



Russia's Use of the Kosovo Case to Legitimize Military Interventions and Territorial Conquests

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While Russia has offered a mixture of rationalizations for its 2022 invasion of Ukraine, including “denazification,” “demilitarization”¹ or the “return of Russian lands,”² it has consistently clung to a core political and legal justification for engaging in military interventions and border changes in post-Soviet states. It refers to the “Kosovo precedent” or NATO’s 1999 military intervention against Serbia—without a UN Security Council backing—and the West’s subsequent recognition of Kosovo’s

¹“Address by the President of the Russian Federation,” President of Russia website, February 24, 2022, accessed October 25, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>

² “[Vladimir Putin’s] Meeting with young entrepreneurs, engineers and scientists,” President of Russia website, June 9, 2022, accessed October 15, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68606>

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independence in 2008. Russia's interpretation does not only apply to the use of force itself, which it has usually justified in pre-emptive as well as preventive terms—to deter or stop “ethnic cleansing” and “acts of genocide”—but also to the conferring of state recognition on contested territories in Georgia and Ukraine, such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008, Crimea in 2014, and Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia in 2022. The Kosovo case is part of a broader Russian anti-Western narrative, centring on U.S. efforts to preserve a post-Cold War unipolar order through a variety of unilateral actions designed to weaken Russia. It includes military interventions in the former Yugoslavia, Iraq and, later, in Libya as well as NATO's eastward expansion, with the prospective additions of Georgia and Ukraine.³

In this chapter, I discuss how Russia has used Western support for Kosovo to instrumentalize contested international norms for geopolitical and territorial aggrandizements. To further its foreign policy aims in Georgia and Ukraine, Russia has sought to do two things: first, to assert its power and authority over what it considers its own “spheres of influence,” variously dubbed, in euphemistic terms, as “post-Soviet space,” “near-abroad,” or “regions of Russian privileged interest”⁴; and second, to compete geopolitically with the West through mimicry or by framing its own actions as mirror images of Western ones.⁵ To combine these separate, if interlinked motives for armed intervention, the creation of new states and the annexation of territories, the Russians have turned concepts such as “genocide,” “self-determination,” and “sovereignty” into signifiers without fixed legal or political meanings. These terms are constantly being reconfigured, reinterpreted, and reframed to fit each circumstance without the need to establish consistency or inner logic. Thus, paradoxically, even if Russia still refers to the Kosovo War as a breach of international law and sticks to its opposition to Kosovo's independence, it relies on both examples to justify its own military interventions and territorial revisions in post-Soviet states.

³ See, for example, Fyodor Liyanov, “Putin's Foreign Policy: The Quest to Restore Russia's Rightful Place,” *Foreign Affairs* 95 (May–June 2016): 30–37.

⁴ See Andrei Kazantsev, Sergei Lebedev, and Svetlana Medvedeva, “Russia's Policies in the Post-Soviet Space: Between Constructive Relations and Fighting the New Cold War,” *Russian Politics*, 6, no. 4 (2021): 503–530.

⁵ See Vasile Rotaru and Miruna Troncoță, “Continuity and change in instrumentalizing ‘The Precedent.’ How Russia uses Kosovo to legitimize the annexation of Crimea,” *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 17, no. 3 (2017): 325–345.

FRAMING THE KOSOVO CASE

NATO rationalized the 1999 air war against Serbia on humanitarian grounds, that is, to put an end to ethnic cleansing operations against the majority Albanian population in Kosovo. Subsequently, most Western states supported the solution proposed, in 2007, by the Finnish UN's Special Representative for the future status of Kosovo, Martti Ahtisaari, for "supervised independence" of the entity, which had been under direct UN rule since the conclusion of the war.⁶ When Russia and Serbia rejected the plan, the West backed Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in 2008. Prior to Kosovo's separation, Russia had consistently advocated against the right to unilateral secession and refused to recognize territorial changes in disputed areas. It pointed out that the Yugoslav ethno-federal system was modelled on the constitution of the Soviet Union,⁷ which, in theory, accorded secession rights only to republics but not to autonomous units. Thus, even if Russia was partly responsible for maintaining the "frozen conflicts" in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Transnistria, and Nagorno-Karabakh, it refused to recognize any of these separatist territories as independent.⁸ Needless to say, other political explanations also played a role.⁹ Russia was able to maintain its preponderant influence in "post-Soviet space" as a power broker in these unrecognized territories or independent states like Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Similarly, Russia wanted to cultivate its intimate historical relations with Serbia through its support on the Kosovo question.

