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Who Gets to Exist?

State Recognition as Strategic Legitimacy in Kosovo and Chechnya

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines why the United States recognised Kosovo's independence in 2008 while consistently refusing to support Chechen self-determination across two wars and more than a decade of conflict. Both cases involved secessionist movements, significant civilian suffering, and comparable normative claims, yet produced opposite recognition outcomes.

This divergence constitutes a central puzzle for international relations theory.

The study develops a Strategic Recognition Framework integrating three explanatory variables: security framing, power asymmetry, and economic interdependence, to explain this variation. Drawing on securitization theory, organised hypocrisy and liberal institutionalism, the framework argues that recognition functions as an instrument of strategic statecraft rather than a neutral legal determination.

Through a structured comparative case study and qualitative content analysis of US official discourse, the thesis finds that all three variables converged to enable recognition in Kosovo and to preclude it in Chechnya, and the findings suggest that humanitarian norms and legal vocabularies are selectively mobilised to legitimise strategically predetermined outcomes.

The study contributes a replicable analytical framework for studying recognition decisions beyond these two cases.

Keywords: State Recognition, Securitization, Organised Hypocrisy, Kosovo, Chechnya, US Foreign Policy, Strategic Recognition Framework

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*To Oscar, the most incredible person and boyfriend,
I am immensely grateful for you.
I love you.*

Table of Contents

Abstract

Acknowledgements

1.0. Introduction	6
1.1. Variables and Analytical Framework	7
1.2. Significance of the Study	7
1.3. Aim and Research Question	8
1.4. Thesis Outline	8
1.5. Background: Kosovo and Chechnya	9
2.0. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review	10
2.1. Previous Research	10
2.2. State Recognition and Securitization	12
2.3. Selective Norms and Economic Interdependence	14
2.4. Strategic Recognition	16
3.0. Methodology	19
3.1. Research Design and Method	19
3.2. Case Selection	21
3.3. Data Collection	22
3.4. Data Analysis and Coding	23
3.5. Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability	25
3.6. Ethical Considerations	25
3.7. Reflexivity	26
3.8. Limitations and Delimitations	26
4.0. Presentation of Findings and Analysis	28
4.1. Background: Kosovo and Chechnya	28
4.2. Security Framing: Humanitarian Emergency, Stabilization, Counterterrorism	29
4.3. Normative Justifications: Self-Determination vs. Territorial Integrity	31
4.4. Power Asymmetry and Strategic Constraints	33
4.5. Economic Interdependence and Policy Costs	34
5.0. Discussion of Results	36

5.1. Explaining Variation in Recognition Outcomes.....	37
5.2. Securitization and the Politics of Legitimacy.....	38
5.3. Selective Recognition.....	39
5.4. Interdependence and Strategic Restraint.....	40
6.0. Conclusion	
Bibliography	

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1.0.Introduction

State recognition is a foundational practice in international relations, through which political entities are granted or denied membership in international society, and it is commonly framed as a legal or normative act grounded in principles such as sovereignty, self-determination, and the fulfillment of formal criteria, as reflected in the Montevideo Convention (Montevideo Convention, 1933). Within legal scholarship, recognition has traditionally been understood through the distinction between declaratory and constitutive theories: while the declaratory approach treats recognition as the acknowledgment of an already existing state, the constitutive approach views recognition itself as a necessary condition for statehood (Kilibarda, 2024: 155). Although these frameworks provide important clarity, they do not fully account for the empirical variation observed in recognition practices, as in practice, recognition decisions are often inconsistent, selective, and shaped by broader political considerations. Moreover, similar cases do not necessarily produce similar outcomes, raising questions about the factors that drive these differences. This inconsistency can be seen in the United States' responses to secessionist movements emerging from contexts of severe state violence.

In 2008, Kosovo's declaration of independence was widely recognized by Western states, including the United States, and justified through humanitarian arguments, including references to Serbian war crimes and the failure of the parent state to protect its population (Congressional Research Service, 2008: 1-2). In contrast, Chechnya, where extensive and well-documented violence was carried out by the Russian state during the 1990s and early 2000s, was not recognized as independent, despite a clear secessionist claim and international awareness of the conflict (U.S. Department of State, 2000).

Focusing on the US sharpens the analytical puzzle, as the United States justified its recognition of Kosovo explicitly on humanitarian grounds, invoking Serbian war crimes and the failure of the parent state to protect its population, yet applied none of this reasoning to Chechnya, where Russian state violence was equally well-documented and condemned. The US, invoking the same normative vocabulary, reached opposite conclusions in structurally comparable cases, which is what makes the US an ideal unit of analysis for examining the factors driving recognition decisions.

This contrast leads to a broad research puzzle, as why do similar humanitarian and political conditions produce different recognition outcomes? Existing scholarship has acknowledged that recognition is not purely legal, but much of the literature continues to treat it as either a normative response to exceptional circumstances or a formal legal determination. Less attention has been given to recognition as a strategic practice embedded in security considerations, power asymmetries, and economic interests.

This thesis addresses this gap by conceptualizing recognition as a form of strategic statecraft and it examines how the United States grants or withholds recognition in ways that reflect broader concerns related to security, hierarchy, and material interests. The focus on the United States as the primary unit of analysis is deliberate and analytically motivated because the United States' recognition decisions carry disproportionate normative and institutional weight, also routinely shaping the responses of allies, international organizations, and smaller states.

