new model would permit Russia to be independent, and be equal with the Western and other rising power centers. Since Vladimir Putin’s Munich address, the policy of Russia toward the West and its neighbors in the CIS became quite bold and even aggressive. Putin at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security
Policy (Putin, 2007) talked about the threats and challenges in 'modern world politics' that came from a desire to create a 'unipolar world'. Putin conveyed the Kremlin's undivided stance relating to all the concerns on 'the world political agenda'. Since according to the president: 'Russia is a country with a history that spans more than a thousand years and has practically always used the privilege to carry out an independent foreign policy. We are not going to change this tradition today' (Putin, 2007). Putin's speech fuelled a series of Russian criticisms on the U.S. world policy.

From this time, the policy of Russia, in unsatisfactory relations with the Western partners, indicated a consensus on advantages of an assertive way of meeting the goals of 'stability, security, and development' (Tsygankov, 2015: 280). A Review of the Russian Federation's Foreign Policy published in 2007 endorsed such consensus and proposed that Russia, having played a proactive role in multilateral efforts, comes up with solutions for regional conflicts and crisis situations by political and diplomatic means with dependence on international law. This is in favor of the compromises in the interests of parties opposing unilateral attempts to replace the existing international mechanisms for resolving crises (Obzor, 2007). The climax of this approach to date came about with the war in Georgia in August 2008, the Ukraine crisis, and the annexation of the Crimea in 2014, which represented the culmination of several trends.

Existing literature tries to explain the 'paradigm shift' in Russian foreign policy, from reassurance to revisionism. Some scholars explain the change in Russia's foreign policy regarding the non-rational, emotional, and unpredictable factors that shape the state's policies. Considering the role of status and identity in world politics, constructivists examine Russia's foreign policies to answer the question of variation in its behaviors from cooperation to confrontation (Clunan, 2014; Forsberg et al., 2014; Heller, 2014; Larson and Shevchenko, 2014; Smith, 2014). According to this view, Russia's foreign behaviors are essentially driven by the aspiration to restore and strengthen the great power status. On the other hand, the proponents of rational approaches try to develop a rational cost-benefit explanation for Post-Cold war Russian foreign behaviors. Realism usually tends to portray the power clashes between Russia and the West purely as a zero-sum game. In line with Mearsheimer (2002), offensive realists argue that post-Soviet Russia is a rising power that aims to gain its national interest through the maximization of its power which usually causes endless conflict. Defensive realists emphasize on security aspect and argue that Kremlins tendency toward cooperation or hostile competition would ultimately depend on 'whichever strategy maximized its security'. Proponents of resource deprivation theory argue that the danger of revisionism would arise from a declining hegemon, not a rising power (Copeland, 2000). Accordingly, some portray Russia as 'a declining power with feet of clay' (Carafano et al., 2015). Gilpin (1981) highlights how the clash between a rising challenger and the dominant power for prestige may lead to a hegemonic war.

Kropatcheva (2012), in a more convincing explanation for the shift in Russia's foreign policy, argues post-Soviet Russia is pursuing more or less long-lasting interests in various stages of its new foreign policy. These comprise providing 'autonomy' and 'security', expansion of material capabilities, and that of 'status-prestige'. Kropatcheva proposes dual dimension of grand strategy and argues that as Russia making efforts to strengthen its relative capabilities, it also expects that the Western powers recognize its status. The author postulates that improving domestic capabilities had rebuilt Russian self-confidence and self-esteem. But denial of Russia's status and its security interests caused the failure in 'trust and cooperation' and consequently the shift in Russian foreign policy. Accordingly, the lack of status recognition plays the main role in Russia's assertive foreign policy than the material abilities. Kropatcheva contends that despite its 'domestic weaknesses, Russia feels self-assured, and this subjective self-confidence adds to its improved material power capabilities, making Russia more able to take risky and self-assertive steps'. Therefore, considering the status of Russia 'respectfully and seriously' and then its affirmative identity results in 'major progress in securing its cooperation' (Kropatcheva, 2012: 38).

But, how does the lack of status recognition influence Russian foreign policy? By which mechanism does this subjective factor cause Russian leaders to accept assurance or revisionism in foreign policy? Furthermore, if the relationship between foreign policy and domestic factors is a concern, is there any
political agreement on the types of grand strategy among different political groups? If there is, when and how can the political consensus be reached around certain perception like status or orientations such as status quo/revisionism? Additionally, how does the shift from one domestic paradigm to another be explained in the case of Russia? Lastly, why did the public ultimately come down on the side of the moderates’ foreign policy oriented toward reassurance and instead support the revisionist preferences?1

This study utilizes wide-ranging literature on status in international relations (IR) to improve a theoretical explanation for the adoption of revisionist orientation by rising powers, in this case, Russia. This paper aims at exploring why Russian grand strategy has recently shifted to revisionism, despite its primary attempts to join the Western-dominated status quo.

According to IR theories, rising powers are dissatisfied with the ‘constitutive and normative structure’ of status quo, and consequently, they are unwilling or unable to adjust themselves toward status quo. This unwillingness or inability toward status quo occurs not only due to the rising abilities but rather the domestic political outcomes constructed by perceptions of ‘status immobility’ – the idea that existing condition is unable to answer the power’s claims to the aspired status (Ward, 2013). Nevertheless, status immobility is an outcome of the status enhancement process.

Social identity theory (SIT) argues that states suffering from status inconsistency may adopt different strategies, such as mobility, creativity, and social competition, to gain the desired status. But the theory does not make clear what happens when the inconsistent state cannot gain the desired status after applying the strategies. This paper hypothesizes that rising states suffering from status inconsistency can adopt different strategies to enhance their relative status, but encountering the impermeability of status boundaries – due to denial of aspirant status – leaves them no choice but a revision of system normative structure. So, the paper contributes to recognition dilemma in IR theories by arguing that lack of genuine recognition causes inconsistent states to adopt enhancement strategies, but the consistency of status inconsistency leads them to adopt a policy toward revisionism. In simple terms, we argue that revolutionism is the result of status recognition dilemma; the process of changing perceptions from status inconsistency to status immobility – achievable status to unachievable – causes a rising power to adopt a revisionist grand strategy orientation. Therefore, the main argument of this study is that the shift in Russia’s foreign policy, after the ‘revolutionary decade’, can mainly be illustrated through the extensive status immobility perceptions related to the great power identity. It means that the shift in Russia’s grand strategy toward revisionism was in a part responding to the lack of status recognition; in particular, the process of changing perceptions from status inconsistency to status immobility has caused the Russian political elites to adopt revisionism, especially after the color revolutions.