The Western legal case for Kosovo's independence could be faulted for being legally and politically ambivalent. Kosovo was seen as a special case, *sui generis*, rooted in the violent disintegration of the former Yugoslavia,

⁶"Report of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Kosovo's future status," UN Security Council, March 26, 2007, accessed October 15, 2022, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/595358?ln=fr>

⁷See Pavel K. Baev, "Russia's stance against secessions: From Chechnya to Kosovo," *International Peacekeeping*, 6, no. 3 (1999): 73–94; Baev, "The 'Kosovo Precedent' and Russian-Georgian Relations," PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo, No. 5 (March 2008), accessed October 15, 2022, https://www.ponarseurasia.org/wp-content/uploads/attachments/pepm_005.pdf

⁸On frozen conflicts, see, for example, Anton Bebler (ed.), *"Frozen conflicts" in Europe* (Opladen, Berlin, Toronto: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2015).

⁹See Tero Lundstedt, "Inherited National Questions: The Soviet Legacy in Russia's International Law Doctrine on Self-determination," *Nordic Journal of International Law* 89, no. 1 (2020), 38–66.

which did not apply elsewhere. Before Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic's decision to deprive Kosovo—through extra-constitutional means—of its autonomy in 1989, it had been part of the rotating collective presidency of Yugoslavia, which gave it an elevated constitutional status on par with the six republics.¹⁰ In addition, strengthening their case for self-determination, the two million Kosovo Albanians, who made up 90% of the population, had their own language, culture, and history, with the Serbian minority constituting only 5%. Yet, secession rights of the former republics of Yugoslavia did not include Kosovo because it was classified as a Serbian province.

Hence, there were only two ways to rationalize Kosovo's divorce from Serbia. First, it was argued, as Ahtisaari did, that after a sustained period of UN rule, during which Serbia's sovereignty was suspended, Kosovo's final status had to take the form of sovereignty; it was "unrealistic" to contemplate Kosovo's return to Serbia, for it would provoke a violent reaction by the Albanians. It was also contended that Kosovo's position was constitutionally weaker as part of Serbia than it had been under the Yugoslav ethno-federal system, which made it more vulnerable to Serbian repression. Second, a remedial legal argument was put forward: that Serbia had forfeited its right to rule over Kosovo because of its abysmal human rights record.¹¹ Indeed, many of the around 100 states that have so far recognized Kosovo's independence referred to victim-centred arguments, often colonial in nature, which were based on the notion that Serbia had lost moral authority to rule the territory.¹²

The counterargument was that the Kosovo case could hardly be interpreted as being unique in this regard because some other independence movements could claim that they had been subjected to gross human rights violations. Yet, given the changed realities on the ground—with a strong U.S. and NATO presence in Kosovo—the Serbs realized that there was no chance of evoking the status quo ante. Hence, in 2007, they were prepared to accept continued UN administration of Kosovo for 20 years as well as extensive Kosovo Albanian autonomy rights to retain formal

¹⁰ The republics within Yugoslavia were: Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Bosnia.

¹¹ "Report of the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Kosovo's future status."

¹² See, for example, Grace Bolton and Gezim Visoka, *Recognizing Kosovo's independence: Remedial secession or earned sovereignty?* Occasional Paper No. 11/10 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

control over it. To the Albanians this sounded like institutionalizing a neo-colonial rule under UN auspices, which they firmly rejected.¹³

RUSSIA'S INTERVENTION IN GEORGIA

Russia's abrupt decision to abandon its long-standing policy on secession after the Georgian crisis erupted in August 2008 was justified by referring to Western acceptance of Kosovo's declaration of independence six months earlier. According to the new interpretation, former autonomous units in "post-Soviet space" could have a right to secede based on the "Kosovo precedent," especially, if not exclusively, on the grounds of remedial secession.¹⁴ What prompted it was Georgia's failed invasion of South Ossetia, leading to a Russian military intervention. Shortly thereafter, Russia recognized both breakaway Georgian provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, with populations of 230,000 and 50,000, respectively, as independent states. Russia accused Georgia of having breached the UN charter, with the aim, in President Dmitry Medvedev's words, of taking over South Ossetia "at the price of exterminating a whole people"—and preparing the same fate for Abkhazia, which was mostly spared in the 2008 conflict.