The thesis contributes to the field of Global Studies because it points out the complex nature of state recognition by comparing the two relevant cases, and in that way, it goes beyond mere legal frameworks.

1.1. Variables and Analytical Framework

This study is organized around a clear explanatory structure: the dependent variable is recognition, defined as the granting of political legitimacy, in this thesis specifically by the United States, to an entity. Three independent variables are used to explain this variation: security framing, meaning how the conflict is discursively constructed in US foreign policy as either a humanitarian emergency or an internal counterterrorism matter; power asymmetry, meaning the relative structural position of the parent state, since challenging a weak state carries different geopolitical costs than challenging a major power; and economic interdependence, meaning the degree of material entanglement between the US and the parent state through trade, energy, arms control, and institutional cooperation. Together these three variables form the Strategic Recognition Framework developed in Chapter 2, and the thesis argues it is their combined configuration that explains different recognition outcomes by the US across Kosovo and Chechnya.

1.2. Significance of the Study

This study contributes to ongoing debates by addressing a key gap in the literature on state recognition, as while existing research has explored the legal and normative dimensions of

recognition, less attention has been paid to the factors that explain variation in recognition outcomes across cases. Therefore, by focusing on recognition as a strategic practice rather than a simply legal or moral act, this thesis offers a more empirically grounded and theoretically integrated perspective. Theoretically, it brings together insights from recognition theory, security studies, and political economy to develop a multidimensional explanatory framework, and empirically, it provides a comparative analysis of two highly relevant cases, Kosovo and Chechnya, that highlight the selective, complex nature of recognition practices. More broadly, the study contributes to understanding how international legitimacy is constructed and contested, and by examining how powerful states such as the United States shape recognition outcomes, the research sheds light on the hierarchical and strategic dimensions of international order. This has implications not only for the study of secession and sovereignty, but also for broader debates on power, norms, and global governance.

1.3.Aim and Research Question

The aim of this thesis is to explain variation in United States recognition decisions in cases of secessionist conflict. Specifically, it seeks to examine how security considerations, power asymmetries, and economic interests shape the granting or withholding of political legitimacy.

The central research question guiding the study is:

How do security considerations, power asymmetries, and economic interests explain variation in United States' differing recognition decisions of Kosovo and Chechnya?

By focusing on these factors, the study aims to move beyond legal and purely normative explanations and to provide a more comprehensive account of recognition as a strategic political practice.

1.4.Thesis Outline

This thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 1 introduces the research problem, key concepts, and overall aim of the study. It also provides background on the cases of Kosovo and Chechnya. Chapter 2 presents the literature review and theoretical framework, outlining key scholars on state recognition and introducing the analytical concepts used to explain variation in recognition outcomes. Chapter 3 describes the methodology, including the research design,

data selection, coding strategy, and considerations of validity and reliability. Chapter 4 presents the empirical analysis, examining how recognition is framed and justified in the cases of Kosovo and Chechnya across key dimensions such as security, legitimacy, and strategic interests, followed by Chapter 5, which discusses the findings in relation to the theoretical framework, providing a comparative analysis of the cases and explaining variation in recognition outcomes. Finally, Chapter 6 concludes the study by summarizing the main findings, reflecting on their implications, and suggesting directions for future research.

1.5. Background: Kosovo and Chechnya

The cases of Kosovo and Chechnya provide a suitable basis for examining variation in recognition practices, as both involve secessionist movements that emerged from contexts of violent conflict and contested state authority, yet they derived different responses from the United States.

Kosovo, a former province of Serbia, declared independence in 2008 following a period of conflict in the late 1990s and subsequent international administration. The declaration was widely recognized by Western states, including the United States, and was justified through references to humanitarian intervention, ethnic cleansing, and the failure of the Serbian state to protect its population (U.S. Department of State, 1999). Kosovo's independence was framed as a unique case, reflecting exceptional circumstances.

In contrast, Chechnya, a region within the Russian Federation, experienced two major wars during the 1990s and early 2000s, and the conflicts were characterized by extensive violence, including actions widely described as war crimes (U.S. Congress, 2000). Despite US criticism of violence inflicted by Russia, Chechnya did not receive international recognition as an independent state, and the United States consistently emphasized Russia's territorial integrity and framed the conflict as an internal matter (US Department of State, 2000).

The contrast between these cases highlights the selective nature of recognition practices and raises important questions about the factors that shape recognition decisions. By comparing Kosovo and Chechnya, this study seeks to move beyond surface-level explanations and to identify the underlying dynamics that produce divergent outcomes.

2.0.Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The Strategic Recognition Framework developed in the following sections builds on and extends existing literature by providing an integrative analytical design.

2.1.Previous Research

The academic literature on state recognition and secessionist conflict has developed across multiple distinct but related fields, including international law, normative political theory, and international relations. While this scholarship provides important conceptual foundations, it has not produced a fully integrated account of why recognition outcomes vary across structurally comparable cases, and the gap this thesis seeks to address is evident in several strands of the existing research.