Meanwhile, this paper uses the post-Soviet Russia – in particular, post color revolutions Russia – as a case with which to demonstrate the influence of status immobility on foreign policy, based on a qualitative method. In order to explain why and how post-Soviet Russia’s foreign policy has been created and changed, this study employs process tracing to seek the ‘diagnostic pieces of evidence’ through detailed scrutiny of historical sequences of events, actions, and activities unfolding over time. To do so, we select and analyze a plethora of sources including official documents and

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1 In August 2009, a year after the Georgia war, the Russian Public Opinion Research Center found that the vast majority of Russians (86%) approved Russia’s action to support South Ossetia, (87%) were ‘confident that Russia should provide further support’, and (60%) considered ‘Russian military support’ as the ‘most appropriate action’ for the region during the confrontation, while in 2004, only 6% approved the military support. Moreover, Russians support the South Ossetia and Abkhazia independence in 2009 by 51% in contrast to 17% in 2004 (VCIOM, 2009). Similarly, in 2014 around 88% of the Russian public approve the accession of the Crimea into Russia. Surprisingly, 80% of Russians supports the accession of the Crimea into Russia as a way of ‘Russia’s returning to its traditional role of a great power’ and ‘promoting Russia’s interests in the post-soviet area’. In August 2014, 85% of Russians notice the accession of the Crimea as ‘a great achievement of the Russian authorities, the positive consequences of which Russians will feel in the future’ (Levada, 2016). To sum up, it can be argued that Russian public supports the Kremlin’s revisionist orientations rather moderate’s reassurance, during the years after color revolutions.
government rhetorical statements produced by Russian governments, political elites and public opinion survey, and existing academic journals from 1991 to 2014.

2. Revisionism
The term revisionism re-emerged in IR recently, by distinguishing between revisionist states and those with status-quo goals. Whereas dissatisfied revisionists seek to change the way things are in international politics, those satisfied with status quo seek ‘to preserve things as they are’ (Davidson, 2006).

The reintroduction of revisionist states to the study of IR has provided scholars with a variety of theoretical perspectives. The majority of classical realists consider ‘revolutionary’ the shifts over the distribution of goods, i.e. security, power. Arnold Wolfers (1962) demarcated revisionism as demanding a ‘preference’ to change the global goods distribution such as ‘territory’ – and an inclination to bear the expenses in the pursuit of that preference, but status-quo states desire to preserve matters ‘as they are’. On the other hand, more recently scholars define revisionism as a change in the normative construction of the system. Legro (2007: 9) proposed that ‘revisionism refers to states that reject the dominant norms of interaction in a given international society and believe that active involvement in overturning that order serves national interests’.

Based on these two ideal-typical methodologies, where one emphasizes on goods distribution, and the other on system constitutive and normative structure, revisionism is a grand strategy orientation that challenges the international status quo fundamentally. It implies that the orientation challenges the system’s hegemonic leadership and its constructive principles, norms, and rules that reinforce the ‘hierarchic and normative structure’ of the system (Ward, 2013: 609).

Conceptualizing an actor as revisionist does not predict conflict or war. Revisionist objectives are only preferences through outcomes. They do not say much about what particular strategies or actions will be or should be followed to attain the goals intended (Powell, 1994). However, a few markers of moving toward systemic revisionism are located in the increase of the influence of domestic actors publicly committed to rejecting the status quo, withdrawal from international institutions, and a general unwillingness or incapability to collaborate with states that ensure the status quo (Davidson, 2002; Ward, 2013; Chan, 2015).

Several approaches scrutinize why states occasionally adopt revisionism. According to conventional wisdom, rising states may adopt revisionism because of the relative capabilities whether declining or rising (Mearsheimer, 2002; Gilpin, 1981; Copeland, 2000), being under the influence of domestic interest groups (Snyder, 1991; Davidson, 2006), or as a result of ideologies, whether ‘ideological distance’ or ‘ideological content’ (Haas, 2005; Legro, 2007). Rather, in line with the alternative explanation, rising powers may adopt revisionism out of status concern, in particular, the ‘status immobility’ perception (Ward, 2013).

2.1 Status and revisionism
In the argument between revisionism and status quo orientations, the domestic actors and their perception are greatly relevant. Since the government preferences reflect the dominant group’s preferences that have become prevalent in political contestation, the politically related group’s preferences are essential in the policy-making stage (Davidson, 2002; Zionts, 2006). Put simply, foreign policy can be abstracted as the outcome of various domestic elements that affect a state’s capability to answer the structural incentives. Domestic players often have different preferences over foreign policy, hence the result should partly be the outcome of domestic political contestation. This contestation in rising powers usually takes the form of a status quo-oriented group that values patience and reassurance highly – the group is called ‘moderates’ allied against ‘revisionists’ or those who prefer to harness the rising capabilities of the state to further national goals or certain interests (Ward, 2013).

Notably, the reason a certain group has certain preferences over foreign policy direction would be the status. Considering the role of status in IR shows that status is very important for both individuals
and states (Clunan, 2014; Dafoe et al., 2014; Forsberg, 2014; Larson and Shevchenko, 2014; Paul et al., 2014; Volgy et al., 2011) This suggests that concerns over international status as ‘a more serious challenge’ and influential aspect in rising powers may have a very important role in the contestation of a specific group over foreign policy (Doran, 2012; Ward, 2013). The status claim plays a crucial role in rising powers’ grand strategy either by changing individual preferences or by changing the discursive environment in ways that would go for the advocates of revisionism (Ward, 2013). Changes in the principles for standing encourage shifts in foreign policy performance, which in turn influence how states determine their interests and more importantly their identities (Doran, 2012).

2.2 Status, inconsistency, immobility, and revisionism

The position of an actor within a collectively understood or publicly recognized social hierarchy is usually known as status (Forsberg et al., 2014; Renshon, 2016). If the status is considered actors’ or groups’ rank in a certain group or society, and groups grading from ‘lower’ to ‘higher’, such grades depend on the agreement that the latter has reached (Dafoe et al., 2014; Paul et al., 2014). In other words, social status implies the position inside hierarchical orders that are intersubjective and contingent upon the recognition of relevant others (Ward, 2013).

Individuals and groups vie for and appreciate social status, not only as a means to other material ends but also, and perhaps more importantly, for it stands strong as an end in itself. In theory, if an actor generously gives status to another actor, it will either promote the gratitude and appreciation or will increase the sense of reciprocal ‘trust and solidarity’. When an actor’s international status does not tally or is not in tandem with the status level it deserves or desires, a real status conflict appears. In other words, status inconsistency – the situation which an actor is not recognized by higher-status actors as having achieved the status degree that it believes to deserve or aspire – can cause to conflict (Ward, 2013). Such conflicts are common for rising or great powers. Therefore, the status conflict will appear because of divergence or ‘inconsistency between the subjective self-perception and the intersubjective status position established in the group’ (Forsberg, 2014: 325).

