The Belligerent Bear

Russia, Status Orders, and War

Pål Røren

Do states get higher social status from fighting? The relationship between war and social status in world politics has been widely explored in recent years by scholars of international relations.[1] This topic is of crucial interest given the finding in cognate literatures that actors are willing to bicker, quarrel, or even fight to gain higher status or adjust a perceived lack of status.[2] Indeed, arguments on status in international relations agree that participating in wars can be either a viable status-seeking strategy, or a normal way of acting out because of perceived status underperformance.[3]

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1. For an overview of the literature, see Allan Dafoe, Jonathan Renshon, and Paul Huth, "Reputation and Status as Motives for War," *Annual Review of Political Science* 17, no. 1 (2014): 371–393, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-071112-213421; Paul K. MacDonald and Joseph M. Parent, "The Status of Status in World Politics," *World Politics* 73, no. 2 (2021): 358–391, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887120000301.
2. See Eric M. Anicich et al., "When the Bases of Social Hierarchy Collide: Power without Status Drives Interpersonal Conflict," *Organization Science* 27, no. 1 (2016): 123–140, https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2015.1019; Sheldon Stryker and Anne Statham Macke, "Status Inconsistency and Role Conflict," *Annual Review of Sociology* 4, no. 1 (1978): 57–90; Joyce Thompson Heames, Michael G. Harvey, and Darren Treadway, "Status Inconsistency: An Antecedent to Bullying Behaviour in Groups," *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 17, no. 2 (2006): 348–361, https://doi.org/10.1080/09585190500404952; Yan Li et al., "Individualism, Collectivism, and Chinese Adolescents' Aggression: Intracultural Variations," *Aggressive Behavior* 36, no. 3 (2010): 187–194, https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.20341.
3. See Jonathan Renshon, "Status Deficits and War," *International Organization* 70, no. 3 (2016): 513–550, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818316000163; Jonathan Renshon, *Fighting for Status: Hierarchy and Conflict in World Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.23943/princeton/9780691174501.001.0001; or for a qualitative perspective see Rasmus Brun Pedersen, "Bandwagon for Status: Changing Patterns in the Nordic States Status-Seeking Strategies?," *International Peacekeeping* 25, no. 2 (2018): 217–241, https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2017.1394792; Ann Hironaka, *Tokens of Power: Rethinking War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316796290; Peter Viggo Jakobsen, Jens Ringsmose, and Håkon Lunde Saxi, "Prestige-Seeking Small States: Danish and Norwegian Military Contributions to U.S.-

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Existing research shows that states seek status by joining or initiating wars. But it has yet to fully determine whether states get recognition from fighting.[4] This is puzzling given what is at stake. Wars kill people, destroy states, and cause irreversible damage to individuals and groups. Thus, if states believe that war is a means to achieve status—however ethically alarming such a stance might be—it is imperative to also understand whether other states grant belligerent states status recognition.

To fill this gap, I explore conditions under which war and aggression can lead to higher social status in world politics. In line with previous research, I assume that wars can have different status effects. Most obviously, losing a war can reduce a state's social status and winning one can increase it. But an even more important factor in determining status effects is the context in which the warfighting is interpreted. States rarely gain or seek recognition from the international system as a whole. Instead, they both pursue and receive status from various substrata of world politics. I call these substrata "social clubs," which are social collectives of exclusion and inclusion that confer status on their members.[5] Each club contain a "status order." These are social structures that condition and enable the pursuit and recognition of status. Status orders determine the criteria that states need to enter social clubs or to navigate their status hierarchies.[6] I argue that the prestige of war depends on

Led Operations," *European Journal of International Security* 3, no. 2 (2018): 256–277, https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2017.20.

4. Notable exceptions include Renshon, *Fighting for Status*; Renshon, "Status Deficits and War"; Jonathan Mercer, "The Illusion of International Prestige," *International Security* 41, no. 4 (Spring 2017): 133–168, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00276. But Renshon's use of proxies and his correlational approach offer limited and questionable insights about how status is distributed among belligerents. I build on Mercer's qualitative approach but ultimately refute his argument that status is an illusion.

5. These clubs include but are not limited to collectives such as international organizations (e.g., the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, or the United Nations) informal and formal groupings (e.g., the G-20, the G-8, the BRICS, or the Non-Aligned Movement), or categories (e.g., the Nordic states or middle powers). For similar usage of collectives, see Tristen Naylor, *Social Closure and International Society: Status Groups from the Family of Civilised Nations to the G20* (London: Routledge, 2018), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351252423; Deborah Welch Larson, "Status Competition among Russia, India, and China in Clubs: A Source of Stalemate or Innovation in Global Governance," *Contemporary Politics* 25, no. 5 (2019): 549–566, https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2019.1622183; William C. Wohlforth et al., "Moral Authority and Status in International Relations: Good States and the Social Dimension of Status Seeking," *Review of International Studies* 44, no. 3 (2017): 3–4, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210517000560; Renshon, *Fighting for Status*, 140–141; Joslyn Barnhart, "Humiliation and Third-Party Aggression," *World Politics* 69, no. 3 (2017): 535, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887117000028.

6. For a similar conceptualization, see Lilach Gilady, *The Price of Prestige: Conspicuous Consumption in International Relations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 42–43, https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226433349.001.0001; Catherine Jones, "Constructing Great Powers: China's Status in a Socially Constructed Plurality," *International Politics* 51 (2014): 600–605, https://doi.org/

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whether the relevant social club, through its status order, assigns positive value to war fighting or not. A state might be criticized, sanctioned, or even condemned for fighting a war. But it might simultaneously experience an increase in status within the relevant club and status order if that club recognizes fighting as esteemed behavior. Conversely, if a status order stigmatizes war, the belligerent state will experience a drop in status—even if the state wins a war and can demonstrate an effective use of force.

I build a qualitative research design to study the relationship between status orders and war. I use discourse analysis as a method of analysis to explore status orders and their components. Existing research relies on proxies to infer status attribution. In contrast, studying recognition via words means focusing on the place where status claims and concessions are taking place.[7] I conduct a single case study of the great power club to understand how status orders affect the relationship between social status and war.[8] Next, to explore the assumption that clubs in world politics have distinct status orders, I compare the core case with two ancillary shadow case studies:[9] the United Nations (UN) Security Council and the Group of 8 (G-8).[10]

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10.1057/ip.2014.28; Pål Røren, "Status Seeking in the Friendly Nordic Neighborhood," *Cooperation and Conflict* 54, no. 4 (2019): 564–567, https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836719828410; Iver B. Neumann, "Status Is Cultural: Durkheimian Poles and Weberian Russians Seek Great-Power Status," in T. V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth, eds., *Status in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 85–114, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO978110 744440 9.006; Naylor, *Social Closure and International Society*, 4.

7. Erik Ringmar, *Identity, Interest, and War: A Cultural Explanation of Sweden's Intervention in the Thirty Years War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 79–82, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511557705; Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Alexei Tsinovoi, "International Misrecognition: The Politics of Humour and National Identity in Israel's Public Diplomacy," *European Journal of International Relations* 25, no. 1 (2018): 7–9, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066117745365.

8. The membership composition of the great power club is not set. Instead, it is an empirical puzzle that should be solved inductively. When scholars attempt to make such a list, however, the states that are most frequently mentioned as great powers in contemporary world politics are: China, France, Germany, India, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States. See, for example, Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers in the Twenty-First Century: China's Rise and the Fate of America's Global Position," *International Security* 40, no. 3 (Winter 2015/16): 7–53, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00225; Thomas J. Volgy et al., "Major Power Status in International Politics," in Thomas J. Volgy et al., ed., *Major Powers and the Quest for Status in International Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 1–26, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230119314_1; Correlates of War Project, State System Membership List, V2016, https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/state-system-membership/.

9. I use the term "shadow cases" in this article to denote ancillary cases that do not qualify in length, extent, and focus to make the study a comparative case study, but that still shed light on the external validity of claims made in the core case. Hillel Soifer, "Shadow Cases in Comparative Research," *Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 18, no. 2 (Fall 2020): 11, https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4046562; John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 20–22, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316848593.

10. The G-7, consisting of Canada, France, Italy, Japan, the UK, the United States, and West

For the core case study, I assign the United States the role of chief gatekeeper of the great power club. I then analyze the reception of the 2014 annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine in the U.S. public discourse. I rely on op-eds and editorials from 2010 to 2019 about the great powers. These opinion pieces reflect what the public associates with great power status. Hence, they offer a window into the status order of the great power club. They also provide insight into what becomes accepted as obvious and commonsensical among the public. Decision-makers with authority to bestow recognition upon other states are socially constrained by these narratives.

Discursive recognition of Russia's belligerence by the U.S. public and foreign policy elites is a least likely case for Russian inclusion in the club. It is least likely because the elites have little incentive to offer admission. Recognizing Russia as a great power means attributing social status—and with that potential power and influence—to a historical and contemporary adversary. If the U.S. public conceives of Russia as a great power, it increases the likelihood that foreign policy officials will do the same. And if these U.S. foreign policy officials recognize Russian great power status, it increases the likelihood that other established great powers would do the same.

I also explore the assumption that clubs of world politics have distinct status orders. To do so, I compare the findings in the core case with how discourse on Russian belligerence was framed in the two shadow cases. If the type of status recognition in the UN Security Council and the G-8 differs from that in the great power club, it increases the confidence that the esteem of war depends on the status order in which it is framed.

The analysis shows that Russia, up until 2014, was represented in the U.S. public discourse as a second-tier, fallen superpower. Russia was seen as a state desperate to pursue—but ultimately destined to fall short of—great power status. Russia's annexation of Crimea drastically shifted the U.S. public discourse. Instead, it was seen as a revived empire. Russia became a state willing to shun norms of the liberal international order to resurrect the Russian and Soviet empires. These narratives laid groundwork for an account of Russia as an equal rival great power. By 2019, the narrative of a rivaling group of great powers—consisting of the United States, China, and Russia—dominated the U.S. public foreign policy discourse.

Russia's social status in the UN Security Council and the G-8 took a dis-

Germany, first gathered in 1976. The name changed to the G-8 after Russia joined the club in 1997 and reverted to the G-7 name on March 24, 2014, after Russia's membership in the group was suspended following the annexation of Crimea.

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tinctly different turn than in the great power club. In the UN Security Council, Russia's status remained unchanged because of a combination of established legal privileges and the council's joint interest in cooperation on other issues. In contrast, members of the G-8 threw Russia out of the club in 2014 because it violated the club's shared rules, values, and order.

The findings of this article have three implications for the study of status in international relations. First, the effective use of force is a central component of the status order of the great power club. While Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine was condemned and criticized within the U.S. public discourse, it was simultaneously recognized as a move that elevated its standing vis-à-vis the great powers. Second, some clubs may value war (the great power club) while others condemn it (the G-8). Thus, the often-mentioned statement that war either elevates or diminishes states' status, without referring to in which clubs the status change takes place, is logically invalid. Third, if status orders dictate whether states get status from fighting, they must also shape the type of recognition that states receive from other actions. International behavior, of which war-making is one example, affects multiple audiences who will respond differently. Incorporating analyses of social clubs' status orders is thus crucial in any attempt to understand the recognition that a state receives for its actions.

This article proceeds as follows. First, I review the literature on status and war in international relations and highlight the lack of focus on recognition. Second, I develop the theoretical concept of status orders and highlight their importance in determining states' social status. Third, I present the research design of the article. In the fourth section, I analyze the change in Russia's social status vis-à-vis the great power club after it annexed Crimea and invaded eastern Ukraine. Fifth, I compare the change in Russia's social status in the great power club with its change in the UN Security Council and the G-8. Sixth, in light of the findings, I discuss the future of Russia's status in world politics following Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine beginning in February 2022. In the final section, I sum up the article's findings and limitations as well as outline its broader implications for the study of status in international relations.

Status and War in World Politics

In the last decade, research on status in international relations emerged from the discipline's background to become a productive field of research.[11] This

11. Canonical works in this wave include Renshon, *Fighting for Status*; Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth,

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wave of research shows that states go to war because of status,[12] that they spend money to cultivate it,[13] and that they behave in an irrational manner when it is up for grabs.[14] The allure of social status stems from two observations. First, status grants actors an intrinsic good. Second, actors can reap the positive byproducts of status—visibility, influence, and voluntary deference.[15]

A large part of the status literature in international relations explores the relationship between war and status. This research agenda centers on three questions. First, scholars consider whether and to what extent perceived lack of prestige increases the likelihood of war.[16] The literature conceptualizes these status gaps as status deficits,[17] status anxiety,[18] status inconsistency,[19]

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"Reputation and Status as Motives for War"; Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, *Status in World Politics*; Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to U.S. Primacy," *International Security* 34, no. 4 (Spring 2010): 63–95, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2010.34.4.63; William C. Wohlforth, "Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War," *World Politics* 61, no. 1 (2009): 28–57, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887109000021.

12. Renshon, *Fighting for Status*; Richard Ned Lebow, "The Past and Future of War," *International Relations* 24, no. 3 (September 2010): 243–270, https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117810377277; Steven Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316856444.