Early legal and normative literature on secession focused primarily on the tension between self-determination and territorial integrity as competing principles of international order. Beach (2000: 2-4) sees this tension as a defining feature of post-Cold War conflict, noting that the proliferation of secessionist movements since decolonisation has placed sustained pressure on the classical state-centric framework in which territorial integrity functioned as the default norm. Beach further notes that secession may be morally justifiable under conditions of sustained gross rights violations and the absence of non-violent remedies, yet that the international community has remained systematically reluctant to endorse it as a general entitlement, preferring instead accommodation of each case which avoids setting a precedent (Beach, 2000: 4-5). This reluctance is itself theoretically important as it shows a gap between normative argument and political practice that purely legal frameworks are not sufficient to explain.

The Kosovo case has attracted attention because it sits at this gap. Weller (1999: 211-213) provides a detailed explanation of the Rambouillet negotiations, documenting how the framing of the Kosovo crisis as a humanitarian emergency was inseparable from a broader struggle over the constitutional structure of the post-Cold War international system. Weller also argues that the Rambouillet process was not primarily about Kosovo but about three larger meta-questions: the redistribution of power among international actors, the contest between different core values of international order, and the legitimacy of the threat or use of force in the absence of Security Council authorisation (Weller, 1999: 217). This framing is relevant to the present study, as it highlights how recognition decisions, including decisions about intervention,

administration, and status, are shaped by strategic calculations that extend well beyond the specifics of any given conflict, and often beyond legal notions.

Weller also explains that the tension between self-determination and territorial integrity was managed at Rambouillet not through principled resolution but through deliberate ambiguity, with the non-negotiable principles affirming Yugoslav territorial integrity while simultaneously providing for a mechanism for a final settlement based on the will of the people (Weller, 1999: 219). This observation anticipates the organised hypocrisy framework developed in this thesis: rather than choosing between competing norms, the international community constructed a settlement that formally upheld territorial integrity while creating the conditions for its eventual erosion. The selective and strategic mobilisation of normative principles identified by Krasner (1999: 3-4) is therefore already visible in the Rambouillet process itself.

Similarly, Beach (2000: 10-11) notes that the legitimacy of the NATO intervention was contested because it lacked Security Council authorisation, and that Russia and China's opposition was partly explained by their sensitivity to the Kosovo precedent in relation to their own domestic secessionist challenges, including Chechnya. This observation establishes an early and important link between the Kosovo and Chechnya cases at the level of the international normative debate, suggesting that the asymmetry in recognition outcomes was not incidental but reflected a deliberate effort by key actors, including the United States, to manage the scope of the Kosovo precedent.

The Chechnya conflict has been discussed in the literature on post-Soviet politics and ethnic conflict, though this has rarely engaged with the question of international recognition. Hughes (2001: 12) argues explicitly against historicist and ethnic war explanations in favour of a multidimensional analysis that foregrounds political agency and sectional economic interests. Hughes shows that the Chechen conflict was not the product of primordial ethnic hatred but of a specific mix of factors including the instrumentalisation of secessionism by political elites on both sides, the strategic interests of Russia's energy and military sectors, and the dynamics of presidentialism under Yeltsin and Putin (Hughes, 2001: 25-26). This analytical framework is directly important to the study as it reframes the Chechnya conflict not as a culturally predetermined clash but as a politically constructed crisis shaped by actors and interests, making it analytically comparable to Kosovo rather than categorically different from it.

Hughes makes a further observation that is central to the argument developed in this thesis. He notes that the key differentiating factor between Chechnya and Kosovo, in terms of international response, was not the severity of violence or the legitimacy of the secessionist

claim but rather the severe limitations on international leverage over Russia due to its nuclear and great power status (Hughes, 2001: 33). Western governments, constrained by Russia's strategic significance and by international norms unfavourable to secession, consistently treated Chechnya as an internal Russian matter and declined to support recognition of Maskhadov's democratically elected government despite its international legitimacy (Hughes, 2001: 33-34). This pattern of deliberate non-engagement is relevant to the power asymmetry and economic interdependence variables developed in this thesis. Hughes also shows how the post-September 11 context reversed the brief period of US criticism of Russian conduct in Chechnya, as Washington prioritised securing Russian support for its campaign in Afghanistan, returning to the Clinton era framing of Chechnya as an internal matter of counterterrorism (Hughes, 2001: 34, 38). This shift is directly relevant to the securitisation dimension of the analytical framework developed here, showing how the same conflict can be reframed by a dominant actor in response to changing strategic priorities.

The previous literature therefore presents important dimensions of both cases and the broader normative tensions surrounding secessionist recognition, but it does not provide a systematic comparative framework that can explain variation across differing recognition decisions between them. Neither Beach nor Weller extends the analysis to a structured comparison with Chechnya, and while Hughes engages the comparison directly, he does so from the perspective of post Soviet politics rather than recognition theory. None of these accounts integrates securitisation, power asymmetry, and economic interdependence into a coherent explanatory structure.

2.2.State Recognition and Securitization

State recognition functions as a mechanism through which states are individuated and differentiated within international society, shaping hierarchies of status, inclusion, and legitimacy in the international system (Bartelson, 2016: 1-2).