The perceptions of status inconsistency create a problem for rising powers to follow a grand strategy toward status quo. In international politics, the status inconsistent power adopts a different approach compared with status-consistent power. The status-inconsistent power pursues a more visible, and more pronounced role for its own in international politics but it is possible that absence of respect and legitimacy may weaken its efforts (Volgy et al., 2011). Upon this premise, it is not really unexpected that powers have continuously sought to enhance and protect their status (Forsberg et al., 2014; Paul et al., 2014; Wohlforth, 2014).

However, status inconsistency cannot always bring about an emergent power adopting a fundamentally anti-status quo grand strategy. This is explained by the fact that the states can follow their status objectives peacefully through reaching noticeable acceptance by high-ranking states. Accordingly, the SIT recommends three status enhancement strategies available to inconsistent actors: social mobility, creativity, and social competition. Social mobility refers to emulating high-status actors in order to pass into the high-status group. Social creativity entails pursuing recognition of status beside alternative or new dimensions of status attribution; it means finding a new ground in order for one to become greater (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Tajfel, 1981; Larson and Shevchenko, 2014). The success of the first two strategies depends on the recognition/acceptance by other major powers or the dominant group. In the case of rejection or impermeability of dominant group boundaries, status-aspirant states may resort to using the third option: social competition as a means of enhancing their status. Nonetheless, striving to enhance the state’s status through the competition strategy does not mean that there will be an unrestricted anti-status quo orientation (Clunan, 2014). In other words, whatever the form that the status competition takes, the act of competing itself solidifies the status quo since states indirectly accept commonly understood status markers (Lebow, 2008; Ward, 2013). Thus in social competition, the hope is that a rising state could be raised to a higher-status situation.
Nevertheless, if status-seeking through the social competition strategy did not work, due to the lack of recognition or impermeable status-category boundaries, the response is ‘social isolation and/or exhibition of psychosomatic symptoms’ (Geschwender, 1967: 169–171). It means that actors confronting ‘status immobility’ or lack of recognition may be forced to manage the psychological effects by saying no to certain forms of social interaction. Therefore, while status-seeking carries the consequence of solidifying reassurance in some areas, the conviction that effective status competition is inconceivable or elite group borders be impermeable to new memberships can turn an emergent power to go against the status quo (Ward, 2013). In other words, the rising states turned to anti-status quo orientation when they failed to enhance their status by status enhancement strategies.

In light of the status immobility hypothesis, when public and political elites in an emergent power consider that the status attribution structure is settled against them in which effective status competition is inconceivable, conviction of status immobility arises in the state (Ward, 2013). The perception of status immobility develops when different strategies – mobility, creativity, and social competition – intended to enhance an emergent power’s status fail. The general attribution of defeat or failure to ‘the unfairness’, ‘injustice’, or ‘hypocrisy’ of various features of the status attribution system shows that the status immobility perception is present.

In line with social psychology theories, ‘when faced with a denial of recognition…the most obvious alternative is to give up’ status claims (Ringmar, 2015: 8). However, in reality accomplishing such adjustment policy orientation is close to zero, especially for rising states, and that is due to fear of political elites from the domestic consequences of adjustment policy, or ‘symbolic flexibility’ of state institutions that prevent the leaders from adopting adjustment policy (Wolf, 2015: 48).

Unverifiable and lasting status inconsistency may result in various serious social psychological irritations. Social interaction under these situations not only creates the ‘dissonance’ between anticipated and real status but also strengthens and legitimizes the social relations that cause dissonance. It means that there is no better option than to control the social and psychological costs by refusing to have or entertain specific kinds of interaction (Wolf, 2011; Ward, 2013). According to Reinhard Wolf (2011), ‘being denied social confirmation of one’s rights, faculties, or merits … can threaten an actor’s self-esteem’ resulting in pressure to act, either to remedy the situation or assuage the discomfort felt. In the international system, this reaction may take the form of a commitment to challenging or rejecting assurance as it is extensively perceived, and the ‘inability or unwillingness’ to follow strategies concerned with reassuring the status quo (Ward, 2013).

Status immobility influences the great powers’ foreign orientation in two ways. First, it may stimulate some domestic players to develop preferences to challenge and reject the status quo. Second, the grand strategy is affected by status immobility through making political and rhetorical means to help the supporters of revisionist orientation at the expense of the moderates (Ward, 2013).

3. Identity and status in post-Soviet Russia

One major objective of Russia’s foreign policy throughout the period after the Soviet collapse was improving or bringing back Russia’s international status and eventually being recognized by the Western powers as a great power with the same rights and privileges. In that regard, greatpowerness (velikoderzhavnost) like framing the center of Russian state identity plays a critical part in Russian foreign policy (Trenin, 2011; Clunan, 2014; Forsberg, 2014; Heller, 2014; Larson and Shevchenko, 2014; Smith, 2014). This belief had some deep effects on the feeling of national identity, the political attitudes of Russian citizens, and the content of the Russian government’s political decisions (Urnov, 2014).

Some contended that Russian desires for greatpowerness were fairly overestimated in the early years after the Soviet collapse, due to its weaknesses in material terms (Adomeit, 1995). Despite the ‘real’ weaknesses, the Russian political elite and public increasingly perceived inconsistency of status in contrast to their Western counterparts. Source of this inconsistency is placed in the kind of Western powers’ dealing with Russia’s transition, as well the shift in security setting in continental Europe.
Kozyrev, would be grounded on identity enhancement strategy obtained through the West questing the status of greatpoweress. According to Kozyrev and his colleagues, the interests would be simply ‘should attempt to obtain the modern status and liberal-democratic global power’ (Arbatov, 2007).

Specifically, status interests have a vital position in Russia’s relations with the Western powers, which are traditionally regarded as the main ‘others’ to Russia (Forsberg, 2014). From the mid-eighteenth century, this significant other has been the projection screen for Russian identity formation and resentiment against the West related to an emotion of Russian inferiority, imperfection or simply ‘otherness’ had manifested itself as a constituting and motivating force, at this point (Malinova, 2014). In brief, in the wake of the Soviet collapse, Russia’s new political elites and leaders had launched a quest for reconstruction of their national identity to deal with the perception of Russian inferiority and status concern.

As aforementioned, status inconsistent states can pursue their status ambitions with more peaceful approaches and adopting different strategies such as mobility, creativity, and competition. Such a trend can be traced in Russia’s foreign policy during the 1990s and the early 2000s, when ‘Westernizers’, alongside hard-line ‘Civilizationists’, and ‘Statists’, made up three broad schools of foreign policy, thereby sought to preserve Russia’s international choices in ways consistent with the schools’ historically established images of the country and the outside world’ (Kasymov, 2012).