Even if its whole argument for intervention and recognition was based on the Kosovo case, Russia initially sought to distance itself from it in an uneasy attempt to accommodate the new policy with the old. It cited its historical mediating and peacekeeping roles in the conflict since the disintegration of the Soviet Union and its respect for Georgia's territorial integrity, even after Kosovo's declaration of independence. Russia's discourse soon, however, became fully aligned with its policy reversal; it contained ample references to UN "responsibility to protect" norms developed after the wars in Rwanda and in the former Yugoslavia, where international collective action was justified to protect populations against "ethnic cleansing," "war crimes," and "genocide."¹⁵ Engaging in mimetic

¹³See Valur Ingimundarson, "The Politics of Memory and the Reconstruction of Albanian National Identity in Postwar Kosovo," *History and Memory*, 19, no. 1 (2007): 95–123.

¹⁴On the concept of remedial secession, see Jure Vidmar, "Remedial Secession in International Law: Theory and (Lack of) Practice," *St Antony's International Review*, 6, no. 1 (2010): 37–56.

¹⁵See Don Hubert and Ariela Blätter, "The Responsibility to Protect as International Crimes Prevention," *Global Responsibility to Protect* 4, no. 1 (2012): 38, 47–48; Emma McClean, "The Responsibility to Protect: The Role of International Human Rights Law," *Journal of Conflict & Security Law*, 13, no. 1 (2008), 125; Rama Mani and Thomas G. Weiss, "R2P's Missing Link, Culture," *Global Responsibility to Protect*, 3, no. 4 (2011), 454–455.

geopolitics, the Russians argued that if Kosovo was a unique case, South Ossetia and Abkhazia were also *sui generis*. To counter the accusation that Russia was pursuing a double standard because it refused to recognize Kosovo's independence, the Georgian human rights situation was described as being far more serious, spanning over 17 years during which ethnic cleansing and genocidal actions took place.¹⁶

Such an argument may have squared with Russia's new-found enthusiasm for "humanitarian warfare" after abandoning the principle of territorial integrity of states. But given Russia's patronage of the secessionist regions,¹⁷ it raised the question of why the Russians had not intervened earlier to stop a genocide. There was, in fact, nothing that suggested that the Abkhaz and South Ossetian ethnic populations were facing an existential threat. The South Ossetians were the ones who had initiated the skirmishes, which prompted Georgian retaliation in August 2008. Georgia's failed attempt to bring the South Ossetians to heel by invading the territory in attempt to reclaim it gave the Russians the perfect pretext to intervene.

Russia's policy change on secession has, of course, to be seen as part of a broader goal to exert political influence in Georgia and Ukraine, reverse their Western orientation, and prevent them from joining NATO. Thus, Russia was not only determined to teach the Georgians a lesson, which it claimed was borrowed from a Western playbook, but also to deter U.S. geopolitical ambitions in the former Soviet republics. At the Bucharest summit in April 2008, NATO had stated that Georgia and Ukraine would eventually become members of the alliance.¹⁸ France and Germany had vetoed a fast-track membership route for the countries because they feared that it would be seen as a provocation by Russia. But to sooth the United States, which was pushing for NATO's expansion, the open-ended wording of the statement on Georgia and Ukraine, containing no timetable,

¹⁶ Gearóid Ó Tuathail, "Russia's Kosovo: A Critical Geopolitics of the August 2008 War over South Ossetia," *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 49, no. 6 (2013), 697.

¹⁷ See Andre W. M. Gerrits and Max Bader, "Russian patronage over Abkhazia and South Ossetia: implications for conflict resolution," *East European Politics*, 32, no. 3 (2016): 297–313.