Classical debates distinguish between declaratory and constitutive approaches to recognition: The declaratory view explains that statehood exists independently of recognition, relying on objective criteria such as a defined territory, permanent population, effective government, and capacity to enter relations with other states (Kilibarda, 2024: 154-155; Fabry, 2013: 165). In contrast, the constitutive perspective emphasizes the performative power of recognition where an entity becomes a state only when it is formally recognized by existing states, highlighting the socially constructed nature of statehood (Ibid.).

While these perspectives show different aspects of recognition, they are insufficient for explaining variation in practice, as they may fulfill legal criteria yet experience different recognition outcomes depending on political, strategic, or normative considerations. Recognition is therefore not binary and simple, but it is multi-layered, involving identification, acknowledging a distinct political entity and accepting its existence, granting authorization, and legitimacy (Bartelson, 2016: 2-4).

The question of who gets to recognize and on what basis has also been examined through the lens of international society theory. Bull (1977: 17-18) argues that recognition functions as a gatekeeper mechanism through which the society of states reproduces itself, admitting new members only when their inclusion serves the ordering interests of existing powers. This perspective challenges the assumption that recognition is primarily a response to empirical statehood and instead places it within a broader logic of social reproduction and exclusion. Crawford (2006: 128, 141, 410) develops this further, showing through extensive historical analysis that recognition has never been applied consistently according to formal legal criteria alone, and that political calculations have shaped outcomes from the decolonization era onward. Taken together, these scholars' arguments take into account the view that recognition is inherently a political practice through which the boundaries of legitimate authority are negotiated and contested rather than simply observed and recorded.

Moreover, recognition decisions are not made in a vacuum, but they are embedded within broader discourses of security and securitization theory, which conceptualizes security as a socially constructed category, and not an objective measure of threat (Wæver, 1995: 14-15). Political actors define certain issues as existential threats, therefore legitimizing extraordinary political or military responses (Wæver, 1995: 17). Within this framework, recognition is entwined with how secessionist conflicts are framed and communicated in international discourse.

The framing of a conflict directly affects its perceived legitimacy and the feasibility of recognition because when a secessionist movement is framed as a threat to regional stability or as a potential source of wider conflict, recognition may be justified as a stabilizing intervention. More specifically, when a conflict is framed as an internal security issue, specifically under the umbrella of counterterrorism, recognition can be politically and normatively delegitimized. Similarly, securitization points out that recognizing (in this context read as: noticing, acknowledging) threats is dependent on the actor's timing and is also the product of strategic interpretation of threats by presenting/framing an actor or state as a threat: securitization determines the conditions under which recognition of crises is politically viable, normatively

defensible, and strategically advantageous (Balzacq, 2005: 171-172, 182). It means that crisis recognition outcomes are therefore contingent upon the intersection of discourse, strategic interest, and perceived security risk.

Moreover, the relationship between securitization and foreign policy has been further elaborated by Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998), who extend the original securitization framework beyond military threats to encompass political, societal, economic, and environmental dimensions. This is relevant for understanding state recognition decisions, as it shows that the designation of a situation as a security issue is always a political choice with real consequences for which actors and institutions are empowered to respond. Importantly, Balzacq (2005: 181-182) emphasizes that securitization requires an audience; the speech act must be accepted by a relevant public or institutional body for it to produce political effects. This has direct implications for recognition: a framing that successfully constructs a secessionist conflict as a security emergency must resonate within specific institutional contexts, such as the UN Security Council or NATO, if it is to translate into policy action. Hansen (2011: 69) adds a further insight by drawing attention to the politics of silence and invisibility in security discourse, noting that the failure to securitize a situation, treating it as routine or internal, is itself a political act that forecloses certain responses. This insight helps explain why the absence of a specific security framing can be just as consequential as its presence in shaping recognition outcomes.

Similarly, Sjøstedt (2007: 233-234; 349-251) argues that foreign policy doctrines do not emerge just in response to immediate external shocks but are shaped by pre-existing discursive structures norms, identity constructions, and securitization processes, that constrain and enable what policymakers can credibly say and do, and her comparative analysis of the Truman and Bush Doctrines shows that remarkable similarities in the discursive mechanisms underpinning each doctrine suggest that continuity in the structure of American foreign policy discourse is more important than the specific events that appear to trigger doctrinal shifts. This goes hand in hand with the argument of the thesis.

2.3.Selective Norms and Economic Interdependence

Even when conflicts are securitized, outcomes vary because the international system does not apply norms uniformly. Krasner's concept of organized hypocrisy shows how sovereignty norms, territorial integrity, and self-determination are selectively interpreted and enforced, and while sovereignty is upheld rhetorically as a universal principle, in practice it is

instrumentalized to serve strategic interests, often by powerful states; this selective application is necessary to understanding recognition discrepancies (Krasner, 1999: 9, 18). In other words, self-determination is mobilized selectively when it aligns with the strategic interests of powerful actors, whereas territorial integrity is emphasized when secession challenges influential states: challenging a weak state carries fewer risks and may be politically feasible, whereas challenging a great power entails potentially catastrophic retaliation, including diplomatic, economic, or military consequences. Kosovo and Chechnya show these dynamics as recognition of Kosovo aligned with the interests of the United States and did not threaten core interests of other major powers. Chechnya, by contrast, challenged the sovereignty of Russia, a major power whose retaliation could destabilize European and global political and economic interests. Krasner's framework explains this divergence by emphasizing that norms are strategically applied, not mechanically enforced. Recognition is therefore a function of both normative discourse and structural power asymmetries, mirroring the politics of selective legitimacy in international society.