3.1 Russian Westernists, and social mobility

The first step taken to pursue a new sense of national identity and tackle the perception of Russian inferiority was to follow the West as a way to gain equality – something that is termed social mobility strategy. Earlier on, the Russian political elites had adopted a Westernist liberal self-image and a pro-Western approach in foreign policy. The new worldview was developed initially from the perception of economic backwardness, as the impact of the socio-economic crisis in the first years of the 1990s.

A powerful group of prominent government officials and think-tanks reinforced the main Westernist national self-image (Kasymov, 2012; Clunan, 2014). They deliberated that Russia’s traditional aspiration for greatpowerness and related status is the source of its preceding authoritarian systems and oppression of its people. Therefore, Westernists declined the attempts to sustain the status; instead they inclined to adopt the Western rational modes, emphasizing the resemblance between Russia and its Western counterparts. They stressed Russia’s association with Western-dominated economic and political orders. Accordingly, the Westernists perceived Russia as a Western power that should attempt to obtain the modern status and liberal-democratic global power’ (Kasymov, 2012: 60).

In 1992, in response to status asymmetry, Andrey Kozyrev had outlined the deep-seated Westernizer identity enhancement strategy – social mobility or assimilation. National interests, as maintained by Kozyrev, would be grounded on ‘our internal transformation’, not on changing the global politics or questing the status of greatpoweress. According to Kozyrev and his colleagues, the interests would be obtained through the West’s modernized, socio-political and economic orders. ‘We want democracy and human rights’, he stated, not a ‘humane socialism’, indicating that Russia also has found the way to prosperity and growth ultimately. ‘We want to get back to a normal development cycle, which we
dropped out for 70 years’ (Kozyrev, 1991; Clunan, 2014). Thus, in the Westernists’ view, the key mission of Russia’s grand strategy should be to form a cooperation with the Western counterparts and to join the Western socio-economic, political, and strategic structures – the European Union (EU), NATO, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the G-7, and so on (Sergunin, 2004).

To be accomplished, an assimilation strategy needs the permeability of higher group boundaries as a precondition for new actors (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Larson and Shevchenko, 2014). Nonetheless, at the end of 1993, the perception of status denial was rampant among the Russian political elites and public. Despite the liberal Westerists’ optimistic view about integration in the Western-dominated order, the West rejected Russian desired status and the leaders soon realized that pursuing ‘West’s lead’ was unsuitable and degrading (Clunan, 2014).

It appears that Russia was required to adopt the ‘right’ democratic way of sovereignty and any diversions and deviations by Russia’s leaders were not dealt with. This supposed ‘right way’ of democracy was a cornerstone and prerequisite of Western powers and institution to support the Russian transition (Heller, 2014). Consequently, the Clinton administration refused to admit Russia’s aspiration to be a member of Western elite ‘clubs’ before obtaining stability and ‘capitalist democracy’. The NATO enlargement plan in 1994, to compromise the former Soviet republics, showed that Russia would not be accepted as a member of ‘civilization’ by the West, in particular, the United States (Larson and Shevchenko, 2014). Therefore, the Russian elites realized that they were pushed into the corner and settled as a ‘junior partner’, ‘pupil’, and even ‘petitioner’, a role that does not sit well with the perception of ‘greatpowerness’ and traditional distinctiveness (Heller, 2014).

Considering the difficult period of ‘pupilhood’ as a failure of Westernists’ grand strategy, led several elites to separate themselves from the liberal Westernist self-image. Centrists and conservatives within the government accused the Westernists’ national self-image of deliberately abandoning Russia’s historical greatpowerness and belittling Russia’s power capabilities and status. Liberal Westernists, particularly Foreign Minister Kozyrev, were also condemned from all sides, for taking such a long time to realize that the near abroad region should be the main concern of Russian foreign policy, as it had provided the base for the historical landscape of Russian greatpowerness and its uniqueness as a ‘Eurasian’, instead of ‘Western’ or ‘Eastern’, power (Clunan, 2014).

3.2 Russian statist; oscillation between creativity and social competition

The failure of status mobility strategy due to impermeable status boundaries leads status inconsistent actors to enhance their status through their participation in social movements – competition or creativity – aiming to increase the standing of the low-status group (Geschwender, 1967: 169–171). Accordingly, lack of recognition and humiliation received by Russian political elites and public caused the change in the domestic political environment from Westernists’ national self-image to statist’s national consensus.

Due to the transformation in a domestic political power center, Russian foreign policy also changed toward this new statist national self-image. As a critical element leading to statist national self-image is the existence or perception of perpetual threat to the state’s security; the perception was more severe and immediate especially in Central Eastern Europe (CEE) regarding the U.S. intention to broaden the military presence in the region (Kasymov, 2012). In such a situation, statism as a new national consensus had come up by emphasizing Russia’s greatpowerness and its related status among the world powers (Clunan, 2014). As Primakov (1997) declared, ‘Russia always was, is and will be a great power’, so ‘her foreign policy should correspond to that status’ (Primakov, 1997 in; Smith, 2014).

Through this seemingly ‘patriotic turn’ or ‘national consensus’, Russia moved from a merely ‘Atlanticist’ situation to more historical terms such as ‘strategic interests’, ‘spheres of influence’, geopolitics and geostrategic strengths (Primakov, 1997). Russia’s elites across the political range stressed the past importance to confirm the ‘patriotic consensuses’ around Russia’s traditional greatpowerness.
In fact, this patriotic consensus was a response to the ‘traumatic experience’ of lost status and national ‘inferiority complex’ (Karaganov, 1993).

This new national consensus shows that Russia’s new political elites wanted to overcome the difficult period of pupilhood – ‘a partnership between the leader and disciple’ – hence, they were not ready to abandon the term of ‘equality’ in the relationship with the Western counterparts (Malinova, 2014). According to Primakov, ‘Russia’s policy was one of ‘strategic partnership’ with the United States … a structure in which one country [the U.S.] led the others was gradually created’, and instead of such unfavourable partnership ‘we want equitable co-operation even though we realize that we are now weaker than the United States’, because ‘the world is becoming accustomed to the fact that we have our distinct identity’ (Izvestiya, 23 December 1997, in; Smith, 1999).

3.2.1 Primakov and social creativity

In the beginning, statists such as Primakov adopted a strategy of social creativity, to receive not only national but international recognition of Russia’s status. For statists, Russia’s national interests lie in preserving its international status through continually referring to Russian Eurasian traditional and geopolitical roles in Asia and Europe as a great power (Clunan, 2014). Certainly, Primakov wanted to articulate a ‘Eurasianist’ alternative, including the assertion of the Russian sphere of influence over the newly independent states, especially in CEE, then called ‘near abroad’ (Nation, 2012; Fedorov, 2013). Primakov also pursued recognition generally by several emblematic declarations of Russia’s status through the Western institutions. Moreover, he intensified Russia’s opposition to NATO enlargement and prolonged attempts to create a ‘special relationship’ with NATO (Clunan, 2014).