¹⁸ "Bucharest Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008," accessed October 25, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm

suggested a far more realistic prospect for accession than was the case. Finally, Russia was aware that any Western encroachments in this region would spoil its own efforts to facilitate the integration of former Soviet states into a political and economic bloc modelled on the EU. One such institutional body was the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), made up of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, which Putin described—rather loftily—as being a supranational association capable or becoming one of the poles in the modern world.¹⁹

While de facto separate, Abkhazia and South Ossetia depend politically and economically on Russia and have failed to gain international recognition.²⁰ Thus, in contrast to Kosovo, only four states have done so: Venezuela, Syria, Nicaragua, and Nauru. This shows that Russia's argument for secession based on this precedent without any involvement of the state it formally belonged to, Georgia, was viewed with scepticism. Hardly viable as a state, South Ossetia never professed any desire to remain independent, a stance that has also much to do with the fact that North Ossetia is part of the Russian Federation. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it declared that it would schedule a referendum on its integration with Russia in the summer of 2022; while it subsequently withdrew its plan pending further discussion with Russia, its goal of eventually becoming part of Russia has not changed.²¹ Abkhazia, which is economically stronger, has shown no such interest, while continuing to rule out any constitutional ties with Georgia. The Abkhazians, however, are deeply reliant on Russia for external representation, with those of its citizens who do not have Russian passports being, in effect, stateless.

¹⁹ "Putin's power play jeopardizes Eurasian Union plans," Deutsche Welle, March 15, 2014, accessed October 25, 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/putins-power-play-jeopardizes-eurasian-union-plans/a-17493164>

²⁰ See David S. Siroky, Milos Popovic, and Nikola Mirilovic, "Unilateral secession, international recognition, and great power contestation," *Journal of Peace Research*, 58, no. 5 (2021): 1049–1067.

²¹ "Georgian breakaway territory suspends announced referendum on joining Russia – decree," Reuters, May 30, 2022, accessed October 25, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/georgian-breakaway-territory-suspends-announced-referendum-joining-russia-decree-2022-05-30/>

USING UKRAINE AS A CASE FOR TERRITORIAL REVISIONS

After its 2014 occupation of Crimea—in the wake of the downfall of the pro-Russian government in Ukraine—Russia acted in a far bolder fashion than in Georgia. It did not only want to grant Crimea independence but also to absorb it quickly into the Russian Federation. In Crimea’s proclamation of independence, the right was reserved for applying to Russia for the inclusion of the territory as a separate subject. The proclamation itself was clearly modelled on Kosovo’s declaration of independence,²² but there was one sharp departure. Kosovo’s constitution explicitly states that it “shall have no territorial claims against, and shall seek no union with, any State or part of any State.”²³ What this really meant was that Kosovo was prohibited from joining Albania, which Western states believed could lead to regional instability.

Russia’s decision to recognize Crimea as an independent state was rationalized by referring to the 2010 judgement of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) that Kosovo’s independence declaration did not violate international law. While it may be argued that the ruling did not preclude such a legal interpretation, it was, in fact, more narrowly framed. It specifically focused on Kosovo within the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244, which was adopted after the Kosovo War and which created the temporary exceptional legal regime that superseded the Serbian legal order in Kosovo. The failure to come to a negotiated settlement on Kosovo’s future status, as required by the resolution, paved the way for a unilateral decision on independence.

Thus, in the case of Crimea, Russia continued to use the Kosovo precedent, but tweaked its meaning to fit different circumstances. The ICJ, in fact, stated unequivocally that “declarations of independence are illegal when connected with the unlawful use of force,” which could be said to have applied in Russia’s case.²⁴ As if realizing that it needed stronger

²² See Juan Francisco Escudero Espinosa (ed.), *Self-Determination and Humanitarian Secession in International Law of a Globalized World. Kosovo v. Crimea* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2017).