The tension between self-determination and territorial integrity has been extensively theorized, as Cassese (1995: 45-47) traces the evolution of self-determination as a legal norm, arguing that while it gained considerable normative force through decolonization, its application in post-colonial contexts has been systematically constrained by the competing principle of territorial integrity, specifically where secession would threaten the interests of major powers. Reus-Smit (2001: 520, 529) builds on constructivist foundations to argue that normative legitimacy in international relations is not simply declared but negotiated through ongoing political contestation, meaning that the same norm can be invoked to support contradictory policy positions depending on the strategic context. Although from a different angle, this aligns closely with Krasner's organized hypocrisy framework and extends it by showing that normative inconsistency is not just tolerated but actively reproduced through institutional discourse. The result, as Fabry (2010: 117) shows, is a system in which the formal vocabulary of norms is preserved while their substantive application remains deeply contingent on the preferences of powerful states.

When it comes to powerful states and economic interests in shaping foreign policy decisions, it has been theorized within the liberal institutionalist tradition. Keohane (2008: 158-160) argues that institutionalized economic interdependence raises the costs of unilateral action and creates incentives for states to pursue cooperative rather than confrontational strategies, even when they possess the capability to act otherwise. This logic has direct implications for recognition decisions: where a parent state is deeply embedded in multilateral economic and

institutional arrangements with the recognizing state, the costs of challenging its territorial integrity extend well beyond the bilateral relationship and into broader regimes of cooperation. Keohane and Nye (1977:8) further explain that economic and material considerations generate mutual vulnerabilities and constraints. Recognition that challenges a parent state's territorial integrity can have a wide range of economic consequences, including disruption of trade, energy supply, investment, and multilateral cooperation.

Economic interdependence amplifies the strategic calculation surrounding recognition, and when material exposure to a parent state is low, recognition may be politically manageable because when exposure is high, costs rise, creating strong disincentives (Keonahe and Nye, 2008: 159). Economic constraints therefore interact with security and power considerations, shaping the spectrum of feasible recognition policies.

Gilpin (1987: 233) argues from a political economy perspective that hegemonic states use economic relationships strategically to maintain order and discipline within their sphere of influence, and that disrupting these relationships, for example through recognition of a secessionist entity, carries systemic as well as bilateral costs. More recently, Cooley and Nexon (2020: 26) have examined how relationships and economic leverage shape the political autonomy of smaller states and the willingness of great powers to extend or withhold recognition, arguing that material dependencies structure the field of politically available choices in ways that normative commitments alone cannot explain. These collectively reinforce the view that economic interdependence is not a background condition but an active variable that shapes the threshold at which recognition becomes politically feasible.

2.4.Strategic Recognition

Existing studies tend to examine recognition either through normative frameworks or geopolitical interests in isolation; however, they rarely provide a systematic comparative explanation for why similar cases produce different recognition outcomes, and this thesis addresses this gap by integrating strategic, normative, and economic factors within a structured comparative framework.

For example, Buchanan (2004: 331) opposes strategic frameworks of the kind developed here, and he argues that recognition practices should be governed by principles of justice rather than strategic calculation, and that the international community's selective application of self-determination norms reflects a moral failure that a reformed legal order ought to correct. While this normative critique is important, it presupposes that recognition decisions are or could be

insulated from strategic considerations, and that is a presupposition that the thesis does not adopt. Buchanan challenges the view of recognition as a strategic tool of powerful states, and he argues that recognition should be governed by principled moral criteria derived from justice theory, specifically, that a right to secession exists when a group has suffered serious injustice and has no adequate remedy short of independence, regardless of whether this aligns with the strategic interests of major powers (2004: 331-332). In other words, for Buchanan, the kind of selective, interest-driven recognition in Kosovo and Chechnya is what the international system should be reformed to prevent, and he is therefore a theoretical opponent to Krasner's organized hypocrisy framework and the Strategic Recognition Framework.

Taken together, the preceding section supports a Strategic Recognition Framework that conceptualizes recognition as a dependent variable defined as the granting or withholding of political legitimacy to a secessionist entity. Recognition outcomes are contingent upon three analytically distinct but mutually reinforcing dimensions: Security framing: Conflicts are socially constructed through discourse, which legitimizes or delegitimizes recognition based on perceived threats (Wæver, 1995: 19). Power asymmetry: Structural hierarchies shape the costs of challenging territorial integrity, reflecting the distribution of capabilities and influence in international politics (Krasner, 1999: 3, 121). Economic interdependence: Material interconnections condition the costs and feasibility of recognition, creating strategic constraints that influence political calculation (Keohane and Nye, 1977). Within this framework, recognition is not an automatic response to legal criteria or humanitarian crises. Instead, it is a strategic act of statecraft, mediated by the interplay of discourse, power, and material interests. Norms such as self-determination, territorial integrity, and humanitarian protection remain central in political discourse but are mobilized selectively, in ways that align with strategic, economic, and security concerns.