From 1996 to 1999, Primakov settled for the ‘multipolar world’ to reinstate Russia’s status through constructing diplomatic partnerships (Larson and Shevchenko, 2014). Moscow sought to have the position, as its official rhetoric says, of an ‘influential centre of a multipolar world’ that would be at par with the United States, China, or the EU (Fedorov, 2013). In this multipolar world, Primakov stressed the crucial role of Russia as order ‘stabilizer’ and ‘upholder’ of law in the international system – an identifying mark of Russia’s foreign policy (Clunan, 2014). Accordingly, Primakov tried to play the mediator on Kosovo and Iraq to demonstrate Russia’s significance as the main actor (Lo, 2002). Furthermore, he designed the policy of ‘strategic partnership’ with China as an attempt to neutralize what had been seen as the U.S. attempts to diminish Russia’s status.

At least for a while, Primakov’s social creativity strategy had been widely supported across political elites and parties, as returning Russia’s self-esteem in the international platform. Primakov came out ‘a man for all seasons’ (Clunan, 2014: 286). He had utilized Russia’s symbolic achievements, for instance, inclusion in some Western-dominated economic and political arrangements such as G-8, using the prominent seat of UNSC, not only as proof of the domestic concern about Russia’s status but also as evidence showing that Western elite groups recognized the status. In other words, Primakov’s stance characterized the Russian leaders’ aspiration that surrounds the idea of a great power status.

Although several achievements around the turn of the twenty-first century seemed to solidify the West’s acceptance of Russia as a great power, these successes had cloaked the growing perceptions of status immobility. The creativity strategy Primakov adopted did not stop the United States from expanding NATO or continuing the military operation in Yugoslavia and Iraq (Tsygankov, 2013: 106). With NATO being used to bomb Kosovo, circumventing the UNSC where Russia’s representation had a veto right, this was considered as an act of humiliation (Baranovsky, 2000: 455). It has also been regarded as a termination of the strategic relationships between Russia and the Western partners by several political elites in Russia (Antonenko, 2007).

Highlighting the ‘humanitarian intervention’, ‘democracy promotion’, and military operation without UN permission, Primakov depicted the United States as acting in a manner that does not suit its

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2We consider the Eurasianism as an ‘intellectual and political diverse movement’ not a ‘uniform unidimensional and essentially anti-Western thinking school of thought’. (Tsygankov, 2003).
title as a stabilizer great power (Clunan, 2014). The Russian political leaders believed that NATO had turned its back against its historical defensive strategy, claiming the right to perform armed operation out of its mission, under the premise of ‘humanitarian intervention’ (Torkunov, 2000). In other words, for Russian elites, the events once again have increased the perception of status immobility and marked the status recognition dilemma.

At the end of the 1990s, considering the level of intergovernmental relations, Russia’s political attempts to restore its greatpowerness appeared to be in vain, since Russia was regarded as an irate chronological aberration in global politics, creating false threats. In 1997, to alleviate Russian leaders’ disgrace on NATO expansion, Russia was asked to join the Group 8. But, the society was still no more than ‘G-7 plus Russia,’ since Russia was only accepted in the ‘diplomatic side’, not at the finance ministers’ forum (Talbott, 2002). Moreover, the Western powers had proposed equal seat for Russia in the EU and NATO, while it was expected that Russia should play a co-chairperson role (Trenin, 2006). All in all, it shows that adding to the range and complexity of socio-political and socioeconomic reforms necessitated for Russia’s aspiration to be recognized, the strategies of mobility and creativity mean that Russia has to imitate and follow the Western rules, norms, and values to gain higher-status.

Despite the perceived status inferiority and the shift in political discourse from the Westernist to statist, the political environment was not yet equipped to shift in favor of revisionism. Indeed, Primakov’s strategy intended solely to achieve recognition of Russian great power status, hence the strategy rejected the explicitly antagonistic ideological and capability competition of the Cold War era. Accordingly, Primakov’s strategy was based on principle rather than objective interests to contribute to world ‘azimuths’ (Primakov, 1997). As evident in various settings, the strategy had slowed down Russia’s creative cooperation with the Western powers, since Russia’s leaders responded to considered insults to Russia’s status, instead of performing on rational calculations of what Russia is capable of, and needs.

3.2.2 Putin and social competition

In theory, motivated states may request for power or ‘shadow’, if both types of social mobility and social creativity fail to make inflexible others recognize the desired status. At the end of the 1990s, the premise of Russia’s status equality in world politics was substituted by the ‘disillusionment’ and the conviction of ignoring ‘Russia’s national interests’ by the West. Thus, the perception of status ‘inferiority’ prompted the Russian elite to pursue social competition strategy to elevate themselves to the higher status.

When Putin succeeded Yeltsin in 2000, neither denying the West completely nor declining the importance of Russia’s previous greatness, pursued Primakov’s leading tactic ‘in offering something for everyone’ (Clunan, 2014: 287). Official documents like Foreign Policy Concept issued in 2000 stressed on Russia’s need to preserve global influence and play the role of a main regional power, but only ‘practically’ (Putin, 2000). It means that the main ideas of Primakov’s creativity persisted under the reign of the new leader (Stepanov and Iusin, 2000). On the other hand, the new thinking points to an important change since the document explicitly warned about the threat from ‘a unipolar structure of the world under the economic and military domination of the United States’ (Tsagankov, 2011: 34).

The main distinction between the Putin and Primakov terms, regarding the status-enhancement strategies, was in the competition dimension that changed from gaining emblematic achievements to ‘domestic development’ or ‘modernization’ of the Russia’s economy, as well as in rhetorical level where the continuous declarations of Russia’s greatpowerness and rights were slightly calmed (Clunan, 2014). Thus, the widespread realization of the futility of social creativity, humiliation, and inferiority spurred Russian elites to form a new strategy; competition. In other words, Putin pursued social competition in addition to social creativity used by Primakov. By social competition, Putin sought to gain world recognition of Russia’s status via domestic development.

Russia’s constant aspiration is ‘to promote the development of the national economy’, through its foreign policy (Putin, 2000). Russia’s political elites found that the major obstacle to gaining their aspired status – greatpowerness – is naturally domestic since they compared Russia’s internal
development and global capabilities with those of the West. Thus, Russian elites and Putin considered modernizing Russia’s economy and consolidating the state as a basis to win respect and desired status (Kropatcheva, 2012). With this in mind, Russia’s position in Putin’s statist national self-image is by far amongst the Western developed industrial powers, but it still remains as a state that preserved its own traditional distance. Accordingly, Putin’s ‘statist developmentalism’ is the result of a traditionally legitimate synthesis of Russia’s greatpowerness and the Western economic norms (Clunan, 2014).