13. Matthew Crandall and Ingrid Varov, "Developing Status as a Small State: Estonia's Foreign Aid Strategy," *East European Politics* 32, no. 4 (2016): 405–425; Christina Stolte, *Brazil's Africa Strategy: Role Conception and the Drive for International Status* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Deganit Paikowsky, *The Power of the Space Club* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108159883.

14. Mercer, "The Illusion of International Prestige"; Paul Beaumont, "Brexit, Retrotopia, and the Perils of Post-Colonial Delusions," *Global Affairs* 3, nos. 4–5 (2018): 379–390, https://doi.org/10.1080/23340460.2018.1478674.

15. Deborah Welch Larson, T. V. Paul, and William C. Wohlforth, "Status and World Order," in Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, eds., *Status in World Politics*, 18–19; Andrew Q. Greve and Jack S. Levy, "Power Transitions, Status Dissatisfaction, and War: The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895," *Security Studies* 27, no. 1 (2018): 8, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2017.1360078; Renshon, "Status Deficits and War," 521–522; Wohlforth et al., "Moral Authority and Status in International Relations," 2–4; Janice Bially Mattern and Ayşe Zarakol, "Hierarchies in World Politics," *International Organization* 70, no. 3 (2016): 637–638, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818316000126.

16. I use prestige and status interchangeably in this article. Scholars disagree about whether status and prestige should be treated as two distinct concepts or as synonyms. See the discussion in Reinhard Wolf, "Taking Interaction Seriously: Asymmetrical Roles and the Behavioral Foundations of Status," *European Journal of International Relations* 25, no. 4 (2019): 1186–1211, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066119837338; Dafoe, Renshon, and Huth, "Reputation and Status as Motives for War," 376; Mercer, "The Illusion of International Prestige," 136; Yuen Foong Khong, "Power as Prestige in World Politics," *International Affairs* 95, no. 1 (2019): 131, https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiy245.

17. Renshon, "Status Deficits and War."

18. Tudor A. Onea, "Between Dominance and Decline: Status Anxiety and Great Power Rivalry," *Review of International Studies* 40, no. 1 (2014): 125–152, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210512000563.

19. Hanna Smith, "Russia as a Great Power: Status Inconsistency and the Two Chechen Wars," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47, no. 3–4 (2014): 355–363, https://doi.org/10.1016/

status dissatisfaction,[20] status humiliation,[21] misrecognition,[22] and status uncertainty.[23] In short, this research shows that perceived status deficits lead to grievances. These grievances, in turn, increase the likelihood of war.

Second, scholars examine how status may influence states' decisions to go to war. This strand of research focuses on whether participation in wars can be explained by the prize of higher status. This research shows how the carrot of potentially increasing or preserving status leads states to start conflicts,[24] legitimize international interventions,[25] participate in military coalitions,[26] and engage in great power conflicts.[27]

A third question is how and to what extent military capabilities can act as status symbols. Status symbols are things, attributes, privileges, or reputations that actors acquire, embody, or practice to signal their preferred social status. Within this strand of research, states acquire military objects such as

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j.postcomstud.2014.09.005; Maria Raquel Freire, "USSR/Russian Federation's Major Power Status Inconsistencies," in Volgy et al., *Major Powers and the Quest for Status in International Politics*, 55–75, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230119314_3.

20. Greve and Levy, "Power Transitions, Status Dissatisfaction, and War"; Wohlforth, "Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War."

21. Barnhart, "Humiliation and Third-Party Aggression."

22. Michelle Murray, *The Struggle for Recognition in International Relations: Status, Revisionism, and Rising Powers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/97801908 78900.001.0001.

23. William C. Wohlforth, "Status Dilemmas and Interstate Conflict," in Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, eds., *Status in World Politics*, 113–141.

24. Jonathan Renshon, "Losing Face and Sinking Costs: Experimental Evidence on the Judgment of Political and Military Leaders," *International Organization* 69, no. 3 (2015): 659–695, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818315000107; Nicholas Sambanis, Stergios Skaperdas, and William C. Wohlforth, "Nation-Building through War," *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 2 (2015): 279–296, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000088; Emilie M. Hafner-Burton and Alexander H. Montgomery, "Power Positions: International Organizations, Social Networks, and Conflict," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 1 (2006): 3–27, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002705281669.

25. Courtney J. Fung, *China and Intervention at the UN Security Council: Reconciling Status* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198842743.001.0001; Matthieu Grandpierron, "Preserving 'Great Power Status': The Complex Case of the British Intervention in the Falklands (1982)," *Croatian International Relations Review* 23, no. 79 (2017): 127–156, https://doi.org/10.1515/cirr-2017-0017.

26. Pedersen, "Bandwagon for Status"; Rasmus Brun Pedersen and Yf Reykers, "Show Them the Flag: Status Ambitions and Recognition in Small State Coalition Warfare," *European Security* 29, no. 1 (2020): 16–32, https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2019.1678147; Jakobsen, Ringsmose, and Saxi, "Prestige-Seeking Small States"; Nina Græger, "From 'Forces for Good' to 'Forces for Status'? Small State Military Status Seeking," in Benjamin de Carvalho and Iver B. Neumann, eds., *Small State Status Seeking: Norway's Quest for International Standing* (London: Routledge, 2015), 86–107, https://doi.org/10.4324_9781315758817-6.

27. Hironaka, *Tokens of Power*; Richard Ned Lebow, *Why Nations Fight: Past and Future Motives for War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511 761485.

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nuclear weapons,[28] aircraft carriers,[29] combat aircrafts,[30] and naval fleets[31] to signal high social status in world politics.

To be sure, these questions have generated valuable insights into understanding how war works to adjust states' status. Yet, the research on war and status has yet to explore whether belligerents get status from fighting. The major exception is Jonathan Renshon's scholarship. Renshon uses the number of hosted diplomatic missions as a proxy measure for status recognition to show that states gain status from fighting regardless of whether they win or lose.[32] But Steven Ward has identified key errors in Renshon's research design.[33] Ward labels Renshon's finding that initiating and especially winning a war improves a state's status as a "modeling error." When this error is corrected, the positive status effect of initiating wars disappears, and the status effect of winning a war is weakened.[34]

Moreover, the proxy measure is problematic.[35] The network centrality meas-

28. Scott D. Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb," *International Security* 21, no. 3 (Winter 1996/97): 54–86, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.21.3.54; Susan Turner Haynes, "The Power of Prestige: Explaining China's Nuclear Weapons Decisions," *Asian Security* 16, no. 1 (2020), 35–52, https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2018.1472581; Barry O'Neill, "Nuclear Weapons and National Prestige," Cowles Foundation Discussion Paper no. 1560, *SSRN*, 2006, https://ssrn.com/abstract=887333; Andrew Prosser, "Much Ado about Nothing? Status Ambitions and Iranian Nuclear Reversal," *Strategic Studies Quarterly* 11, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 26–81.
29. Gilady, *The Price of Prestige*, 55–89.
30. Græger, "From 'Forces for Good' to 'Forces for Status'?"
31. Michelle Murray, "Identity, Insecurity, and Great Power Politics: The Tragedy of German Naval Ambition before the First World War," *Security Studies* 19, no. 4 (2010): 656–688, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2010.524081; Xiaoyu Pu and Randall L. Schweller, "Status Signaling, Multiple Audiences, and China's Blue-Water Naval Ambition," in Paul, Larson, and Wohlforth, eds., *Status in World Politics*, 141–162.
32. Renshon, "Status Deficits and War"; Renshon, *Fighting for Status*. Another exception is Jonathan Mercer's analysis of British prestige. Building on a similar critique of the diplomatic exchange measure, Mercer conducts a historical case study of the 1899–1902 South African War to test hypotheses of perceived increased British prestige. Mercer suggests that prestige is illusory in international politics. He develops a hard case for his argument that prestige is not attributed by adversaries by merit. If the British allies do not bestow prestige upon Britain in victory, Mercer argues, then other states—including adversaries—are also unlikely to recognize it. See Mercer, "The Illusion of International Prestige," 144–145.
33. Steven Ward, "Status from Fighting? Reassessing the Relationship between Conflict Involvement and Diplomatic Rank," *International Interactions* 46, no. 2 (2020): 274–290, https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2020.1708350.
34. Ibid., 275.
35. For work that uses the diplomatic representation measure to investigate the relationship between war and status, see Thomas J. Volgy and Stacey Mayhall, "Status Inconsistency and International War: Exploring the Effects of Systemic Change," *International Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (1995): 67–84, https://doi.org/10.2307/2600724; Greve and Levy, "Power Transitions, Status Dissatisfaction, and War"; Zeev Maoz et al., "Structural Equivalence and International Conflict: A So-

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ure assumes that if state A establishes an embassy in state B, it represents a "vote" for state B's importance in the world. This measure is noisy. Hosting international organizations, receiving aid, colonial ties, and geographic proximity can raise the diplomatic rank of states. Yet these factors are not indicators of high status.[36] Moreover, high-status states should in theory count most in determining the status of recipient states. Hosting a Chinese embassy is a stronger signal of prestige than hosting a Norwegian embassy. But the wealthier and more powerful states have the resources to establish embassies in virtually every corner of the world. Thus, an embassy from a high-status state, such as the United States or China, in practice carries little to no information about the hosting state's prestige. Instead, embassies from low-status states are most informative in that measure and ultimately dictate most states' positions in the international status hierarchy.[37]

Scholars are right to critique the diplomatic representation proxy measure. But the field has yet to develop an equally sophisticated approach to capture status recognition. Most scholars instead focus on showing that states and leaders go to war because they want higher status. In turn, some hint that participation may increase a state's status.[38] To be sure, this line of research has been useful for showing that status is an important factor in understanding states' motivations for war. Yet, it has not shown whether those aspirations come to fruition.

Another strand of research explicitly focuses on the social consequences of fighting. Like status, reputations are formed by others' beliefs that an actor has

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cial Networks Analysis," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 5 (2006): 664–689, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002706291053. For work that uses the diplomatic measure for other research purposes, see Marina G. Duque, "Recognizing International Status: A Relational Approach," *International Studies Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (2018): 577–592, https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqy001; Pål Røren, "On the Social Status of the European Union," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 58, no. 3 (2020): 706–722, https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12962.

36. Mercer, "The Illusion of International Prestige," 138; Pål Røren and Paul Beaumont, "Grading Greatness: Evaluating the Status Performance of the BRICS," *Third World Quarterly* 40, no. 3 (2019): 433–434, https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1535892; Steven Ward, "How Not to Measure Status" (unpublished manuscript, 2014).

37. Ward, "How Not to Measure Status."

38. For instance, Peter Viggo Jakobsen, Jens Ringsmose, and Håkon Lunde Saxi explicitly suggest that while it is "intensely debated in Denmark whether Denmark's military support for the United States in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Iraq/Syria has paid off or not," their article is only "seeking to determine whether Danish decision-makers measure success in a way that signals interest in generating prestige and goodwill in NATO, London, Paris, and Washington." See Jakobsen, Ringsmose, and Saxi, "Prestige-Seeking Small States," 267. See also Græger, "From 'Forces for Good' to 'Forces for Status'?," 92; Reinhard Wolf, "Status Fixations, the Need for 'Firmness,' and Decisions for War," *International Relations* 28, no. 2 (2014): 256, 259–260.

a certain trait.[39] Although the conceptual distinction between status and reputation is not that clear, these concepts should nonetheless remain analytically separated for two reasons. First, status is autotelic, reputation is not. In other words, it is meaningless to seek reputation as a goal in itself. Analytically, reputation only comes into existence when it influences perceptions that an actor is capable and willing to fight.[40] Social status could also be identified via its effects (for instance via voluntary deference). But this would eliminate those cases in which actors have status, but its effects are equivocal. It would also not pick up the social process of turning a feat, quality, or behavior into recognition and status.

Second, reputations are easier to manipulate than status.[41] States can gain a reputation for something without affecting others' reputations. In contrast, status is positional and competitive. If everyone has high status, no one does.[42] Consequently, peers have an incentive not to recognize actors for their status-seeking if the status quo is preferable to them. This makes status stickier than reputations.[43] Thus, research on reputation can assume that a state strengthens its reputation for resolve if it commits more than before. The same logic cannot be applied to status. But reputations still affect actors' social status. Status is influenced by a host of factors, actions, symbols, traits, and, indeed, reputations.[44] As the next sections illustrate, reputations for toughness or ruthlessness can help actors join a prestigious club or navigate a particular status hierarchy.

To sum up, the lack of research exploring the recognitional side of belligerence—with an eye for its spatial, temporal, and social contingencies—is puzzling. To fill this gap, I develop a theoretical framework and research design that underline the importance of different status orders in determining how and whether war leads to higher status.

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39. Renshon, "Status Deficits and War," 522.
40. See Robert Jervis, Keren Yarhi-Milo, and Don Casler, "Redefining the Debate over Reputation and Credibility in International Security: Promises and Limits of New Scholarship," *World Politics* 73, no. 1 (2021): 182–189, https://doi.org 10.1017/S0043887120000246. An illustrative example of this kind of operationalization can be found in Alex Weisiger and Keren Yarhi-Milo, "Revisiting Reputation: How Past Actions Matter in International Politics," *International Organization* 69, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 482–483, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818314000393.
41. Jervis, Yarhi-Milo, and Casler, "Redefining the Debate over Reputation and Credibility," 187–188; Renshon, "Status Deficits and War," 522.
42. Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth, "Status and World Order," 9.
43. The size of the audience also affects this stickiness. It is easier to manipulate reputation than status because fewer actors need to be convinced. Renshon, *Fighting for Status*, 118.
44. Ahsan I. Butt, "Why Did the United States Invade Iraq in 2003?," *Security Studies* 28, no. 2 (2019): 264–268, https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2019.1551567; Renshon, *Fighting for Status*, 588.