By integrating insights from recognition theory (Bartelson, 2016), securitization theory (Wæver, 1995), and interdependence theory (Keohane and Nye, 1977), the Strategic Recognition Framework provides a robust analytical lens for explaining variation in recognition outcomes. It captures the inherently contingent, political, and strategic nature of recognition, offering both theoretical coherence and empirical applicability to cases like Kosovo and Chechnya, and providing a generalizable approach to contemporary secessionist conflicts.

The coding scheme presented in Table 1.0 below operationalizes the independent variables through specific observable indicators, and rather than relying on abstract categories, the analysis systematically identifies these variables through recurring keywords, phrases, and

argumentative patterns in the data. This ensures consistency in how each variable is applied across both cases:

1.0

Variable Type	Variable	Definition	Operationalization
Dep. Variable 1	Recognition	Granting or withholding of political legitimacy to a secessionist entity	US official statements, state recognition, institutional support
Ind. Variable 2	Security Framing	How conflicts are constructed as threats or non-threats	Language in US discourse (e.g. “humanitarian crisis” vs “terrorism/internal issue”)
Ind. Variable 3	Power Asymmetry	Relative power of the parent state in the international system	Status of parent state (e.g. great power vs weak state), potential retaliation
Ind. Variable 4	Economic Interdependence	Degree of economic and strategic ties affecting policy costs	Trade relations, energy dependence, security cooperation

This allows for direct comparison of how different forms of framing are emphasized in US discourse across the two cases.

3.0.Methodology

This thesis adopts a qualitative research design to examine variation in United States recognition practices in the cases of Kosovo (2008) and Chechnya (1991-2005). The study is grounded in a comparative case study approach and employs qualitative content analysis to systematically analyze how recognition decisions are framed, justified, and articulated in official discourse. The methodological approach is aligned with the study's objective of explaining variation in recognition outcomes, rather than measuring causal relationships in a strictly positivist sense. By focusing on discourse, justification, and strategic framing, the methodology allows for a nuanced understanding of how recognition operates as a political outcome shaped by security considerations, power asymmetries, and economic constraints.

3.1.Research Design and Method

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on a comparative case study approach, combined with qualitative content analysis, to examine variation in United States recognition practices.

The comparative case study design is chosen over a single case study or large-N approach for a specific reason: the research puzzle this thesis addresses is inherently comparative. The question is not what happened in Kosovo or what happened in Chechnya, but why the same state, invoking the same normative vocabulary, reached opposite conclusions in structurally comparable cases. A single case study would not allow for isolating the factors that explain this divergence, and a large-N quantitative approach would flatten the discursive and contextual complexity that is central to my argument. The comparative design is therefore not a default methodological choice but a deliberate response to the nature of the research question.

Comparative case study research is particularly well suited for theory-driven inquiry in International Relations, as it enables the systematic examination of similarities and differences across cases while maintaining sensitivity to contextual variation (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2017: 906-907). Rather than treating cases as isolated instances, this approach allows for the application of a common analytical framework, facilitating structured comparison and theory testing. In this study, the comparative design is used to assess how the same set of independent variables, security framing, power asymmetry, and economic interdependence, operate differently across cases to produce variation in the dependent variable, recognition. The cases of Kosovo and Chechnya are selected based on a "most similar systems" logic, as they share several key characteristics while differing in outcome. Both cases involve secessionist

movements, large-scale violence, and significant international attention. However, they diverge in terms of recognition outcomes: Kosovo received broad recognition from Western states, including the United States, while Chechnya did not. This variation makes the cases analytically valuable, as it allows the study to isolate and examine the factors that explain divergent recognition practices. By controlling for structural similarities, the comparative design strengthens the explanatory power of the analysis and allows for more robust theoretical conclusions.

The selection of this design is therefore not arbitrary but directly motivated by the empirical puzzle at the heart of this thesis: if Kosovo and Chechnya share so many structural characteristics, secessionist conflict, large-scale violence, and significant international attention, then what accounts for the divergence in recognition outcomes? The most-similar systems logic pushes this puzzle from a historical curiosity into an analytically tractable research problem by controlling for shared conditions and isolating the variables that differ across cases.

The comparative design employed in this study follows what George and Bennett (2005) term a structured, focused comparison. The approach is structured in that the same set of theoretically derived questions is posed systematically to each case: How was the secessionist conflict framed in US official discourse? What was the structural position of the parent state in the international system? What degree of economic and institutional interdependence existed between the US and the parent state? By asking identical questions of both Kosovo and Chechnya, the analysis ensures comparability and guards against the risk of cherry-picking evidence that fits a predetermined narrative. The approach is focused; it does not attempt a comprehensive historical account of either conflict, but instead examines only those aspects of each case that are theoretically relevant to explaining variation in recognition outcomes. As George and Bennett (2005) argue, this methodology is particularly well suited to theory because it combines the contextual sensitivity of case study research with the analytical discipline of systematic comparison, allowing the researcher to identify causal mechanisms rather than simply document empirical patterns.

Darian-Smith and McCarty argue that global studies require researchers to move beyond the vertically nested hierarchy of local, national, and international scales that has dominated political science because this hierarchy limits the ways in which global processes are simultaneously constituted at multiple levels (2017: 14).

In this study, the structured focused comparison serves a dual purpose: it tests whether the Strategic Recognition Framework developed in Chapter 2 goes across both cases, and it

generates theoretically grounded explanations for why the same independent variables: security framing, power asymmetry, and economic interdependence, produced different recognition outcomes.