Obviously, Putin and his statist companions’ mindset gives more elective affinity to the civilizationists than it does to Westernists. This similarity hypothetically nurtures civilizationist ideas, the means to affect the foreign policy orientation (March, 2012). In line with the civilizationist view, Putin argues that Russia makes up a global power in its own right, neither a Western nor an Eastern power, whose security has become the main objective of Russia’s leaders (Kasymov, 2012). Accordingly, Russia should attempt to maintain its distinct traditions and request the great power status through adopting Western capitalism and its main components, while not being Western completely. It means that Putin’s strategy had synthesized Primakov’s creativity but settled Russia’s national identity in social competition strategy to be accepted or recognized as ‘great and modern’ (Clunan, 2014).

Consequently, Russian foreign policy has moved gradually from Primakov’s social creativity to social competition in Putin’s term, as a way to enhance status and to gain recognition via the distinctive and positive characteristics that make the rising power a leading member of the existing world’s normative order, rather than a zero-sum or realistic competition. Putin had tolerated several American actions in the international arena, as Russia has shown a mild reaction to the 1999 and 2004 series of NATO enlargement and the U.S. proposal to withdraw themselves from the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty.

The climax of this new strategy was in September 2001, when Putin grabbed the opportunity to reshape Russian identity in a partnership with the Western powers, in the War on Terror, and to be allied with the United States (Lo, 2008: 124–130). Putin and Bush announced their relationship as a ‘strategic partnership’. Putin’s main objective of such ‘Roosevelt and Churchill’ relation was to accentuate the historical role of Russia as a ‘joint stabilizer’ of World order that had positioned Russia in parallel with the United States through the Cold War era (Putin, 2002). Russia joined with the United States in terms of the political and military intelligence regarding international terrorists, approving the U.S. planes to fly over Russian territory, acquiescing to U.S. military bases in Central Asia, taking part in international search and rescue missions, and further assisting the ‘Northern Alliance’ in Afghanistan (Aron, 2006).

In theory, to ensure the success of social strategies, the dominant group boundaries must be permeable, which means that higher-status states must acknowledge the rising power’s attempts to gain recognition. The U.S. executive, in particular, Bush, nevertheless refused to accept equality with Russia (Shevtsova, 2007: 230). For example, Bush denied discussing with Putin before the invasion of Iraq, Russia’s previous client where it had considerable economic interests (Balmforth, 2003). Yet, as Ambrosio (2005) claimed, the relationship of Russia and the West was not seriously damaged until 2004, not as a result of the war in Iraq, according to realists’ assumptions, but of the ‘color revolutions’ that took precedence in Russia’s ‘sphere of influence’ and the Western reaction that had seemed muted.

In spite of respecting Russia’s great power status, with a droit de regard in the former Soviet region, the West, especially the United States had lent support to ‘color revolutions’. ‘Regime shifts’ in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan were observed as a humiliating intervention in Russian’s sphere of influence (Shevtsova, 2007: 230–248; Lo, 2008: 94; Mankoff, 2009: 117–123; Judah, 2013: 84–86; Larson and Shevchenko, 2014: 273). The revolutions, in particular, the ‘orange revolution’ in Ukraine, as a ‘personal slap’ and ‘shock’ for Putin, re-awoke the foreign threat perception to the regime as a major political and ideological issue in Moscow. Such perception was strong in particular regarding the authoritative propaganda, in which ‘the West’ and ‘the U.S.’ were known as the main evil and single enemy (Surkov, 2006). Putin recognized such revolutions as the efforts to further weaken Russia’s status and role in the Eurasian heartland and equal partnership with the United States and the EU (Shlapentokh, 2009).
In general, the outcome of color revolutions forced the Russian leaders not only to change their tactics when dealing with the European members of the CIS but also to take a more defensive stance toward a lot of aspects (Alf et al., 2008; Gretskiy et al., 2014). Briefly, after the color revolutions, Russia was unable or unwilling to materialize the status quo-oriented grand strategy, although Russian moderates had preferred such a course, since the Russian elites’ perception had changed from the perception of status inconsistency to that of status immobility.

To sum up, the humiliation that accompanied Russia’s interactions with the West led to two important responses. First, it persuaded the main actors of discursive identity creation to adopt distinctive strategies – mobility, creativity, and social competition – as a means of gaining equality. Second, ‘failure of social mobility and creativity’, also no obvious accomplishment of social competition, in a certain condition, worsened the resentment complex along with ‘the sense of envy that aggravated particularistic pride and xenophobia as parts of national identity’ (Sherr, 2008). Thus, whether as an inciting element of the enhancement strategies or as a persistent result of the strategies’ invalidities, resentment had been the main force of discourse in light of Russian identity (Malinova, 2014).

4. Status immobility and Russia’s foreign policy after color revolutions

From the mid-2000s, the years following the color revolutions, the advocates of reassurance had lost their grip on the levers of policy. Consequently, the Russian state was increasingly incapable of and uninterested in taking steps to reassure the Western great powers. Status immobility played a key role in Russia’s shift toward revisionism from the mid-2000s, through the two mechanisms that have been illustrated in the preceding theoretical discussion. First, the resentment toward the West and in particular perceptions of identity distinction or even inferiority – contributed to development of the ideologies and foreign policy preferences of the hard-line civilizationists/nationalists groups whose agitation against ‘strategic partnership’ or even limited cooperation with the ‘capitalist world’ threatened and undermined the efforts exerted by the modernists/internationalist leaders to maintain reassurance. Moreover, the civilizationists pursued restoring Soviet-era ‘great power status’ as a national distinctive identity (Tsygankov, 2003). Second, widespread perceptions of status immobility and the associated expectation that Russia would be treated unjustly by Western powers facilitated the increasing influence of revisionists by making it a complex business for moderates to legitimate their preferred course in the surge of color revolutions. The immediate result was the Georgia war and increased influence of the opponents of reassurance.

The Georgia war in 2008 can be used as a case in which the revisionist preferences in Russian foreign policy have their basis in these two mechanisms. From the mid-2000s the internal ‘oversupply’ of civilizationist nationalist identity regarding great power status aspiration and the ‘undersupply’ of other liberal alternatives gradually began to govern and ruin Russia’s foreign behavior equally at the ‘conceptual’ or ‘rhetorical’ level. The Kremlin’s policy toward Georgia is a scope in which the civilizationist nationalist self-image, based on the idea of greatpowerness, ‘momentarily escaped the cage’. The trend showed official and civilizationist discourses turning out to be gradually linked, indiscernible, and ‘self-reinforcing’. The key influence of this civilizationist nationalist identity on the conflict with Georgia was offering a framing ideology: Russia increasingly saw Georgia as an illegitimate, hostile, and aggressive state that needed to be taught a lesson, lest its conduct fundamentally damage Russia’s great-power status. It also provided a favorable domestic context whereby no alternative to Russia’s actions was conceivable – the civilizationists were prominent in creating an atmosphere of extreme jingoism that pushed Moscow to keep going (March, 2011: 203).