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Status Orders and War

To study the effects of going to war on an actor's social status, it is important to understand whose opinion matters. Indeed, if states fight wars for status, they rarely seek recognition from the "international society." Instead, states seek and receive status from different substrata of world politics, which I call the "social clubs" of world politics.[45] These clubs can be international organizations or institutions, informal and formal groups, cliques, categories, or communities. Each club has its own collective social boundaries of exclusion and inclusion that confer status on its members, and each club contains one or more status orders.[46]

Clubs' status orders determine whether war—or indeed any other form of action, practice, or item—merits recognition or not. I define these orders as sets of shared, and often tacit, assumptions by the club members about what things, practices, or reputations count as effective symbols for determining actors' social status.[47] Given that most states participate in a range of clubs in world politics, they also adhere to an array of status orders.[48] Thus, to answer the main question of whether war increases a state's status, it is necessary to first understand how the status orders of clubs in world politics are constructed and how they influence the distribution of prestige within them.

Status orders condition actors in two ways: they define what states need to enter a club, and they dictate what club members think of as prestigious. First, to join a club, prospective members must show that they have the correct status. In the G-20, for instance, member states should be of "systemic significance" for the financial system.[49] Thus, wealth, population, regional im-

45. Naylor, *Social Closure and International Society*; Larson, "Status Competition among Russia, India, and China in Clubs"; Deborah Welch Larson, "New Perspectives on Rising Powers and Global Governance: Status and Clubs," *International Studies Review* 20, no. 2 (2018): 247–254, https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viy039; Paikowsky, *The Power of the Space Club*; Gilady, *The Price of Prestige*; Wohlforth et al., "Moral Authority and Status in International Relations."

46. Naylor, *Social Closure and International Society*, 7; Larson, "New Perspectives on Rising Powers," 249–251; Røren, "On the Social Status of the European Union," 710–711.

47. This definition of status orders builds on how "orders" in international relations normally are conceptualized: as the continuous effort to develop and sustain "relatively stable expectations and shared norms to govern relations among actors." Michael N. Barnett, "Sovereignty, Nationalism, and Regional Order in the Arab States System," *International Organization* 49, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 486, https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081830003335X.

48. Gilady, *The Price of Prestige*, 42–43; Naylor, *Social Closure and International Society*, 4; Jones, "Constructing Great Powers," 600–605.

49. Lora Anne Viola, "'Systemically Significant States': Tracing the G20's Membership Category as a New Logic of Stratification in the International System," *Global Society* 34, no. 3 (2020): 1–18, https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2020.1739630.

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pact, and diplomatic maneuverability are the symbols of the club's status order deemed necessary to enter.[50]

Second, once in the club, the status order dictates how members may reach the club's status echelons. In the words of Max Weber, status orders are "stratification in terms of 'honor' and of styles of life peculiar to status groups," meaning that they define the relevant components of confined status hierarchies.[51] For example, diplomatic practices in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the UN tend to "generate notions of competence or mastery," which in turn produce patterns of social stratification among diplomats.[52] Thus, members need to develop competence, acquire symbols, or behave in certain ways that fit with the club's status order to move up its status hierarchy.[53]

The criteria for entry and ascent often overlap. For instance, to join the great and superpower club during the Cold War, states needed to have nuclear weapons.[54] By the early 1950s, the United States and the Soviet Union had enough warheads for nuclear deterrence.[55] Nonetheless, both kept producing more weapons. At their respective peaks, the two superpowers' nuclear arsenals were 300 to 400 times bigger than what they needed to fend off any adversary.[56] Thus, the goal for these states was not to deter the other club member; rather, it was to become recognized as number one in that club.[57]

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50. Naylor, *Social Closure and International Society*, 38; Juha Jokela, "The High-Level Representation of the EU in the G20," *Studia Diplomatica* 65, no. 4 (2012): 23. For the role of status symbols in enabling club entry, see Gilady, *The Price of Prestige*, 33–54.
51. Max Weber, Hans H. Gerth, and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 192; Røren and Beaumont, "Grading Greatness," 432–433.
52. Vincent Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 258, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316534564.
53. Gilady, *The Price of Prestige*; Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders*.
54. Jo L. Husbands, "The Prestige States," in William H. Kincade and Christoph Bertram, eds., *Nuclear Proliferation in the 1980s: Perspectives and Proposals* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1982), 112–136, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-06163-1_5; Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?," 78. Of course, nuclear weapons are not sufficient for great power status. See Richard Ned Lebow, *National Identities and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 85–87, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316710982.
55. Joshua M. Pearce and David C. Denkenberger, "A National Pragmatic Safety Limit for Nuclear Weapon Quantities," *Safety* 4, no. 2 (2018): 25, https://doi.org/10.3390/safety4020025.
56. The United States had over 30,000 warheads at its Cold War height in 1966, whereas the Soviet arsenal reached a peak of about 45,000 warheads in 1986. The minimum number of warheads that a state needs for deterrence purposes is 100. See Pearce and Denkenberger, "A National Pragmatic Safety Limit."
57. Nicholas Greenwood Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and Interna-*

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Status orders are important to incorporate into analyses of status and war because waging wars may not only raise or decrease a state's social status. Waging war might elevate a state's positional status in club A. But it might simultaneously lead to no status changes in club B. And it might even decrease the state's status in club C.[58] For instance, Canada's status in NATO increased when it used its aircraft to deploy U.S. nukes. But its standing in the Non-Aligned Movement dropped for the same reasons.[59] Similarly, Sweden abandoned its aspirations to join the nuclear weapons club in the 1960s in order to remain in the middle power club.[60]

Status orders are social constructs. To be sure, over time they become internalized, reified, and harder to "explain away."[61] But they remain social constructs. An analytical focus centered on status orders thus offers agency to actors both inside and outside clubs. Actors have the agency to maintain or change what is considered prestigious. Members can attempt to change the status order if they see their competitors emulating them. For example, the entry criteria for the so-called "Family of Civilised States" shifted between material power and positivist international law.[62] States in the club's status

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tional Relations (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 282. Also see Paul Beaumont, "The Grammar of Status Competition: International Hierarchies as Domestic Practice" (PhD diss., Norwegian University of Life Sciences, 2020); Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth, "Status and World Order," 7.

58. In this respect, status order overlaps with Alexander Wendt's classic definition of "culture" as being shared ideas that constitute the interactions among actors in an anarchic system. See Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 140–142, 249, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511612183. Indeed, as I show below, war-waging is a component of the status order of the great power club. In contrast, the status order of the Nordic club contains no such elements; rather, friendship, trust, and amity have become embedded within the status dynamics of this club. See Røren, "Status Seeking in the Friendly Nordic Neighborhood."

59. O'Neill, "Nuclear Weapons and National Prestige," 19.

60. Prosser, "Much Ado about Nothing?," 35.

61. Iver B. Neumann, "Discourse Analysis," in Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash, eds., *Qualitative Methods in International Relations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 74, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230584129_5; Iver B. Neumann, *Uses of the Other: "The East" in European Identity Formation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 148; John M. Hobson and J. C. Sharman, "The Enduring Place of Hierarchy in World Politics: Tracing the Social Logics of Hierarchy and Political Change," *European Journal of International Relations* 11, no. 1 (2005): 87, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066105050137; Evelyn Goh, "Hierarchy and the Role of the United States in the East Asian Security Order," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 8, no. 3 (2008): 353–377, https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcn011.

62. Naylor, *Social Closure and International Society*, 9, 60–61.

echelons could "shift the goal posts" so that ascendant states remained excluded if they only fulfilled one of these sets of criteria.[63]

In sum, the question of whether war leads to status cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. War may be prestigious in one club and stigmatized in another. The meaning of war as a practice or symbol of status depends on the status order in which it is interpreted. Thus, scholars and practitioners should not ask whether war either increased or decreased a state's social status. Instead, they ought to ask: Where did the war lead to adjustments in status? And why did those shifts happen in those clubs? The next section builds a research design to answer these questions.

Research Design

I first show how discourse analysis offers a useful method to analyze the status order in social clubs. Second, I outline the article's case selection strategy, which consists of a least likely single case study of the great power club complemented by two ancillary shadow case studies of the UN Security Council and the G-8. Third, I describe the process of operationalization in each case. Fourth, I detail the empirical data used in the analysis and the procedure for gathering, systematizing, and analyzing the collected data.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Discourse is a battle for truth.[64] Hence, discourse analysis is a method to understand clashes between different versions of truth.[65] Discourse analysts do not deny the existence of an objective reality.[66] But they suggest that objective reality is never directly available. Rather, it needs to be interpreted. And this constant interpretation of realities leads to changing the ways in which people view the world. Hence, discourse can function as a tool to legitimize, politi-

63. Ibid., 61; also see Tomoko T. Okagaki, *The Logic of Conformity: Japan's Entry into International Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 37–41, https://doi.org/10.1177/0020702014539239.

64. Jens Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511586385; John Todd, *The UK's Relationship with Europe: Struggling over Sovereignty* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 10, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-33669-5.

65. Bartelson, *A Genealogy of Sovereignty*, 4.

66. Kevin C. Dunn, "Historical Representations," in Klotz and Prakash, eds., *Qualitative Methods in International Relations*, 79, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230584129_6.

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cize, or securitize certain phenomena over others.[67] It turns migrants into security threats,[68] freedom fighters into terrorists,[69] and converts superior weapons into symbols of stigma.[70]

These interpretive insights have consequences for this article. Crucially, whether war is considered prestigious in a given status order depends on the sociocultural context in which it is interpreted. From a discursive point of view, the established truth that wars generate prestige rests on salient and dominant discursive representations. In short, fighting wars only becomes esteemed if this position is reflected in the dominant representations of the discourse. The prestige of war depends on the rhetorical labor that goes into constructing it as such.[71]

I use discourse analysis to explore the components of status orders in three clubs: the great power club, the UN Security Council, and the G-8. In each case—and particularly in the great power club—I focus on identifying the key representations of the discourse. Representations here refer to positions within a particular discourse; that is, a specific line of argument or a particular understanding of a given phenomenon.[72] The task of the discourse analyst is to map these truth claims, and to determine the dominant and alternative representations within a discourse. Investigating these representations offers a window into the status orders of these social clubs. For example, the section below analyzes how high-status clubs discursively responded to Russian war-making in Ukraine. The dominant representation of Russia's social status after

67. Richard Price, "A Genealogy of the Chemical Weapons Taboo," *International Organization* 49, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 87, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818300001582.
68. Jef Huysmans, "The European Union and the Securitization of Migration," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 38, no. 5 (2000): 751–777, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00263.
69. Paul Beaumont, *Performing Nuclear Weapons: How Britain Made Trident Make Sense* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 58–59, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-67576-9.
70. Price, "A Genealogy of the Chemical Weapons Taboo"; Nina Tannenwald, "Stigmatizing the Bomb: Origins of the Nuclear Taboo," *International Security* 29, no. 4 (Spring 2005): 5–49, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec.2005.29.4.5. For other examples from international relations on how discourse structures how people understand reality, see David Campbell, *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); Anders Sundstøl Bjørkheim, "One Terrorism to Rule Them All: Turkey, the PKK and Global Terrorism Discourse," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 23 (2020): 487–510, https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-018-00167-z; Ronald R. Krebs and Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, "Twisting Tongues and Twisting Arms: The Power of Political Rhetoric," *European Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 1 (2007): 35–66, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066107074284.
71. Kevin C. Dunn and Iver B. Neumann, *Undertaking Discourse Analysis for Social Research* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.7106945.
72. Neumann, "Discourse Analysis," 61–62; Dunn, "Historical Representations," 79.

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the fighting had started will indicate how war features in each status order. Russia's war against Ukraine could propel Moscow discursively up or down the status hierarchy of a club. If so, it could be argued that war is either valued or stigmatized in this club.

Discourse thus fulfills two important functions in this article. First, discourse has productive power. The dominant representations of the discourse shape status orders and thus what actors consider prestigious within them.[73] For example, whether a political activist is considered a freedom fighter or a terrorist is less about individuals' behaviors and more about the discourse surrounding them.[74] Likewise, whether war is deemed prestigious is less about its inherent destructive force and more about the discourse surrounding the fighting. Second, discourse offers an apt empirical window into status order and the status recognition of states in world politics. In contrast to other methods, such as network analysis using diplomatic exchange data, discourse analysis does not require proxies to trace the status recognition of states. Instead, discourse analysis focuses on where those status claims and concessions are actually taking place.

case selection

To understand whether fighting leads to status in world politics, I first explore how status orders affect the relationship between social status and war. To do so, the core case investigates how Russia's status vis-à-vis the great power club changed after it annexed Crimea and invaded eastern Ukraine. Second, I use two shadow cases to explore the assumption that clubs and world politics have distinct status orders. I compare the findings from the core case with how Russian war-making was received in the UN Security Council and in the G-8.