The qualitative content analysis is the most suitable as it helps explain and understand the thesis puzzle and is chosen over quantitative alternatives such as automated text analysis or word frequency mapping because the object of this study is not how often certain words appear but how legitimacy is constructed through language (Thies, 2002: 368-369). The aim is to trace the rhetorical and discursive strategies through which the United States frames secessionist conflicts as either amenable or hostile to recognition, and this requires close interpretive engagement with texts rather than statistical measurement. Qualitative content analysis allows for asking not just what is said but how it is said, what is omitted, and what normative assumptions are embedded in official discourse. This is important for identifying where the same normative vocabulary: self-determination, territorial integrity, humanitarian protection, is deployed selectively across cases in ways that a frequency count would not capture.

3.2.Case Selection

The selection of the United States as the primary unit of analysis requires justification. Several considerations informed this decision: First, the United States is the most consequential unilateral recognizer in the post-Cold War international order; its recognition decisions carry disproportionate normative and institutional weight, routinely shaping the responses of allies, international organizations, and smaller states. Focusing on a hegemonic actor therefore maximizes the analytical leverage of the study, since the US faces fewer structural constraints than most states and its decisions are therefore more directly attributable to strategic choice rather than external pressure. Second, the US was the lead actor in both cases under examination: it affected the diplomatic process that produced Kosovo's internationally recognized independence in 2008 and simultaneously maintained a consistent position of nonrecognition toward Chechnya throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, framing the conflict explicitly as an internal Russian matter. This makes the US the most directly comparable unit across both cases. Third, and methodologically, the United States produces an exceptionally well-documented public record of its foreign policy reasoning; State Department statements, presidential addresses, UN Security Council interventions, and Congressional records are all publicly accessible, making it possible to trace the construction and justification of recognition decisions with a degree of empirical precision that would be difficult to replicate for other

actors. The focus on the US is therefore not random but analytically motivated, and it is this combination of structural significance, direct case relevance, and empirical accessibility that makes it the appropriate unit of analysis for this study.

3.3.Data Collection

The empirical material is selected based on direct relevance to the research question rather than representativeness in a statistical sense. Purposive selection was appropriate here because the attempt is not to generalize across a population of documents, but to reconstruct how the United States justified specific recognition decisions at specific historical moments (Ties, 2002: 369). The official discourse is deliberately prioritized over media coverage or civil society sources because recognition is a state practice, and it is therefore in state-produced language that the strategic construction of legitimacy is most directly observable. Including Russian government statements was considered for comparative contextual purposes, but as the study's unit of analysis is specifically US foreign policy reasoning rather than bilateral diplomatic exchange, Russia was not included.

The empirical material for this study consists of primary source documents taken from official US foreign policy discourse across both cases. The selection of material was guided by the theoretical framework, focusing specifically on sources that reveal how the United States constructed, justified, and communicated its position on recognition in relation to Kosovo and Chechnya.

For the Kosovo case, the primary sources collected include United Nations Security Council debates from 1998 to 2008, with particular focus on sessions surrounding NATO intervention in 1999 and the 2008 declaration of independence. US State Department press releases and official statements from this period are included, notably statements by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright during the 1999 Rambouillet negotiations and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's formal recognition statement of February 2008. Presidential addresses by Bill Clinton and George W. Bush relating to Kosovo's status are also included, alongside the US submission to the International Court of Justice in the 2010 advisory opinion proceedings on Kosovo's declaration of independence.

For the Chechnya case, the material covers the period from 1991 to 2005, encompassing both the First Chechen War (1994-1996) and the Second Chechen War (1999-2005). Sources include UN Security Council and General Assembly debates in which the US took positions on the conflict, State Department press releases addressing Russian military operations in

Chechnya, and statements by senior US officials including Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Secretary of State Colin Powell, and President George W. Bush, particularly following the reframing of the conflict within the post-September 11 counterterrorism context. Secondary sources are incorporated to contextualize the primary material and situate the findings within existing scholarly debates on recognition, securitization, and international political economy. Secondary sources are not the primary unit of analysis but serve an interpretive and contextualizing function throughout the study.

3.4.Data Analysis & Coding

The empirical material is analyzed using a deductive qualitative content analysis guided by the Strategic Recognition Framework developed in Chapter 2. It was coded for the presence, frequency, and contextual framing of themes corresponding to the three independent variables: security framing, power asymmetry, and economic interdependence, as well as the dependent variable of recognition. Coding was conducted manually to allow for close interpretive engagement with the language and rhetorical strategies employed in official discourse. Coding also attends to patterns of absence, where a theme that is prominent in one case is systematically absent in the other. This is significant for identifying organized hypocrisy, where normative vocabularies are selectively deployed. For example, the presence of humanitarian framing in Kosovo discourse alongside its absence in Chechnya discourse, despite comparable levels of documented violence, is treated as analytically meaningful in itself.

While the primary approach is deductive, the coding process remained open to emergent themes not fully anticipated by the framework. Any such themes were noted and assessed for their theoretical relevance before being incorporated into the analysis. This combination of structure and flexibility reflects the interpretivist epistemological position of the study and ensures that the analysis remains responsive to the complexity of the empirical material rather than forcing it into a predetermined schema.