²³ “Kosovo’s Constitution of 2008 with Amendments through 2016,” The Constitute Project, April 27, 2022, accessed October 25, 2022, https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Kosovo_2016.pdf?lang=en

²⁴ International Court of Justice, “Reports of judgments, advisory opinions and orders accordance with international law of the unilateral declaration of independence in respect of Kosovo advisory opinion of 22 July 2010,” 437–438, accessed October 25, 2022, <https://www.icj-cij.org/public/files/case-related/141/141-20100722-ADV-01-00-EN.pdf>

arguments to justify its annexation policy, Russia also referred to historical rights and to the correction of historical wrongs: that Crimea had belonged to Russia for centuries until it was illegally transferred to Ukraine in the 1950s. Such a claim may have buttressed support for incorporating Crimea into the Russian Federation, but it had no basis in international law.²⁵ And given Ukraine's strong opposition to the Crimean annexation, only about 15 states have recognized it—some of them formally and others informally through supporting statements.

The Crimean intervention was a dress rehearsal for Russia's 2022 war against Ukraine. The day before the invasion, Russia recognized the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk in the Donbas region. Using the same methods as in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia claimed that the decision had been made on humanitarian grounds to protect civilians, including Russian ones, facing what it termed the "threat of direct physical annihilation by the Ukrainian government," whose military actions in the Donbas were "nothing short of a genocide against Ukraine's own people."²⁶ As was the case in Georgia, there was nothing to support this claim. While it is estimated that the civil conflict in the region had cost over 2000 civilian lives from August 2014 until February 2022, the vast majority of which occurred in 2014–2015, it could not by any means be squared with the definition of a genocide as an attempt to annihilate systematically a group of people. In April 2022, Putin justified Russia's recognition of the "republics of Donbass" by referring to the independence of Kosovo. And, as the Russians did with respect to Crimea, he also mentioned the ICJ ruling on Kosovo: that in exercising the right to self-determination, there was no obligation to apply for permission to declare independence to the central government or that of Ukraine.²⁷

After the invasion of Ukraine, Russia's goal of territorial aggrandizement became far more explicit. To be sure, the Russians had to abandon their original war objective of staging a "regime change" and of imposing

²⁵ "Address by the President of the Russian Federation [on Crimea]," March 18, 2014, accessed October 15, 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>

²⁶ "Russian Foreign Ministry statement on recognising the independence of the Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics," February 23, 2022, accessed October 25, 2022, <https://russiaeu.ru/printpage/en/node/7353>

²⁷ "Putin cites precedent of Kosovo in explaining recognition of DPR, LPR," TASS, April 26, 2022, accessed October 15, 2022, https://tass.com/politics/1443661?utm_source=google.com & utm_medium=organic & utm_campaign=google.com & utm_referrer=google.com

a direct rule over the whole of Ukraine. But they are still committed to the late September 2022 decision—made after show referendums—to annex the eastern provinces of Luhansk and Donetsk and well as the southern ones of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia from Ukraine. Earlier, the Russians had prepared the groundwork by referring to Kosovo. In mid-May 2022, former President Medvedev and current Deputy Chairman of Russia’s Security Council, put it, sarcastically, this way: “[O]ur country doesn’t care about G7’s non-recognition of the new borders [of Ukraine]; what matters is the true will of the people living there. Do not forget the Kosovo precedent, our Western friends.”²⁸ Putin went further in dividing states into true sovereign states, which had to fulfil strict “military-political” and “technological-social” criteria to qualify as such, and “colonies,” which are unable to make sovereign decisions.²⁹ It is possible that the ICJ’s rejection of the legality of declarations of independence when connected directly with military force may have played a role in Russia’s decision to recognize the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk before attacking Ukraine. In Kherson and Zaporizhzhia, however, the use of referendums instead of unilateral declarations may have been an attempt to give added legitimacy to the independence claims made in the name of those two regions.