I first analyze the kind of discursive recognition that Russia received in U.S. public discourse. This approach warrants further explanation. To be sure, all members of a club act as gatekeepers for prospective candidates. Furthermore, the great powers also depend on the recognition of non–great powers to sustain their legitimacy and privileges in world politics.[75] Yet, there are two rea-

73. Michael J. Shapiro, "Textualizing Global Politics," in James Der Derian and Michael J. Shapiro, *International/Intertextual Relations: Postmodern Readings of World Politics* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1989), 14.
74. Beaumont, *Performing Nuclear Weapons*, 58–59.
75. Andrew Hurrell, "Hegemony, Liberalism, and Global Order: What Space for Would-Be Great Powers?," *International Affairs* 82, no. 1 (2006): 6; Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 196, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-24028-9; Jones, "Constructing Great Powers."

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sons why focusing only on the United States' discursive recognition is a sound case selection strategy.

First, since the end of World War II, the United States has been the most ideologically, militarily, and economically dominant state in world politics.[76] This dominance does not mean that the United States dictates whether an outsider should become a member. But given the United States' position and its overall recognition by the academic community as a peak great power, U.S. recognition is a necessary condition for great power status in contemporary world politics.[77] Recognition from the United States thus serves as a litmus test for great power status.

Second, discursive recognition of Russia's belligerence by the U.S. public and foreign policy elites represents a least likely case for Russian inclusion in the club. It is a hard case because the elites have little incentive to recognize Russia as a great power, given that doing so means ascribing social status—and with that potential power and influence—to a historical and contemporary adversary. Moreover, status is a scarce good. Gatekeepers of the most prestigious club in world politics—the great powers—have a strong incentive to keep potential entrants outside.[78] Thus, if Russia is conceived of in the U.S. public discourse as a great power, it means foreign policy officials will likely do the same. If these U.S. foreign policy officials recognize Russian great power status, it increases the likelihood that other established great powers would do the same.

In the second part of the analysis, I explore the assumption that clubs in world politics have distinct status orders. I analyze the recognition attributed to Russia in the UN Security Council and the G-8 after the annexation and invasion. These clubs represent the functional expression of great power status.[79] The focus of the analysis is on the status order of the great power club. The UN

76. David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 82–92.
77. See Goh, "Hierarchy and the Role of the United States," 360–361. I am unaware of any scholarly work that places the United States in any clubs below the great powers in the period analyzed in this article.
78. See Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth, "Status and World Order," 9; Greve and Levy, "Power Transitions, Status Dissatisfaction, and War," 8; Renshon, "Status Deficits and War," 520; Wohlforth, "Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War," 30.
79. Shogo Suzuki, "Seeking 'Legitimate' Great Power Status in Post–Cold War International Society: China's and Japan's Participation in UNPKO," *International Relations* 22, no. 1 (2008): 48, https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117807087242; Ian Clark and Christian Reus-Smit, "Liberal Internationalism, the Practice of Special Responsibilities and Evolving Politics of the Security Council," *International Politics* 50 (2013): 45, https://doi.org/10.1057/ip.2012.27; Larson, "New Perspectives on Rising Powers," 250–251.

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Security Council and the G-8 offer useful comparisons to the status order of the great power club. Crucially, if discursive recognition of Russia is similar in both these clubs and the great power club, it weakens my argument that clubs have distinct status orders. Conversely, if these clubs' discursive recognition of Russia differs from that of the great power club, it strengthens the argument that clubs have distinct status orders.

The article's research design is not intended to provide a sole explanation for status change within these clubs. There are many paths to prestige, after all, and covering them all is beyond the scope of this article. Thus, while I make a concerted effort to understand how Russia's status changed, my analysis is not an exhaustive explanation.

OPERATIONALIZATION OF INDICATORS

The distinct organizational structures in the three clubs means that the type of discourse differs in each case. Members of socially distant clubs, like the great power club, rarely meet. They do not have a fixed group of representatives, and their duties and privileges are not inscribed in statutes enforced by a protocol department. Thus, the discourse produced on the club's status order is decentralized.[80] Conversely, members of socially proximate clubs like the UN Security Council have close and regular interaction with one other. Here, the discourse is centralized and structured in and around representatives of the council.[81] In clubs that are on a spectrum between distant or proximate, such as the G-8, the status order of the club is upheld by a mixture of centralized and decentralized discourse.

For the great power club, I rely on editorials and op-eds on great power status in five major newspapers in the United States. This bottom-up approach challenges some mainstream assumptions in the literature. Most approaches assume that state leaders are vested with the authority to bestow recognition upon other states. Moreover, leaders base their decisions to recognize other states on their first-hand perceptions of such states.[82] This conventional approach obscures the process leading up to whether leaders decide to recognize

80. Wohlforth et al., "Moral Authority and Status in International Relations," 531; Naylor, *Social Closure and International Society*, 64–67; Pål Røren and Anders Wivel, "King in the North: Evaluating the Status Recognition and Performance of the Scandinavian Countries," *International Relations*, published ahead of print, 2022, 5–6, https://doi.org/10.1177/00471178221110135.
81. Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders*; Vincent Pouliot, "Diplomats as Permanent Representatives: The Practical Logics of the Multilateral Pecking Order," *International Journal* 66, no. 3 (2011): 543–561, https://doi.org/10.1177/002070201106600302.
82. Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth, "Status and World Order," 8. For a multifaceted, broader ap-

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or not to recognize another state. Crucially, this decision—like any other foreign policy decision—is a complex process. It is the result of international pressures and dynamics as well as domestic concerns and priorities.[83] To be sure, the president of the United States has considerable authority to bestow recognition upon another state. Yet, the decision depends on the broader discourses found within and outside the United States.

Opinion pieces offer a window into those discourses that reflect, condition, and enable what foreign policy practitioners can say and do. Of course, editorials and op-eds are often written by political and cultural elites who are sometimes out of touch with the broader public opinion. Nevertheless, I rely on newspaper opinions because they offer insights into the discourse that became accepted as common sense. These editorials and op-eds reflect dominant narratives, and as such they "represent the boundaries of legitimate American views of the global scene."[84] It is still true that foreign policy practitioners can bestow recognition on other states. But the broader public discursive space conditions what is socially possible to say or do.[85]

To be clear, this kind of discourse analysis cannot predict that foreign policy leaders will or will not recognize Russia or any other nation as a great power. In fact, most discourse analysts are inherently skeptical of predictions. Indeed, as Kenneth Waltz famously claims, structural theories cannot explain "why state X made a certain move last Tuesday."[86] Structural approaches are never deterministic. Yet, in both neorealism and discourse analysis, structure (whether material or discursive) can push or discourage certain behaviors.

Although I do not offer predictions, I do show that the public discourse is likely to have a strong effect on how U.S. leaders and practitioners speak and act in the world. Even though it is physically possible for practitioners of the

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proach, see Ward, *Status and the Challenge of Rising Powers*, chap. 2; Beaumont, "Brexit, Retrotopia and the Perils of Post-Colonial Delusions."

83. Anne L. Clunan, "Historical Aspirations and the Domestic Politics of Russia's Pursuit of International Status," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47, nos. 3–4 (2014): 281–290, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2014.09.002; Rebecca Adler-Nissen, "Are We 'Lazy Greeks' or 'Nazi Germans'?" in Ayşe Zarakol, ed., *Hierarchies in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 198–218, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108241588.011; Joshua Freedman, "Back of the Queue: Brexit, Status Loss, and the Politics of Backlash," *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 22, no. 4 (2020): 635, https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148120949824.

84. Ronald R. Krebs, "How Dominant Narratives Rise and Fall: Military Conflict, Politics, and the Cold War Consensus," *International Organization* 69, no. 4 (2015): 816, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818315000181.

85. Ibid.; Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *Civilizing the Enemy: German Reconstruction and the Invention of the West* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.155507.

86. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), 171.

United States to utter "Malta is a great power," such a statement has no root in the rhetorical truism about what great powers are.[87] Thus, someone who claims that Malta is a great power will face ridicule. The claim is socially impossible. Hence, it is unlikely that leaders or practitioners will ever label Malta a great power. In other words, these commonsense discursive representations found in the broader public discourse "set the boundaries of what actors can legitimately articulate in public, what they can collectively (though not individually) imagine, and what is politically possible."[88]

Instead of covering all U.S. narratives about Russia in my analysis of the great power club, I show how the U.S. public discourse makes sense of Russian belligerence. Moreover, I illustrate how this sense-making relates to the status order of the great power club. This discourse in turn constrains and reflects the possible ways in which foreign policy practitioners can interact with Russia and the great power club and its status order.[89]

For the two shadow cases, I collected and analyzed a different type of discourse. For the socially proximate UN Security Council, I collected and analyzed two types of data among the permanent representatives to showcase the club's status order. First, I collected transcripts of official open council meetings between ambassadors and looked for statements that indicated a rise or decrease in Russian status because of its actions in Ukraine. Second, I conducted interviews with former and current ambassadors and diplomats to the UN or the UN Security Council. The aim for the interviews was to understand the informal discourse about Russia's actions among permanent representatives and how it aligned with the formal discourse. The second shadow case, the G-8, is neither a socially distant club nor a socially proximate one. Although the membership composition and rules of the club are not as firm as in the UN Security Council, they are not as loose as in the great power club. For this club, the leaders' discourse and statements about the Russian annexation and invasion were most unequivocal before, during, and after planned summits.

87. Krebs and Jackson, "Twisting Tongues and Twisting Arms," 45.
88. Krebs, "How Dominant Narratives Rise and Fall," 813; Jennifer Milliken, "The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods," *European Journal of International Relations* 5, no. 2 (1999): 237, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066199005002003.
89. Iver B. Neumann, "Returning Practice to the Linguistic Turn: The Case of Diplomacy," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 31, no. 3 (2002): 630–631, https://doi.org/10.1177/03058298020310031201.

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DATA COLLECTION

To understand how U.S. public discourse framed Russian belligerence, I rely on op-eds and editorials from 2010 to 2019 in five newspapers: the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post*. I used three criteria to select these newspapers. First, their political inclinations are spread across the political spectrum.[90] Second, these newspapers are among the ten outlets with the largest circulations in the United States. Third, the sampled newspapers feature long-standing, reputable foreign policy opinion sections.

Drawing on the academic literature on great powers, I developed a list of terms used to describe overlapping categories of the great power club.[91] I searched the ProQuest database of U.S. major dailies from January 1, 2010, to July 15, 2019, to construct my corpus.[92] This initial search yielded 11,158 editorials and op-eds.[93] I screened each piece and completely read those that were relevant for the topic.[94] The total study sample was 544 opinion pieces. I then coded each piece using the following four criteria: (1) which club or group it referred to; (2) the time reference;[95] (3) whether Russia was positively or negatively compared with the club; and (4) which other states were associated with the club. I used this coded material to get an overview of the discourse and to understand which representation was dominant at a given time. I then used this overview to map and layer the discursive representation of Russia's status vis-à-vis the great power club.

For the first shadow case, the UN Security Council, I gathered and analyzed

90. See Ceren Budak, Sharad Goel, and Justin M. Rao, "Fair and Balanced? Quantifying Media Bias through Crowdsourced Content Analysis," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80, no. S1 (2016): 250–271, https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfw007.
91. These categories include the singular, plural, and other relevant conjugations of the root terms: great power, superpower, major power, big country, big power, major country, major state, major nation, large power, emerging power, emerging state, emerging nation, emerging country, hegemon, middle power, regional power, rising power, rising country, rising states, global power, empire, world power, powerful nation, powerful country, powerful state, hyperpower, leading power, leading country, and leading state.
92. U.S. Major Dailies, ProQuest, https://www.proquest.com/products-services/US-Major-Dailies.html.
93. These articles are from the following newspapers: the *Chicago Tribune* (8 percent), the *Los Angeles Times* (9 percent), the *New York Times* (25 percent), the *Wall Street Journal* (24 percent), and the *Washington Post* (34 percent).
94. For instance, hundreds of omitted opinion pieces cite "empire," "superpowers," or "major state" but are actually referring to the Empire State Building, Wonder Woman, and Texas, respectively.
95. For example, time reference indicates whether Russia was referred to as a "former great power" (past), "a great power" (contemporary), or a "potential great power" (future).

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twenty-nine verbatim transcripts of the open council meetings on Ukraine and Crimea from 2014 to 2019. I put special emphasis on the fifteen meetings held in 2014. Next, using snowball sampling, I conducted a total of six in-depth interviews with current and former ambassadors and diplomats to the UN Security Council or the UN. In the analysis I refer to all interviewees as "diplomats" because they preferred to remain anonymous.

For the second shadow case, the G-8, I conducted a focused newspaper search in LexisNexis on Russia and each of the G-8 members and their representatives. The aim was to capture the reactions coming from leaders and top foreign policy practitioners inside the club. I conducted the search from 2013 to 2020 to capture the immediate reaction to the Russian annexation and invasion, as well as President Donald Trump's attempts to re-include Russia to the G-7 summits.

In the rest of this article, I put this research design to work. First, I analyze the discursive representations of Russia's standing vis-à-vis the great power club according to U.S. newspaper opinion articles. Second, I analyze the immediate and long-term discursive reactions from the UN Security Council and the G-8 following the Russian war-making in Ukraine.