4.1 Preferences for revisionism in Russia

One major mechanism of status immobility by which Russia’s policy drifted toward revisionism was the increase of civilizationist influence in the Russian political sphere. As argued before, under the first Putin administration, the authorities have, in general, enhanced a policy regarding ‘statist consensus’
but, as the Georgia War shows, the civilizationist nationalism improved gradually to the level of ‘politically correct domestic discourse’ (March, 2011: 189).

It is difficult to say with certainty to what extent perceptions of inferiority and status immobility influenced the ideologies, objectives, and preferences of these groups, but an examination of the history and content of the civilizationist approach suggests that they did have a role. First and foremost the relevance to the Georgia case is that civilizationist nationalism is allowed relatively free rein in the cultural and political spheres. As associated with pro-communist politicians and their sympathizers, civilizationists have permanently perceived Russia’s distinctive character in the world via the prism of a cultural opposition between Moscow and the Western powers. For civilizationists, Russia is not a Western power, but they portray Russia as culturally anti-Western, an independent unit in a generally hostile world (Tsygankov, 2003).

From the mid-2000s, a harsh circle of civilizationist self-image was formed mainly by the marginalizing of liberal-moderate voices through the given state control of public and private media. In other words, there was a ping-pong relation between the Russian state and the media; the Kremlin aided to establish a media led by the civilizationist self-image, which in turn instructed the state’s policy. Often this civilizationist self-image benefitted the Russian elites by providing means which ‘combine openness to the West with the effective discrediting of all Western voices by means of creating a virtual conflict with the West over a third area’ (Filippov, 2009: 1829). In fact, the elites have purposefully strengthened anti-Westernism to these goals.

The new wave of Russian great-power identity based on the statist and civilizationist worldview advanced by interrelated think-tanks and ideologues who are very ‘young’ and ‘educated’ further indicates that political leaders and civilizationists have a common belief, and often peripheral civilizationist perceptions can come to be more publicized (Laruelle, 2008). Civilizationists’ pro-state think-tanks have apparently flooded the market with the civilizationist self-image. Similarily, the domestic oversupply of civilizationist nationalism was increasingly observable even in official documents. For instance, the dominant features of Russianness in Kremlin discourse became the ‘commitment to … Russian culture: language, history, values of statehood and patriotism, the idea of the strong and great Russia, uniqueness of the Russian civilization’ (Panov, 2010).

During Putin’s tenure, the potential for civilizationists’ views to influence Russian political elite discourse has also grown via power centralization. The centralization of the policy-making process in the Putin era has increased relative to the Yeltsin period. As a consequence going inside the Kremlin’s ‘black box’ is problematic, since the Russian policy-formation process is confined to the small group of trusted advisers and presidential administration (Kryshtanovskaya and White 2005). Civilizationists can benefit from such situation via behind-the-scene lobbying or individual connections and other indirect forms of influence (March, 2011: 193). It is in that regard that some have charged that Putin cannot free himself from the imperialist thoughts voiced through Russian civilizationists such as ‘Aleksandr Prokhanov’ and ‘Aleksandr Dugin’ (Barbashin and Thoburn, 2014; Snyder, 2014; Tsygankov, 2015). As Liverant (2009) argued, Dugin is not the Russian regime’s official ideologue, but, all the same, his influence is undoubtedly ‘immense’ and ‘today’s Russia is indeed moving closer and closer to Dugin’s vision’. The worldview he advocates has become part of mainstream thinking, both in the Russian political establishment and among the general public.3 Although

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3It is not clear exactly to what extent civilizationists like Dugin influence the Russian policy-making process during the time, but some observers try to show his role considering the Kremlin’s ‘black box’. For example, Liverant (2009) shows that during Putin era, Dugin ‘slowly but surely’ has become successful to achieve a position within the new administrations ‘inner circle’. Dugin solidified his stance by creating strong ties with a hawkish, security oriented faction of insiders, mostly composed of ex-members of the military and security services, such as Igor Sechin, a former KGB official a Putin’s closest adviser and then deputy prime minister; Nikolai Patrushev Security Council secretary and former head of the FSB; Sergei Ivanov, former deputy prime minister and Security Council member; and Boris Gryzlov, the speaker of the lower house of parliament and chairman of Putin’s ruling United Russia party’ (Liverant, 2009). Dugin deepened his influence within the high-level inner circle of the Russian political establishment. He established the Evrazia, International Eurasian
none of this is verifiable, it shows how closed policy-making procedure may really advantage civilizationists with great access.

To sum up, the perceived injustice of Western-dominated order by Russian elites – a concept clearly linked with status immobility – played a pivotal role in the way most civilizationist-nationalist groups assessed the status quo and Russia’s role in the world. For instance, Putin in December 2004 criticized the disrespect to Russia when he denoted the United States as a ‘strict uncle in a pith helmet instructing others how to live their lives’. Similarly, in 2006, Putin analogized the United States as a wolf ‘who knows who to eat and is not about to listen to anyone’ (Shevtsova, 2007). In the Munich security conferences, 2007, Putin accused the United States of having ‘overstepped its national borders in every way,’ as demonstrated by the ‘economic, political, cultural, and educational policies it imposes on other nations’ (Putin, 2007). In May 2007, at a ‘Victory Day’ celebration, Putin also bluntly equated the United States with the ‘Third Reich’ (Kramer, 2007).

4.2 Russia’s withdrawal from cooperation (Georgia War)
The second way that status immobility had directed the foreign policy of Russia was through providing the rhetorical and political settings in Russia more promising for pro-revisionism, which is obviously visible in the starting of the war in Georgia.

Russian domestic discourse had increasingly framed the conflict in such a way that the Kremlin felt that there was no option but for it to respond with such a hard way. In that regard, Russian civilizationists had a direct role to play in aggravating public aggressive attitudes to which the Kremlin felt it had to react. This arguably intensified Russia’s incentives to use the conflict to teach the West and Georgia ‘a lesson’, and to indicate that it pursued respect as both a regional and world actor. Certainly, the civilizationists had played an important role in intensifying domestic tension and external conflict. For example, during 2008, the civilizationist members whether in or out of the Duma had frequently called for recognition of the unrecognized regions and were relatively satisfied while Russia improved its relationships with ‘South Ossetia’ and ‘Abkhazia’ in April 2008 (March, 2011: 198).