Yet, Russia’s formal evocation of the ICJ opinion on unilateral declaration of independence—to justify the rights of the people of “Donbass and the south of Ukraine” to self-determination and to join Russia following the referendums in Kherson and Zaporizhzhia³⁰—only weakened its legal case. The referenda, which were organized under military administration—with handpicked international observers and the exclusion of international organizations—lacked credibility and legitimacy. An occupation by a foreign power, even if it is dressed up in legal terms as an “invitation” does not grant permanent sovereignty in the territory. For that reason, there was no legal case for holding referendums about independence or annexation. What is more, Russia only partially controlled the territories of the regions it annexed. Only two states, Syria and North Korea, which

²⁸ “Russia doesn’t care if G7 recognizes new Ukrainian borders — Medvedev,” TASS, May 14, 2022, accessed October 25, 2022, <https://tass.com/world/1451025>

²⁹ “[Vladimir Putin’s] Meeting with young entrepreneurs, engineers and scientists.”

³⁰ “Russian Foreign Ministry’s statement on the referendums in the DPR, LPR, Kherson and Zaporozhye regions,” September 28, 2022, accessed October 25, 2022, <https://rus-siaeu.ru/en/news/russian-foreign-ministrys-statement-referendums-dpr-lpr-kherson-and-zaporozhye-regions>

are especially close to Russia, have recognized the territorial conquests of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia. There will be a strong incentive to refrain from doing so, not only because states are usually reluctant to recognize independence claims that are contested by the territorial state in question but also because border changes were, in this case, engineered by military force as a prelude to annexation.

It is clear that Russia has abandoned any pretence of making newly proclaimed states viable as separate entities. Having, in 2023, withdrawn its recognition of Moldova's sovereignty over Transnistria, Russia is poised to recognize its proxy region as an independent state, which could signal a willingness to annex it at a future date. No matter how the Ukrainian war ends, enforced border changes have been made part of a Russian discourse that has jettisoned territorial integrity in favour of self-determination. Yet, as practiced by Russia, it is not a universal legal doctrine but a highly selective one. While it refers to the Kosovo case, the Russians only apply it to post-Soviet states with Russian-speaking minorities.

CONCLUSION

Russia has relied so extensively on the Kosovo trajectory that it has even used it to justify an act that has nothing to do with it, such as the incorporation of Crimea into the Russian Federation as well as the attempt to do the same with other southern and eastern Ukrainian territories. This raises the question of how unique the Kosovo experience really is and to what degree it has been used as a precedent in other situations. The failed Western intervention in Libya was steeped in humanitarian warfare rhetoric and secession movements, such as that in Catalonia, have mentioned Kosovo's path to statehood. Yet, Kosovo did not become a key reference point in either case. That no claim to statehood has been supported by more states gives some validity to the argument that Kosovo is, indeed, a different case. As noted, just a few states have followed in the footsteps of Russia and recognized the secession of Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Crimea, Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, or their absorption into the Russian Federation.

Kosovo's independence is, however, still contested because of the example it could set for other secessionist movements. And the West's rhetoric on the territorial integration of states has become, in many ways, similar to that of Russia prior to the Ukrainian crisis. Kosovo is not a universally recognized state and is not a member of key international organizations,

such as the United Nations. In addition, five EU member states still refuse to recognize its sovereignty for self-interested political reasons, involving real or imagined secessionist threats in their own countries or neighbouring ones. Romania does not want to do anything that could embolden the Russians in Transnistria and undermine Moldova, a stance that has much saliency within the context of the war in Ukraine; Slovakia is worried about potential nationalist stirrings of its Hungarian minority; Greece and Cyprus are thinking of the unrecognized Turkish state claim in Northern Cyprus, and Spain is worried about strengthening Catalan and Bask separatism.

Russia's post-2008 policy reversal on territorial integrity has not pleased Serbia, which has refused to recognize the independence of the "states" Russia has created in the former Soviet Union since it would undermine its continued claim to Kosovo. Paradoxically, Russia's legal stance invites autonomous regions within Russia itself such as Chechnya, where a strong remedial case could be made to demand secession rights on the basis of self-determination. In short, Russia is trying to have it both ways. Its instrumental use of the Kosovo case has served the purpose of providing a political cover—dressed up as a legal one—for Russia's efforts to reassert its authority in those countries that belonged to the Soviet Union and to engage through mimicry in a geopolitical competition with the West. Thus, contested terms associated with intervention or secession have not only assumed contradictory meanings in the Russian official vocabulary; they have also been turned into a ritual political means to justify expansionist military ends.

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