The Belligerent Bear and the Club of Great Powers

On February 23, 2014, the Kremlin-supported Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych was overthrown by the Ukrainian Parliament after weeks of public protest in Kiev. In the midst of the Ukrainian crisis, Russian special forces occupied Crimea, claiming that it protected Russia's access to the Black Sea. The Russian forces seized control of the Crimean legislature and installed a pro-Russian prime minister. On March 11, the Supreme Council of Crimea and the Sevastopol City Council declared independence from Ukraine. Five days later, the region held a referendum to join the Russian Federation.

Russia also stirred political protest movements in eastern Ukraine. From February to May of 2014, the movement became a violent conflict between pro-Russian separatists backed by Moscow and the Ukrainian Army. In a replay of the Crimean annexation, pro-Russian militia overtook government buildings across eastern Ukraine. Separatists in Luhansk and Donetsk declared their independence from Ukraine in May.

Two representations dominated the U.S. public discourse on Russia's status leading up to the Crimean annexation and invasion of eastern Ukraine. The first representation centered on Russia's lost superpower status. This represen-

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tation focused on the sharp temporal divide between the former communist superpower and the current disgruntled Russian regional power. Commentators said that the loss of wealth, population, and power meant that President Vladimir Putin's wish to regain status would prove futile.[96] "Stripped of its possessions," one commentator noted, "the Soviet Empire has been rolled back and has morphed into a Russia with a wounded ego."[97] The representation described a broken state spearheaded by a leader desperately clinging to the hope of restoring Russia's former glory. For example, commentators said that the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) served to boost Russia's vanity. Russia could use it "to bolster its withered status as a superpower," said a *Washington Post* editorial.[98] Likewise, columnist George Will argued that the treaty benefited Russia's need for "psychotherapy," given that it "longs to be treated as what it no longer is, a superpower."[99] Ilan Bernan called the New START "an exercise in arms control as psychiatry" for a Russia that "still suffers from an acute post-imperial hangover."[100] Russia was ridiculed as a "pretend post-Soviet Superpower"[101] and a state "in pursuit of a superpower status that [it] has irretrievably lost."[102] Any engagement with the United States, be it via Russia's support for Bashar al-Assad or meetings in the G-8, was to "cultivate the domestic *illusion* that Russia remains a great power [emphasis added]."[103]

The second representation maintained that Russia was still a disruptive and potentially dangerous second-tier power. This representation built on the material realities of the mid-2000s. The Russian economy had stabilized,[104] Putin had consolidated and centralized political power, and Russia was gradu-

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96. See arguments made by Walter Russell Mead, "The Future Still Belongs to America," *Wall Street Journal*, July 2, 2011; Joel Kotkin, "The Kids Will Be Alright—the Coming U.S. Population Boom Will Bring New Economic Vitality; the Resurgence of Fargo," *Wall Street Journal*, January 23, 2010; Jackson Diehl, "The Good and the Bad of the Egg-Tossing in Ukraine's Parliament," *Washington Post*, April 27, 2010.
97. Frank Schell, "What's Wrong with Congress?," *Chicago Tribune*, August 11, 2011.
98. Editorial, "On the Brink with Russia: Has President Obama Managed to Outwait Vladimir Putin on Nuclear Arms Control?," *Washington Post*, March 20, 2010.
99. George F. Will, "Treaty in a Time Warp," *Washington Post*, December 2, 2010.
100. Ilan Bernan, "Obama Gives the Kremlin A Seal of Approval," *Wall Street Journal*, December 24, 2010.
101. Charles Krauthammer, "While Syria Burns," *Washington Post*, April 27, 2012.
102. Diehl, "The Good and the Bad of the Egg-Tossing in Ukraine's Parliament."
103. Editorial, "A Welcome Rebuke to Putin," *Wall Street Journal*, August 8, 2013; for the same phrasing see also Editorial, "A Little Russian Help? Nyet," *Chicago Tribune*, June 17, 2012.
104. S. Neil MacFarlane, "The 'R' in BRICs: Is Russia an Emerging Power?," *International Affairs* 82, no. 1 (2006): 43–44, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2006.00514.x.

ally reemerging as a military power.[105] For example, commentators portrayed Russia as a pivotal "major power" or "world power" broker along with China, the European Union (EU), France, Germany, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States.[106] Additionally, indebted to its BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) membership, Russia was labeled an "emerging power"[107] and a "rising power" when grouped together with China.[108] Furthermore, the representation also depicted Russia as a "nuclear superpower." Russia was seen as capable of playing a distinctive role in world politics despite it not having any other symbols associated with great or superpower status. For instance, Leon Aron suggested that the United States must prepare for "any truculence" and "any destabilizing developments in the world's other nuclear superpower."[109]

Thus, the representation suggested that Russia was a force to be reckoned with. But the narrative also made clear that the United States was the only (fully fledged) superpower in the world; that is, China was a "rising" major power, Russia was in "decline," and the United States was a stable hegemon.[110] The emphasis on unipolarity in this discursive representation is also notable. Other major powers existed. But none posed a symmetrical threat to the United States. In an op-ed for the *New York Times*, former U.S. diplomat and president of the Council on Foreign Relations Richard Haas argued: "The United States *faces no great-power rival*. And this is likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. . . . None of the other major powers of this era—China, Russia, Europe, Japan, India—are tempted to challenge the United States for

105. Bettina Renz, "Russian Military Capabilities after 20 Years of Reform," *Survival* 56, no. 3 (2014): 61–84, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2014.920145.
106. For Syria talks, see Nicholas D. Kristof, "From Peace Prize to Paralysis," *New York Times*, June 10, 2012; Rajan Menon, "Syrian Standoff: Shared Interests Must Pull the United States, China and Russia Together," *Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 2012. For Iran talks, see Editorial, "Sanctions against Iran," *New York Times*, June 22, 2012; Editorial, "Another Try at Nuclear Talks," *New York Times*, March 2, 2013; Gerald F. Seib, "While Talking to Iran, Ducking Friendly Fire," *Wall Street Journal*, November 5, 2013; Gerald F. Seib, "Moment of Truth Arrives for Iran Nuclear Talks," *Wall Street Journal*, May 15, 2012.
107. Paul Krugman, "On Economic Hooliganism," *New York Times*, May 11, 2011; Fouad Ajami, "America and the Solitude of the Syrians," *Wall Street Journal*, January 6, 2012.
108. Samuel Moyn, "Human Rights, Not So Pure Anymore," *New York Times*, May 13, 2012; A. Wess Mitchell and Jakub J. Grygiel, "America Needs Its Frontline Allies Now More Than Ever," *Wall Street Journal*, July 5, 2013.
109. Leon Aron, "Dancing with Putin Again: The Last Thing Russia Needs Is More of the Same Failed Economic Policies and Politics," *Los Angeles Times*, October 3, 2011; also see Leon Aron, "As the Ice Cracks under Putin, What Will He Do?," *Wall Street Journal*, December 19, 2011; Lawrence Krauss, "6 Minutes to . . . Doomsday: Can We Stop the Clock?," *Los Angeles Times*, January 22, 2010.
110. Joseph S. Nye, "Another Overhyped Challenge to U.S. Power," *Wall Street Journal*, June 20, 2011; Mead, "The Future Still Belongs to America."

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primacy. America's per-capita gross domestic product is at least six times that of China, and the United States spends more on defense than the next 10 countries combined [emphasis added]."[111]

Taken together, these two dominant representations painted a picture of a Russia desperate to restore a lost empire in order to rejoin the great power club. This narrative also had an underlying, ridiculing tone—a tone underlining how impossible, ludicrous, and farfetched such aspirations were. By mid-2013, Russia was seen as a global player in world politics. But any prospect of being seen as a member of the great power club seemed unrealistic.

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

During and after Russia annexed Crimea and invaded Ukraine, a new revived empire representation replaced the lost superpower representation. Both representations built on Russia's history as a previous great power and superpower. Yet, the lost superpower representation drew a sharp line between contemporary Russia and its historical imperial great power status. In contrast, the new revived empire representation drew a direct parallel between contemporary Russia and the Russian and Soviet empires. In December 2013, two *Wall Street Journal* editorials, for instance, said Putin's aim was "to drag Kiev into his own trade and political bloc as he tries to reconstitute a Russian empire."[112]

The link between the Russian empire and the "new" empire was discursively established by presenting Putin as a prospective czar. Former ambassador Robert J. Callahan said Putin was "an eager successor to the czars and commissars [who] seeks to re-create the Russian empire, buffer states and all."[113] Similarly, *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman argued that Putin sought to "restore Russia's czarist empire"[114] and to establish "the same 'sphere-of-influence' that Russia had in Central Europe in the days of the czars."[115] Furthermore, in an op-ed on the tug-of-war between the EU and Russia over Ukraine, Friedman rhetorically connected the Russian empire and contemporary Russia:

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111. Richard N. Haass, "America Can Take a Breather. And It Should," *New York Times*, June 23, 2013.
112. Editorial, "The Stakes in Ukraine," *Wall Street Journal*, December 9, 2013; also see Editorial, "The Putin Crony Rescue Fund," *Wall Street Journal*, December 18, 2013.
113. Robert J. Callahan, "Frustrations of U.S. Foreign Policy," *Chicago Tribune*, December 12, 2013.
114. Thomas L. Friedman, "The Square People, Part 2," *New York Times*, May 18, 2014.
115. Thomas L. Friedman, "People of Influence," July 2, 2014.

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> The first unified "Rus" state was born in Kiev, when "St. Vladimir the Great, the Grand Prince of Kiev," unified all the tribes and territories in the region into an entity called by historians "Kievan Rus." . . . Now fast-forward 1,000-plus years, and you have another "Vladimir the Great"—Mr. Putin—massing troops on Ukraine's border to re-establish Russia's influence here. Putin recently hinted that it might be time for him to reclaim "Novorossiya" or New Russia, which is how a region of southeastern Ukraine was referred to by the czars in the 19th century, when it was part of Russia. So when Putin says New Russia, he really means Old Russia—a Russia that used to dominate Ukraine.[116]

Friedman's argument sets the tone for a sizable group of articles under the revived empire representation. Commentators saw Russia's actions as moves that Russia believed would revive an empire. Conservative columnist Charles Krauthammer wrote that Ukraine was "the linchpin for Vladimir Putin's dream of a renewed imperial Russia."[117] Other commentators and editorials stated that Putin either "position[ed] contemporary Russia as the heir to the Russian empire"[118] or was trying "to regain a lost empire,"[119] "to construct a 21st-century version of the Soviet empire,"[120] or to cobble "together as much of the old Soviet empire as he [could]."[121] The revived empire representation ridiculed Russia's new imperialism. *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat claimed that Putin's dream of empire "seems far out of his reach, and what's closer to his grasp is something more destructive—a wrecker's legacy, not Peter the Great's, in which his own people gain little from his efforts, but the world grows more unstable with every move he makes."[122]

Senator John McCain was even more critical. McCain characterized Putin as "an unreconstructed Russian imperialist," and further claimed that Putin's "regime may appear imposing, but it is rotting inside. His Russia is not a great power on par with America. It is a gas station run by a corrupt, autocratic regime."[123]

Yet the revived empire discursive representation also contained concern that

116. Thomas L. Friedman, "Who Will Influence Whom?," *New York Times*, April 27, 2014.
117. Charles Krauthammer, "Woe to U.S. Allies," *Washington Post*, December 6, 2013.
118. Masha Gessen, "After Carving Up Ukraine, Where Will Putin Turn Next?," *Washington Post*, May 10, 2014.
119. David Garner, "The U.S. Needs to Be Resolute against Putin," *Washington Post*, October 15, 2014.
120. Editorial, "Putin's Big Mac Attack," *Chicago Tribune*, October 23, 2014.
121. Editorial, "Merkel Pokes the Russian Bear," *Chicago Tribune*, November 20, 2014.
122. Ross Douthat, "Is Putin Winning?," *New York Times*, October 4, 2015. Also see Editorial, "Russian Paper Tiger?," *Chicago Tribune*, April 29, 2014.
123. John McCain, "Obama Has Made America Look Weak," *New York Times*, March 15, 2014.