As the main civilizationist, Dugin was clearly all for escalating the conflict with Georgia, with the argument that the Caucasian region is the mainstay of the U.S. policies to ‘destroy Russia’. Dugin had forced the Kremlin for steady support of all minorities who fight in Georgia. He anticipated that Russia will exert some force on Estonia and Latvia, which have noticeable Russophone minorities and more importantly, in Ukraine. Therefore, in line with the civilizationist’ worldview, Dugin called for imperial restoration and integration of Georgia within Russia’s sphere of influence: ‘Georgia should focus on Russia not to return their already irretrievably lost territory, but in order not to lose the rest’ (Laruelle, 2008).

Under the influence of civilizationist self-image, the general Russian anti-Americanism has increased. Not unpredictably, in Russian public opinion, Mikheil Saakashvili and G.W.Bush were considered as Russia’s main enemies before August 2008. It means that Russian debate over Georgia agreed with traditional patterns of ‘rallying around the flag against foreign enemies’. Putin and Dmitry Medvedev in the aftermath of the conflict stressed on the geopolitical origins of the conflict and the main role of the United States in Georgia (March, 2011). To note, Medvedev’s reputation had improved from ‘toothless’ to a rising authoritative and independent politician that indicates the civilizationists’ support for him (Lentsev, 2008). The Georgia war highlights the highest of symbiosis that has been formed among the authorities, civilizationists, and the population. Moscow hit its population with a media barrage and the main focus was on the domestic audience and the state-directed electronic media went into overdrive to present the Kremlin’s case to its people (Sakwa, 2008). This was going well: Medvedev and Putin achieved high degrees of general approval historically in September 2008 (88% and 83%, respectively), according to Russia Votes (2011).

Movement, a group that would come to involve academics, politicians, parliamentarians, journalists, and intellectuals from Russia, its neighbors, and the West (Liverant, 2009; Barbashin & Thoburn, 2014).
It is undeniable that a number of moderate central leadership and analysts have developed a critical view with regard to the Russian military action in Georgia, even including a prominent Russian civilizationist Aleksandr Prokhanov, who contended that Moscow had truly lost – at least in the military aspect (March, 2011). However, these analysts had turned a deaf ear to the political questions. Indeed, the war represents a decisive defeat for the few liberal moderates in Russia who had hoped that President Medvedev would take a second opinion in steering back Russia’s authoritarian system. Russia’s military, with a victory, has consolidated its position in Russian domestic politics (Jones, 2008). Furthermore, this was not entirely surprising as a permanent theme in all security documents between 2000 and 2008 was the protection of Russian minorities living in the ‘near abroad’. This argument was manipulated by Moscow to legitimize its invasion of Georgia in 2008 (De Haas, 2010). Accordingly, Russia’s self-serving debates that Medvedev had no option except to follow military invasion and acceptance of the pro-independence regions responding to several attacks on its compatriots cannot simply be neglected. We can also argue that Medvedev’s own political situation would have been fragile had he not secured Russian ‘citizens’ (Monaghan, 2008). In other words, moderate leaders did not prefer or actively seek to get involved in the war but were rather helpless in avoiding it.

It is a very important point because it suggests that preferences for revisionism were not harmonious among Russian leaders and perceptions of status immobility predated Russia’s shift away from moderation. Another suggestion is that explaining Russia’s shift toward revisionism involves considering the outcome of a political contest over grand strategy – a contest stacked against moderation advocates as a result of the emerging status immobility.

What came out from this process was a political and rhetorical space in which there was little room for the West to occupy. In the lead-up to and aftermath of the Georgia war, the civilizationist approach had flowed into the foreign policy rhetoric to an unprecedented degree. President Medvedev requested that Georgia’s state honor Russia’s state, its population and its cultural and traditional values. This showed the ‘sense of grievance’ spilled over into the Russian foreign policy. The Foreign Policy Concept 2008 stated, surprisingly, that the grand strategy is tackling a ‘civilizational dimension’, driving the civilizationist foreign policy to stand strong on the doctrinal legitimacy that had before been missing from the system (Medvedev, 2008).

Thus, Russia’s war in Georgia is doubly significant. First, it indicated that Russia’s moderates had largely lost the ability to preside over the advocates of revisionism and pursue reassurance. Second, it helped the advocates of revisionism among Russian decision-makers to continue their dominance.

5. Conclusion

Referring to the suggested theory, this paper proposes an explanation that justifies Russia’s shift toward revisionism, as a response to the perceptions of impermeability of the higher status group boundaries based on the significance of identity. Perceptions of status immobility developed in Russia as a result of the failure of the status enhancement strategies throughout the 1990s and early 2000s to enhance Russia’s relative standing were somehow interpreted as identity-based insults. These insults convinced many elites and public opinion leaders that Russia’s claims to equality of status with Western great powers could not be realized within the constraints of a Western-dominated status hierarchy. Widespread perceptions of uncorrectable status hierarchy by the 2000s – particularly overwhelming in the wake of the color revolutions – caused Russian political elites to move on the revisionist grand strategy orientation through some main mechanisms. First, it stimulated some Russian – revisionists’ nationalists and civilizationists – whose agitation was at stake and who happened to belittle Russia’s moderate political and military leadership throughout the early 1990s. Second, it made Russia’s elite and public opinion highly susceptible to the color revolutions and it became the immediate cause of Russia’s revisionism especially the war that broke out in Georgia in 2008 and then the invasion of Ukraine in 2013. The events had thrown some light on the inability of Russia’s moderates to formulate a foreign policy of reassurance and helped to increase the dominance of the revisionists who led Russia to undergo a major competition with the Western great powers.
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Esmail Mazloomi is a PhD candidate, Asia-Europe Institute (AEI), University of Malaya (UM), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Emile Kok-Kheng Yeoh is the Department Head and an Associate Professor of the Department of Administrative Studies and Politics, Faculty of Economics and Administration, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. He is the founding editor of the triannual academic journal Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations: An International Journal (CCPS) jointly published by the Institute of China and Asia-Pacific Studies of Taiwan’s National Sun Yat-sen University and the University of Malaya’s Department of Administrative Studies and Politics. He was the director of the Institute of China Studies (ICS), University of Malaya, from 13 March 2008 to 1 January 2014, the founder and editor of the institute’s then top-tier Scopus-indexed triannual academic journal, International Journal of China Studies (IJCS, Vol. 1, 2010 – Vol. 5, 2014).

Mohd Aminul Karim is a Senior Research Fellow; Asia-Europe Institute, University of Malaya (UM), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Invited Professor; China Foreign Affairs University, Beijing.