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the annexation might lead Putin closer to establishing a new empire and achieving great power status. During the annexation of Crimea, some voiced opinions that if Ukraine and Europe were to stop Russia, Putin would have to give up on any dreams of a revived empire. "Without Ukraine," a *Wall Street Journal* editorial in December 2013 claimed, "Russia can't become a new empire."[124] Two months later, the same newspaper was gloomier about the prospects of stopping Russia. Two successive editorials argued that without Ukraine "a new Russian empire is impossible,"[125] but a Ukraine under Moscow's control would represent "a revived Russian empire if Mr. Putin has his way."[126] In the words of Walter Russell Mead, "With Ukraine, Russia can at least aspire to great power status and can hope to build a power center between the EU and China that can stand on something approaching equal terms with both. If, on the other hand, the verdict of 1989 and the Soviet collapse becomes final, Russia must come to terms with the same kind of loss of empire and stature that Britain, France, and Spain have faced. Mr. Putin's standing at home will be sharply, and perhaps decisively, diminished."[127]

The faction expressing concern about the arrival of a new Russian empire became stronger after the Russian annexation of Crimea. The narrative focused less on the utopian idea of an empire and more on a plausible scenario that Russia could become one. Some argued that the military response by the West was lacking. A *Wall Street Journal* editorial in mid-March 2014 claimed that Putin might "figure he's better off seizing more territory now and forcing the West to *accept his facts on the ground*. All the more so given that his domestic popularity is soaring as he seeks to revive the 19th-century Russian empire [emphasis added]."[128] The combination of a successful annexation from Moscow's perspective and a United States–NATO standoff meant that the onset of a new Russian empire became more pressing in the discourse. A *Chicago Tribune* editorial argued that "Crimea has been lost," urging Europe to focus on making "it a painful acquisition for Putin, and signal that his ambitions for

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124. Editorial, "Global Disorder Scorecard," *Wall Street Journal*, December 31, 2013; also see Serhy Yekelchyk, "Goodbye, Lenin—and Russia," *Washington Post*, March 2, 2014; and Mikheil Saakashvili, "Why the West Must Join the Ukraine Protesters," *Wall Street Journal*, January 28, 2014, for a similar line of argument.
125. Editorial, "Why Putin Wants Ukraine," *Wall Street Journal*, February 21, 2014.
126. Editorial, "Ukraine and America," *Wall Street Journal*, February 20, 2014.
127. Walter Russell Mead, "Putin Knows History Hasn't Ended," *Wall Street Journal*, February 21, 2014.
128. Editorial, "Welcome to the 19th Century," *Wall Street Journal*, March 17, 2014.

a greater Russian empire can go no further."[129] The representation thus shifted toward a realization that "czarist Russia . . . is reemerging and has in Vladimir Putin an ambitious warden."[130]

From April to September 2014, the public narrative centered on limiting the expansion of a Russian empire instead of ridiculing the idea. Mead said that only "power keeps or can keep Russia from rebuilding its old empire and pushing forward into the former Warsaw Pact states."[131] The narrative urged the West to prevent Moscow from annexing another state. Doing so would be "the next front in Russia's efforts to rebuild its lost empire."[132] Anne Applebaum even urged the United States to "begin to reinforce the local police forces of the states that border the *new Russian empire* [emphasis added]."[133] Applebaum's remark signifies a broader trend within the discourse. By the end of 2014, what was once a ridiculed dystopian idea of a new Russian empire had become reality. Moreover, Russia's imperial moves were also increasingly seen as conducive for achieving great power status.

RIVALING GREATS

Parallel to the revived empire narrative was the "rivaling greats" representation. The latter established an even stronger link between belligerence and great power status. Unlike the revived empire representation, the rivaling greats narrative avoided ridiculing Russia's dream of higher status. Instead, the representation centered on the new security environment between the United States and Russia. Because of Russia's annexation of Crimea, the representation highlighted an antagonistic dyad between two great powers.

Throughout 2014, the rivaling greats representation focused on Russia's belligerence in Ukraine. But it also scolded the Barack Obama administration for not responding proportionally. According to a *Washington Post* editorial, "President Obama has led a foreign policy based more on how he thinks the world should operate than on reality." In Obama's vision, "invasions, brute force, great-power games and shifting alliances—these were things of the past. . . . Unfortunately . . . Russian President Vladimir Putin has not re-

129. Editorial, "Your Turn, Europe," *Chicago Tribune*, March 21, 2014.
130. George F. Will, "Keeping Russia Out," *Washington Post*, March 27, 2014.
131. Walter Russell Mead, "Putin Did Americans a Favor," *Wall Street Journal*, June 2, 2014. Also see Matthew Kaminski, "Putin Has Exposed Europe's Cracks," *Wall Street Journal*, June 17, 2014.
132. Brenda Shaffer, "Russia's Next Land Grab," *New York Times*, September 9, 2014.
133. Anne Applebaum, "A New Kind of War," *Washington Post*, April 17, 2014.

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ceived the memo on 21st-century behavior."[134] Similarly, the *Wall Street Journal* criticized Obama for dismantling the U.S. nuclear deterrent and suggested that the Russian belligerence provided "daily reminders that the great-power rivalries of previous centuries are far from over."[135] A few days later, the *Wall Street Journal* editorial again lashed out at Obama, suggesting that he "didn't run for President to engage in great power politics, but it is still part of the job description."[136]

Throughout 2014, the representation became more adamant about Russia's prospective entrance to the great power club. On March 9, 2014, former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice warned of a great power confrontation between Russia and the United States in a *Washington Post* op-ed. Rice wrote that while the United States and Europe have tried to convince Russia that Ukraine "should not be a pawn in a great-power conflict . . . Putin has never seen it that way," because he views Russia as in "a zero-sum game for the loyalty of former territories of the empire." The invasion and possible annexation of Crimea, Rice claimed, "is his answer to us."[137] Rice thus connected the onset of a great power conflict with Russia to the revived empire representation and the annexation of Crimea, arguing that war-making is a way for Russia to become recognized as a great power. In the wake of Russia entering the Syrian civil war, Rice—along with former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates—was even more explicit about Russia's ascent to the great power club:

> Putin's move into Syria is old-fashioned great-power politics. (Yes, people do that in the 21st century.) There is a domestic benefit to him, but he is not externalizing his problems at home. Russian domestic and international policies have always been inextricably linked. Russia feels strong at home when it is strong abroad—this is Putin's plea to his propagandized population—and the Russian people buy it, at least for now. *Russia is a great power* and derives its self-worth from that. What else is there? When is the last time you bought a Russian product that wasn't petroleum? *Moscow matters again in international politics*, and Russian armed forces are on the move [emphasis added].[138]

The rivaling greats representation remained widespread in the U.S. public foreign policy discourse in the years that followed. But it became the dominant

134. Editorial, "The Risks of Wishful Thinking," *Washington Post*, March 3, 2014.
135. Editorial, "Putin Invades, Obama Dismantles," *Wall Street Journal*, April 8, 2014.
136. Editorial, "Putin Acts, Obama Assesses," *Wall Street Journal*, April 15, 2014.
137. Condoleezza Rice, "A Ukrainian Wake-Up Call," *Washington Post*, March 9, 2014.
138. Condoleezza Rice and Robert M. Gates, "Countering Putin," *Washington Post*, October 9, 2015.

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discursive representation at the end of Trump's first year as president. On December 18, 2017, the Trump administration launched its *National Security Strategy*.[139] The document traditionally outlines the United States' major national security concerns and how the executive branch intends to handle them. The document sparked extensive debates about U.S. foreign policy, building on the already established rivaling greats discursive representation: "After being dismissed as a phenomenon of an earlier century, *great power competition* returned. China and Russia began to reassert their influence regionally and globally. Today, they are fielding military capabilities designed to deny America access in times of crisis and to contest our ability to operate freely in critical commercial zones during peacetime. In short, they are contesting our geopolitical advantages and trying to change the international order in their favor [emphasis added]."[140] The document further stated that "Russia seeks to restore its great power status and establish spheres of influence near its borders" and that "with its invasions of Georgia and Ukraine, Russia demonstrated its willingness to violate the sovereignty of states in the region."[141]

In the wake of the publication of the *National Security Strategy*, most of the major newspapers published editorials that addressed the renewed great power competition.[142] Commentators began using "great power competition" to justify their opinions beyond Ukraine. Former Ambassador to NATO Victoria Nuland wrote an op-ed ahead of the Helsinki meeting between Trump and Putin, arguing that the U.S. president "can make American diplomacy great again if he demonstrates to Mr. Putin that normal relations with us require civilized global behavior by Russia. The alternative—a NATO in tatters and a re-energized Mr. Putin—would leave America weaker and Mr. Trump

139. The *National Security Strategy* was a follow-up to then defense secretary Jim Mattis's *National Defense Strategy*, launched in January in that same year. While the document remains confidential, Mattis claimed in presenting it that Russia and China were "revisionist powers" and that "great power competition, not terrorism, is now the primary focus of the U.S. national security." See "U.S. Military Puts 'Great Power Competition' at Heart of Strategy: Mattis," Reuters, January 19, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-military-china-russia/u-s-military-puts-great-power-competition-at-heart-of-strategy-mattis-idUSKBN1F81TR.
140. White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America, December 2017* (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2017), https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/NSS2017.pdf.
141. Ibid., 25, 47.
142. Editorial, "The Trump Doctrine, in Theory; Realism about Rising Threats but Some Policy Disconnects," *Wall Street Journal*, December 19, 2017; Editorial, "Trump's Steely Approach to a Treacherous World," *Chicago Tribune*, December 18, 2017; Editorial, "Raising the Risk of Nuclear War," *New York Times*, January 14, 2018; Editorial, "On Russia, We Need More Reason and Less Frenzy," *Washington Post*, February 27, 2018.

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the loser in the great power competition he himself has initiated."[143] Senator Jon Kyl and former CIA Deputy Director Michael Morell urged that "nuclear weapons must continue to maintain their deterrent effect" when the government mindset shifts "to a return of great power competition with Russia and China."[144] Similarly, former CIA Director David Petraeus and Senator Sheldon Whitehouse wrote in the *Washington Post* that because Russia had weaponized "corruption as an instrument of foreign policy," the fight against it "has become a strategic one—and a battle ground in a great power competition."[145] And *New York Times* columnists Thomas Friedman and David Brooks wrote that the era of great power rivalry is coming back.[146] The vocal involvement of Russia and the United States in the 2019 Venezuelan presidential crisis led Mead to label it the "first major crisis of this new era of great-power competition."[147] It also prompted former NATO Ambassador Ivo Daalder to refer to it as a "site of great power conflict between the United States on one side and Russia, China and Iran on the other."[148]

China's entry to the great power club boosted Russia's status ascent.[149] The rivaling greats narrative focused on China and Russia as a collective antagonist "Other." Three developments framed this discursive othering of Russia and China. First, Russia and China share overlapping club memberships. Both were nuclear weapons states[150] and members of the G-20, the P5 (permanent members of the UN Security Council),[151] and the BRICS,[152] and they were

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143. Victoria Nuland, "A Moment of Truth for Trump," *New York Times*, July 7, 2018.
144. Jon Kyl and Michael Morell, "Why America Needs Low-Yield Nuclear Warheads Now," *Washington Post*, November 30, 2018.
145. David Petraeus and Sheldon Whitehouse, "Authoritarians' Corruption Is a Weapon—and a Weakness," *Washington Post*, March 11, 2019.
146. David Brooks, "Voters, Your Foreign Policy Views Stink!," *New York Times*, June 14, 2019; Thomas L. Friedman, "Who to Elect for a Crisis at 3 a.m.?," *New York Times*, March 13, 2019.
147. Walter Russell Mead, "Maduro Is Putin's Man in Caracas," *Wall Street Journal*, January 29, 2019.
148. Ivo Daalder, "In Venezuela, U.S. Military Intervention Is Not the Answer," *Chicago Tribune*, May 9, 2019; also see Drew Holland Kinney, "What the History of Coups in the Middle East Tells Us about Venezuela," *Washington Post*, May 2, 2019.
149. Commentators already saw China as an established great power by 2010. See Harold Meyerson, "How We Help China; the Shining City on a Hill Needs Repair," *Washington Post*, March 31, 2010; Fareed Zakaria, "China's Case of Nerves," *Washington Post*, June 7, 2010; Robert J. Samuelson, "China's 'Me First' Doctrine," *Washington Post*, February 15, 2010; John Bolton, "Confronting China's Snarl," *Wall Street Journal*, August 10, 2010.
150. Kyl and Morell, "Why America Needs Low-Yield Nuclear Warheads Now."
151. David Gordon and Ash Jain, "Forget the G-8; It's Time for the D-10," *Wall Street Journal*, June 17, 2013.
152. Mead, "Putin Did Americans a Favor."

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grouped in the rising power club.[153] Second, the narrative focused on Russia and China's combative illiberalism and authoritarianism. For example, Fareed Zakaria asked how the order that the United States built could be ensured to "continue, even as new powers—such as China—rise and old ones—such as Russia—flex their muscles?"[154] Third, the discursive othering of Russia and China as a defiant duo was also helped by the increasing cooperation between the two states. As Ali Wyne argued, "Russia is a declining power with regional, perhaps continental, ambitions. China is a rising power with global ambitions. Russia's quest for great-power status rides partly on the perception that it enjoys a privileged alliance with Beijing. China, meanwhile, regards Russia as one of an ever-growing array of countries eager to furnish it with vital commodities. Russia is important but not indispensable."[155]

The stronger relationship between Russia and China fed into the rivaling greats narrative. Under this representation, any mistrust that Russia and China shared was superseded by common opposition to the United States. The "budding partnership between these two great powers—who were riven for decades by high levels of mistrust—is a natural response to the adversity and confrontation in the U.S.-Russian relationship," Alexander Gabuev wrote in a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed.[156]

By 2019, the rivaling greats representation had become normalized in the public discourse on U.S. foreign policy. The depiction of the contemporary security climate dominated by great power antagonism produced symmetry between Russia and the United States. The idea of a poor, weak, and resentful post-Soviet regional power—prominent in the early 2010s lost superpower representation—was replaced by an idea of Russia that competed on equal terms with the great power United States and the new great power China.[157] In writing about the demise of the liberal international order, Mead argued: "Great powers like Russia and China never liked this approach, seeing it as a thinly disguised form of U.S. hegemony and a threat to their illiberal political

153. Gerald F. Seib, "In Syria and Beyond, a Dangerous New Era Dawns; the U.S. Simultaneously Confronts an Aggrieved Russia and an Aggressive Rising Power in China, a Situation that Calls for Dexterous Diplomacy," *Wall Street Journal*, April 16, 2018.
154. Fareed Zakaria, "The Perils of Leaning Forward," *Wall Street Journal*, June 6, 2014. Also see Walter Russell Mead, "2018's Biggest Loser Was the Liberal International Order," *Wall Street Journal*, December 31, 2018; Vance Serchuk, "Russia and China Are Outwitting America," *Washington Post*, April 10, 2019.
155. Ali Wyne, "The Limits of China-Russia Cooperation," *Wall Street Journal*, May 23, 2014.
156. Alexander Gabuev, "China and Russia's Dangerous Entente," *Wall Street Journal*, October 4, 2017.
157. For a similar academic conclusion, see John J. Mearsheimer, "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order," *International Security* 43, no. 4 (Spring 2019): 42, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00342.

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systems."[158] Other op-eds referred to China and Russia as "great powers,"[159] "great power rivals,"[160] "authoritarian great powers,"[161] or "rising great powers."[162] By the end of the 2010s, the consensus among commentators was that Russia had arrived in the great power club.[163]

rival explanations of russia's great power attribution

Before I analyze the status effects of Russia's war against Ukraine in other clubs in world politics, I consider two rival explanations for Russia's entry into the great power club. First, Russia's rise to great power standing could be a function of its increase in power during the 1990s and 2000s. Table 1 presents three measures of capabilities as a share (percentage) of major power capabilities: gross domestic product, military expenditures, and national power capabilities. Three factors facilitated the representation of Russia as a second-tier major power with considerable influence in world politics: (1) Russia's military expenditures rose during the period; (2) Putin centralized and consolidated power; and (3) Russia maintained its large nuclear arsenal.[164] But the change in overall distribution of capabilities is too small to exhaustively explain the increasing recognition of Russia's great power status during the period. As table 1 shows, the size of Russia's economy and overall national power

158. Mead, "2018's Biggest Loser Was the Liberal International Order."
159. Mary Anastasia O'Grady, "The Case for Force in Venezuela," *Wall Street Journal*, June 3, 2019.
160. Katrina vanden Heuvel, "Progressives Are Starting to Define a New Realism for Our National Security Strategy," *Washington Post*, March 5, 2019.
161. Robert Kagan, "The Strongmen Strike Back," *Washington Post*, March 14, 2019.
162. Dan Sullivan, "Trump Has Not Been Soft on Russia. He's Been Tougher Than Obama," *Washington Post*, March 28, 2019.
163. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss how the rivaling greats representation within the public discourse spilled over into the beliefs and practices of foreign policy leaders and practitioners. Yet, evidence suggests that it did. For example, John McCain, who in March of 2014 said explicitly that Russia was "not a great power," in 2016 and 2017 embraced the notion of an era of "great power competition with Russia and China." Compare McCain, "Obama Made America Look Weak" with U.S. House of Representatives, *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, Conference Report*, 114th Cong., 2nd sess. (December 23, 2016), Congressional Record S.2943, https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/2943/text; and *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018, Motion to Proceed*, 115th Cong., 1st sess. (July 10, 2017), Congressional Record S.1519, https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/1519/text. Similarly, President Joseph Biden still referred to the "growing rivalry with China and Russia" in his *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance*. President Joseph R. Biden Jr., *Interim National Security Strategic Guidance* (Washington, DC: White House, March 2021), 6, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/NSC-1v2.pdf. Moreover, he broke with President Barack Obama's policy to not refer to Russia as a great power when, before his meeting with President Putin in Geneva in 2021, he referred to Russia and the United States as "two great powers." "President Biden and Russian President Putin Hold Summit in Geneva," *C-SPAN*, June 16, 2021, https://www.c-span.org/video/?512681-1/president-biden-russian-president-putin-hold-summit-geneva.
164. Renz, "Russian Military Capabilities"; MacFarlane, "The 'R' in BRICs," 43–44.

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Table 1. Comparing Concentrations of Power: Share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Military Expenditures, and National Power Capabilities among Major Powers (percentage of aggregate major power capabilities), 1992–2016

Share of GDP among major powers (in percent)

Year	China	France	Germany	India	Japan	Russia	United Kingdom	United States
1992	6	8	11	2	16	4	8	45
2000	9	7	10	3	14	3	8	47
2010	19	6	8	4	11	3	7	42
2016	25	5	7	5	9	3	6	39

Share of military expenditures among major powers (in percent)

Year	China	France	Germany	India	Japan	Russia	United Kingdom	United States
1992	3	6	6	2	5	5	6	67
2000	6	6	6	4	6	3	6	63
2010	10	4	3	4	4	4	5	67
2016	17	4	4	5	4	6	4	56

Share of national power capabilities (CINC) among major powers (in percent)

Year	China	France	Germany	India	Japan	Russia	United Kingdom	United States
1992	23	4	6	12	10	13	5	28
2000	30	3	5	13	9	9	4	26
2010	37	3	3	14	7	7	3	26
2016	41	2	3	15	6	6	2	24

SOURCES: GDP (Constant 2015 US$), World Bank, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD; SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, https://milex.sipri.org/sipri; David J. Singer, Stuart Bremer, and John Stuckey, "Capability Distribution, Uncertainty, and Major Power War, 1820–1965. National Material Capabilities v.6.0," in Bruce Russett, ed., *Peace, War, and Numbers* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1972), 19–48, http://www.correlatesofwar.org/.

NOTE: The table shows the share of power capabilities relative to the total power capabilities of the eight major powers in the study. Distribution of GDP among major powers is based on constant 2015 $US. Distribution of military expenditures among major powers is based on constant 2020 $US. The Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC) is an aggregate measure consisting of six variables (military expenditures, armed forces, steel production, energy consumption, urban population, and total population) across three dimensions of national power.

capabilities remained only a fraction of those of the United States and China during the measured period. The timing of Russia's entry into the great power club suggests that the war against Ukraine—and not material capabilities—was the immediate cause of increased status recognition as a great power.

The second rival explanation for Russia's entry into the great power club is

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that Russia was involved in multiple wars when it gained this status, not just when it annexed Crimea and invaded eastern Ukraine. In fact, Russia has not stopped fighting since it first became a state in 1991. In particular, its intervention in the Syrian civil war boosted the perception in the public discourse of an emerging great power.[165] Even though Russia's participation in the Syrian civil war helped construct an antagonistic "Other" to the United States, the Ukrainian war had an even stronger effect. It was the annexation of Crimea and subsequent invasion of eastern Ukraine that engendered associations with Russian imperial behavior.[166] This imperial behavior was in turn the narrative foundation for the discursive recognition of Russia as a great power.

In sum, the annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine are not a monocausal explanation for the increased recognition of Russia as a great power during the 2014–2019 period. Russia would not be considered as a potential entrant to the club had it not possessed sufficient material capabilities. And Russia's overall belligerence contributed to the idea of a resurgent and antagonistic great power rival. Nevertheless, I contend that Russia's actions in Ukraine were the immediate cause of the increasing rhetorical recognition in U.S. foreign policy discourse of Russia as a member of the great power club.

Russia's Status in the UN Security Council and the G-8

Annexing Crimea and invading eastern Ukraine meant that Russia was increasingly conceived of as a great power in the U.S. public discourse. Thus, the status order of the great power club values belligerence. A key theoretical argument of this article is that status orders differ from club to club. War might be positively received in one club but stigmatized in another. What consequences did the war have for Russia's standing in other clubs of world politics? To answer the question, I analyze the discourse on Russian status within the UN Security Council and the G-8. I show that Russia's status remained stable in the UN Security Council because of established legal privileges and the

165. For examples of opinion articles that connected great power status and the Syrian civil war, see Rice and Gates, "Countering Putin"; Michael Ignatieff and Leon Wieseltier, "Enough Is Enough—U.S. Abdication on Syria Must Come to an End," *Washington Post*, February 9, 2016; Charles Krauthammer, "While Obama Fiddles," *Washington Post*, February 25, 2016; Doyle McManus, "Why the Cease-Fire in Syria Won't Work," *Los Angeles Times*, September 14, 2016; Jochen Bittner, "Who Will Win the New Great Game?," *New York Times*, April 26, 2018.
166. See Walter Russell Mead, "Russia and Europe Vie to Win the Prize of Ukraine," *Wall Street Journal*, November 15, 2013; Mead, "Putin Knows History Hasn't Ended"; Editorial, "Why Putin Wants Ukraine"; Stein Ringen, "Putin Fights for His Empire," *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 2016.

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UN Security Council's interest in cooperating with Russia on other issues. In the G-8, there were no such established legal privileges or interest in working on other issues. Thus, Russia was thrown out of the club because it violated the club's shared rules, values, and order. In sum, the status outcomes for Russia in these three clubs diverged. This finding strengthens the theoretical claim that clubs in world politics have distinct and sometimes diverging status orders.

THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL

In 2014, Russia vetoed a UN Security Council resolution that reaffirmed Ukraine's territorial integrity.[167] But the veto did not deter the UK, the United States, and France (the P3, collectively) from condemning Russia's actions.[168] In 2014, the council met fifteen times to discuss the developments in eastern Ukraine and Crimea. According to one diplomat, the P3 strategy for these meetings was to "expose Russian lies and hypocrisy."[169] Throughout the sessions, the P3 ambassadors stigmatized Russia within the UN Security Council. Ahead of the annexation, the French ambassador said, "Russia will gain Crimea and lose its credibility."[170] And when Russia tries to return to its foundations and restore the credibility of Russian diplomacy, the French ambassador continued, "it will be met with nothing but sarcasm and a shrug."[171] The British ambassador argued that in the "twenty-first century, no country should be acting with such blatant disregard for international law," suggesting that Russia's "political and economic reputation have already suffered" following the annexation.[172] The P3 viewed the annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine as disrupting the international order, which warranted consequences for Russia's standing within the UN Security Council.

Despite the P3's efforts, however, Russia's status within the council at large remained stable. The main reason for this stability is that Russia's social

167. Emily Crawford, "United Nations General Assembly Resolution on the Territorial Integrity of Ukraine," *International Legal Materials* 53, no. 5 (2014): 927, https://doi.org/ 10.5305/intelegamate.53.5.0927.
168. Alisher Faizullaev and Jérémie Cornut, "Narrative Practice in International Politics and Diplomacy: The Case of the Crimean Crisis," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 20, no. 3 (2017): 578–604, https://doi.org/10.1057/jird.2016.6; Juliet J. Fall, "Territory, Sovereignty, and Entitlement: Diplomatic Discourses in the United Nations Security Council," *Political Geography* 81 (2020): 102208, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2020.102208.
169. Author interview with diplomat, by Zoom, December 15, 2020.
170. United Nations Security Council, 7134th Meeting, March 13, 2014, S/PV.7134, 9.
171. Ibid.
172. United Nations Security Council, 7125th Meeting, March 3, 2014, S/PV.7125, 7.

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status within the council is closely connected to its legal status privileges as a P5 country with veto rights.[173] In the words of one diplomat, "the P5 are at the top of the pecking order in any way you cut it. . . . The system is set up in a way . . . [that] if you want the system to work you have to engage with the P5."[174] This tiered status system makes it necessary for the UN Security Council members to compartmentalize their tasks. On the one hand, Russia needs the council to work to preserve the esteem associated with being a permanent member.[175] As one diplomat noted, given that Russia's "permanent membership is at the absolute heart of their big power status," it would simply not "be in the interest of Russia to freeze the rest of business or whatever was happening outside Ukraine."[176] On the other hand, the other members of the council need to include Russia to get other things done. As the diplomat recalled, "even though we were hammering Russia on Ukraine in the morning, the Security Council was still conducting other business in the afternoon."[177] While Russia's status inside the council did not increase, Russia's fixed privileges and the members' joint interest in cooperation meant that its status within the council remained relatively stable.

THE GROUP OF EIGHT (G-8)

The Russian occupation and March 2014 referendum on the status of Crimea drew immediate criticism from the members of the G-8. But unlike the UN Security Council, the G-8 sanctioned Russia. On March 2, 2014, the leaders of the seven other members issued a joint communiqué condemning Russia's "clear violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine," which also contravened "the principles and values on which the G7 and the G8 operate."[178] Consequently, the other seven members suspended their participation in the scheduled G-8 summit in Sochi, Russia, in June.[179] "You just don't in the 21st Century behave in 19th Century fashion by invading another country,"

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173. Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders*, 40–41, 167; Roy Allison, *Russia, the West, and Military Intervention* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 176, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199590636.001.0001.
174. Author interview with diplomat, by Zoom, December 15, 2020.
175. Author interview with diplomat, by Zoom, December 14, 2020; author interview with diplomat, by telephone, December 17, 2020.
176. Author interview with diplomat, by Zoom, December 15, 2020.
177. Ibid.
178. "Statement by G7 Nations," G7 Research Group, March 2, 2014, http://www.g7.utoronto.ca/summit/2014sochi/ukraine_140302.html.
179. Ibid.

said U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. "If Russia wants to be a G8 country, it needs to behave like a G8 country," he continued.[180]

After the annexation, the leaders of Canada, France, Germany, the UK, and the United States, threatened Russia with permanent exclusion from the club. Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said that the exclusion was a way to harm Russia's status: "A regime does not spend $50-billion on the Olympics if it does not care about its international reputation."[181] On March 24, the seven states issued a joint statement announcing that "Russia's actions in recent weeks are not consistent" with the rest of the group's "shared belief and shared responsibilities," which led them to suspend their "participation in the G-8 until Russia changes course."[182]

During the summit in Quebec in June 2018, Trump launched a bid to let Russia back in, suggesting that the G-8 was "a more meaningful group than the G7."[183] But Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said that readmittance was "not something we are even remotely looking at."[184] German Chancellor Angela Merkel said that readmitting Russia could not happen unless "substantial progress in regard to the problems with Ukraine" was made.[185] Two years later, President Trump again invited President Putin to the G-7 summit at Camp David.[186] And again the G-7 members pushed back. Trudeau said that Russia was excluded because it invaded Crimea, and its disrespect of international rules and norms was why it "will continue to remain out."[187] Unlike with the UN Security Council, the G-8 had a clear mechanism to cause harm to Russia's status within the club: exclusion. The violation of Ukraine's sovereignty was not in line with the club's "values," "principles," "shared re-

180. Rebecca Kaplan, "John Kerry Warns of Consequences for Russia after Ukraine Invasion," *Face the Nation*, March 2, 2014, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/john-kerry-warns-of-consequences-for-russia-after-ukraine-invasion/.
181. Steven Chase and Mark Mackinnon, "Leaders Cancel G8 Summit, Excluding Russia from Group," *Globe and Mail*, March 24, 2014, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/leaders-cancel-g8-summit-excluding-russia-from-group/article17644834/.
182. "G7: The Hague Declaration," European Council, March 24, 2014, http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/summit/2014brussels/hague-declaration.pdf.
183. Jennfier Hansler, "Trump Again Calls for Readmitting Russia to G7, Blames Obama for Crimea's Annexation," *CNN*, June 9, 2018, https://edition.cnn.com/2018/06/09/politics/trump-russia-g8-press-conference/index.html.
184. Ibid.
185. Ibid.
186. Julian Borger, "Donald Trump Offers to Invite Vladimir Putin to Expanded G7 Summit," *Guardian*, June 1, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/01/donald-trump-vladimir-putin-g7-call.
187. Ibid. Also see Charlie Cooper, "UK Would Veto Russia's Return to G7," *Politico*, June 1, 2020, https://politico.eu/article/uk-boris-johnson-would-veto-russia-vladimir-putin-g7-return/.

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sponsibilities," and "like-minded" members who were dedicated "to the rule of law."[188]

In sum, the core case and the two shadow cases show three variations in outcome. Despite all being high-status clubs, the analysis supports my theory that status orders govern what is considered prestigious in a club. Russian war-making in Ukraine propelled Russia toward becoming a member of the great power club. In contrast, it had no effect on Russia's standing within the UN Security Council, and it diminished Russia's club status within the G-8. These three cases show that the status orders in clubs of world politics vary enough to potentially cause diverging individual status effects for the same kind of action.

The Future of Russia's Social Status

In February 2022, Russia launched a new stage in the war against Ukraine. A full-scale invasion replaced the hybrid war that Russian-supported militias had been fighting in eastern Ukraine since 2014. Leaders and experts, including Putin himself, expected Kiev to fall within a matter of days.[189] It did not. After Russia's successive defeats in Ukraine, experts have argued that its immoral actions, combined with its poor military performance, mean that its standing in world politics would drop.[190] On the basis of the findings in this article, I would advocate for more tentative predictions. First, Russia's status has not uniformly decreased across the international system. Wars do not either increase or decrease a state's social status because there is no all-encompassing status hierarchy in world politics. The invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea caused different status effects in the great power

188. Tristen Naylor suggests that it was the club's core "value of the inviolability of sovereign territory and the violation of international law that served as the impetus for Russia's expulsion." Naylor, *Social Closure and International Society*, 47.
189. Jake Epstein and Charles R. Davis, "Putin Thought Russia's Military Could Capture Kyiv in 2 Days, but It Still Hasn't in 20," *Business Insider*, March 15, 2022, https://www.businessinsider.com/vladimir-putin-russian-forces-could-take-kyiv-ukraine-two-days-2022-3?r=US&IR=T.
190. See, for example, Lynne Hartnett, "The Long History of Russian Imperialism Shaping Putin's War," *Washington Post*, March 2, 2022; Daniel R. Depetris, "Is Russia Still a Great Power?," *Newsweek*, September 30, 2022, https://www.newsweek.com/russia-still-great-power-opinion-1747602; Taras Kuzio, "Putin's Failing Ukraine Invasion Proves Russia Is No Superpower," *Atlantic Council*, November 1, 2022, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/putins-failing-ukraine-invasion-proves-russia-is-no-superpower/; Phillips P. O'Brien, "Ukraine Has Exposed Russia as a Not-So-Great Power," *Atlantic*, July 1, 2022, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/07/rethinking-russia-ukraine-international-political-power-military-strength/661452/.

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club, in the G-8, and in the UN Security Council. Clubs containing different status orders are thus likely to respond differently to the current stage of the Ukraine war.

Second, military blunders do not necessitate status loss. One of my core arguments in this article is that—contrary to popular belief and amid the noise of condemnation—successful wars can generate recognition in certain clubs. Conversely, the ineffective use of force could harm Russia's status as a great power. For example, the Soviet Union's failed war in Afghanistan and subsequent 1989 withdrawal contributed to its loss of superpower status.[191] In contrast, the United States retained its superpower status following its loss in the Vietnam War.[192] And while the Suez crisis caused reputational damage to the UK, it is still considered a great power.[193] Moreover, even if Russia were to lose its great power status given its poor military performance in Ukraine, it is likely to be represented as a second-tier power within the foreign policy discourse. Key status symbols, such as nuclear weapons, ensure a position not too far below the great power club.

Third, initial reactions are a poor indication of a state's long-term status recognition as a great power. The 2014 annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine were immediately met with ridicule, moral upheaval, and strong criticism in the U.S. foreign policy discourse. The rivaling greats representation only became dominant years after the initial annexation of Crimea. Thus, while Russia's military may have suffered a reputational loss after it launched its full-scale war against Ukraine in 2022, it is too soon to conclude that it is no longer a great power because of its actions.

Conclusion

In this article, I have explored under which conditions war can lead to higher social status in world politics. To do so, I developed a theory of status orders,

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191. A. Z. Hilali, "Afghanistan: The Decline of Soviet Military Strategy and Political Status," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 12, no. 1 (March 1999): 114–115, https://doi.org/10.1080/13518049908430380; Daria Fane, "After Afghanistan: The Decline of Soviet Military Prestige," *Washington Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (June 1990): 5–16, https://doi.org/10.1080/01636609009477632.
192. John Glaser, "Status, Prestige, Activism and the Illusion of American Decline," *Washington Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2018): 173–197, https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2018.1445903.
193. Renshon, *Fighting for Status*, 233–244; David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century* (London: Longman, 1991), 205; David M. McCourt, "Has Britain Found Its Role?," *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy* 56, no. 2 (2014): 159–178, https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2014.901746; Volgy et al., "Major Power Status in International Politics."

which are shared assumptions about what counts as prestigious in a given social club of world politics. I argued that different clubs in world politics have distinct status orders, and that war and aggression might be ways for states to gain higher status if the relevant status order values belligerence.

I used discourse analysis as a method of analysis to explore status orders and their components. Using the U.S. public discourse as an analytical window, I conducted a single case study of the great power club to understand how status orders affect the relationship between social status and war. To explore the assumption that clubs in world politics have distinct status orders, I analyzed the discourse in the core case with two ancillary shadow case studies: the UN Security Council and the G-8. I argued that if the type of status recognition in the UN Security Council and the G-8 differs from that in the great power club, it increases the confidence that the esteem of war depends on the status order in which it is interpreted.

The 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine shifted the U.S. public discourse. Over time, this discourse labeled Russia as a disgruntled and disillusioned regional power, then as a resurgent imperial power, and then increasingly as a great power rival. Whether a planned status move or not, Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine was viewed by the U.S. public as in line with the status order of the great power club. In contrast, Russia's status remained stable in the UN Security Council because of established legal privileges and the council's joint interest in cooperating with Russia on other issues. But these two factors were not relevant to the status order of the G-8, and thus that club ejected Russia for violating its shared rules, values, and order.

These findings are consequential for the future study of status in international relations. First, the effective use of force is a central component of the status order of the great power club. Although public elites in the United States condemned and criticized Russia's annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine, they simultaneously recognized that such moves elevated Russian's standing vis-à-vis the great powers. Second, an act of war can have divergent status effects depending on the audiences. Waging war against Ukraine raised Russia's status in the great power club, demolished it in the G-8, and caused little change within the UN Security Council. Thus, the often-mentioned statement that war either elevates or diminishes states' status, without specifying in which clubs the status change occurred, is logically invalid. Third, if the type of status order decides whether states get status from fighting, the consequence is that status orders also determine the type of

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recognition that states receive from other actions. Any type of foreign policy action or behavior, of which war-making is one example, affect multiple audiences that are likely to respond to the act in different ways. Incorporating analyses of social clubs' status orders is thus crucial for understanding the recognition that a state receives for its actions.

There are five key caveats for these findings. First, war should not be seen as an exhaustive explanation for Russia's changed status in the three clubs that I analyze in this article. I have shown that Russia's standing vis-à-vis the great power club improved because of fighting. But other political, economic, and military factors might have facilitated or indirectly influenced this change. Moreover, China has already arrived in the great power club without having to fight. This juxtaposition reinforces the point that there are many paths to prestige. This article has sought to illuminate one of those paths.

Second, not all wars may represent a path to prestige. UN-led peacekeeping missions are fundamentally different than hybrid warfare and annexations. Hence, these forms of war and the ways that they are conducted should produce different status effects in different clubs. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 was effective and precise, resulting in few battle deaths and symbolizing the military superiority of the state. This outcome, in turn, strengthened the idea that Russia belonged in the great power club. In contrast, Russia's ineffective, full-scale invasion of Ukraine beginning in 2022 is not likely to benefit Russia's status as a great power.

Third, the annexation and hybrid warfare proved successful for Russia's bid for great power status. But other states may not achieve the same result for similar actions. The discourse on Russia's actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine was rhetorically connected to Russia's past; that is, the Russian empire, the Soviet Union, and the state's former great power and superpower status.[194] Countries that do not share the same great power history as Russia, such as Brazil or India, would arguably not achieve the same results if they were to take similar military actions.

Fourth, acquiring great power status is not the same as receiving higher status. The two shadow cases in this article have illustrated this dynamic well. Emulating Russian belligerence runs the risk of a state being barred or ejected from or having its standing decrease in other clubs of world politics.

Fifth, and perhaps most important, even though the status order of the great

194. Naylor refers to this dynamic as "ostensibly achievable criteria" for inclusion into clubs. Naylor, *Social Closure and International Society*, 64–67.

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power club seems to positively recognize war, this is not set in stone. If my theoretical assumptions of status orders and discourse are correct, then a wide range of actors may have agency to change the status order of the club. To change dominant representations of the discourse is no easy feat. But it is possible. Highlighting the conducive and perhaps problematic relationship between the great power club and war may enable doing something about it. It is my opinion that leaders and practitioners, along with public and political elites and even academics, have agency to shift this discourse.[195]

Beyond the empirical findings, I believe that the analytical framework developed and applied in this article applies to cases not covered here. The most logical step forward would be to explore the status recognition of new or established great powers. It would be particularly intriguing to trace Chinese discursive recognition of other major powers. This would make it possible to gauge whether these rhetorical moves of inclusion and exclusion correspond to those of the United States. The study cases could also be expanded beyond Russia and belligerence. According to U.S. public discourse, China has already arrived as a great power. Future research might trace the exact timing for this recognition. It could also determine what that discursive recognition was based on. Finally, a comparative analysis of members and potential entrants to the club (e.g., Brazil, China, Germany, India, Japan, and Russia) or potential declining great powers (e.g., France and the UK) would determine the membership composition of the club and could shed light on the different aspects of the status order beyond that of a single case study.

The analytical framework in this article is also applicable to other informal and formal clubs of world politics, ranging from the BRICS to the middle powers to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to the African Union. The exact technique for analyzing these clubs' respective status orders might differ from the approach applied here. I have argued that discourse offers a useful analytical window to explore status orders. But other interpretive methodologies such as ethnography or practice theory offer equally well-suited alternatives to study the situated status dynamics unfolding in various clubs of world politics.[196]

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195. Iver B. Neumann, *Concepts of International Relations, for Students and Other Smarties* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019), 104–105, https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.9709659.
196. Røren, "Status Seeking in the Friendly Nordic Neighborhood"; Pouliot, *International Pecking Orders*; Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Vincent Pouliot, "Power in Practice: Negotiating the International Intervention in Libya," *European Journal of International Relations* 20, no. 4 (2014): 889–911, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066113512702.