The coding scheme is organized around four primary codes, each with a definition and concrete textual indicators, as set out in the table nr 2.0 below:

2.0

Code	Variable	IV / DV	Definition	TextIndicators
Recognition Outcome Statement	Recognition	DV	Explicit statements granting or withholding political legitimacy to the secessionist entity	Formal recognition declarations, statements affirming territorial integrity of parent state, conditional language on status
Security Framing	Security Framing	IV	Language constructing the conflict as either a humanitarian emergency or an internal/counterterrorism matter, shaping the political viability of recognition	"ethnic cleansing," "war crimes," "civilian protection," "internal affair," "fight against terrorism," "separatists"
Parent State Power Reference	Power Asymmetry	IV	Language explicitly or implicitly acknowledging the structural position of the parent state as a constraint on US action	References to "strategic partner," invocations of great power relations, avoidance of direct condemnation, deference language
Economic and Strategic Cost Language	Economic Interdependence	IV	Language referencing material ties between the US and parent state as considerations shaping policy costs	"energy security," "arms reduction," "strategic partnership," "bilateral relations," "economic cooperation"

3.5. Validity, Reliability, and Generalizability

Ensuring the quality and rigor of qualitative research requires careful attention to validity, reliability, and generalizability. In this study, internal validity is strengthened through the close alignment between the research design, theoretical framework, and empirical analysis. By clearly defining recognition as the dependent variable and systematically applying the independent variables across cases, the study enhances its explanatory coherence and analytical precision. Qualitative content analysis further contributes to validity by enabling a detailed and context-sensitive examination of empirical material (Creswell and Creswell, 2023: 292). To enhance credibility, the study relies on multiple sources of data, including official documents, institutional records, and scholarly literature. This triangulation reduces the risk of bias and strengthens the rigor of the findings. Additionally, the analysis situates all empirical material within its historical and political context, ensuring that interpretations remain grounded and accurate. Reliability is addressed using a consistent coding framework applied across both cases, and by clearly defining coding categories and systematically applying them to all selected materials, the study ensures a degree of procedural consistency (Creswell and Creswell, 2023: 243). Transparency in data selection and analytical procedures further contributes to the replicability of the research process, even if exact replication is not the primary goal of qualitative inquiry. In terms of generalizability, the study acknowledges the limitations inherent in small-N qualitative research. The findings are not intended to be statistically generalizable but rather analytically transferable (Creswell and Creswell, 2023: 244). The aim is to contribute by identifying mechanisms and patterns that may be applicable to other cases of contested recognition. By grounding the analysis in established theoretical frameworks, the study enhances its relevance beyond the specific cases examined. Overall, the study prioritizes analytical rigor, transparency, and theoretical consistency in order to produce credible and meaningful insights into variation in recognition practices.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

Although this study does not involve human participants, ethical considerations remain central to the research process. The use of publicly available documents does not eliminate the responsibility to ensure accuracy, integrity, and critical engagement with sources (Creswell and Creswell, 2023: 124-126). Given the politically sensitive nature of the cases examined, special care is taken to avoid reproducing biased, selective, or propagandistic narratives (Ties, 2002: 367). Official statements are treated as strategic and context-dependent rather than neutral

representations of reality. The analysis therefore critically evaluates sources, recognizing that political actors may frame events in ways that serve specific interests. The study also strives for balanced representation by incorporating multiple perspectives and avoiding overreliance on a single source or viewpoint. This is particularly important in cases involving conflict and contested legitimacy, where narratives are often highly polarized. Furthermore, proper citation and acknowledgment of all sources are maintained throughout the research process, ensuring academic integrity and transparency. The aim of the study is not to advocate for a particular political position, but to provide a rigorous and analytically grounded examination of recognition practices within international relations.

3.7. Reflexivity

Reflexivity plays an important role in qualitative research, as it requires the researcher to critically reflect on their own positionality and its potential influence on the research process (Creswell and Creswell, 2023: 226). In this study, the researcher's academic background in International Relations and familiarity with the Balkan region provide valuable contextual insight but also necessitate careful self-awareness. Personal perspectives and prior knowledge can shape the selection, interpretation, and evaluation of empirical material. To mitigate this, the study adopts a structured and theory-driven approach, ensuring that analysis is guided by clearly defined concepts rather than subjective assumptions. The use of multiple sources and consistent coding procedures further reduces the risk of bias. Reflexivity is treated as an ongoing process throughout the research, involving continuous critical engagement with both the data and the analytical framework. By acknowledging potential biases and actively working to address them, the study enhances the credibility and transparency of its findings.

3.8. Limitations and Delimitations

This study is subject to several limitations present in qualitative research design: first, the reliance on qualitative content analysis means that findings are interpretive and dependent on the researcher's analytical framework. While efforts are made to ensure rigor and consistency, alternative interpretations of the data remain possible. Second, the focus on two case studies limits the scope of generalization, and the findings are context-specific and should be understood within the theoretical framework applied in this study. However, the purpose of the research is not to produce universally generalizable results, but to generate theoretically informed insights into variation in recognition practices. Third, the analysis is based on publicly

available documents, which reflect official discourse rather than internal decision-making processes. As such, the study presents how recognition is justified and communicated, but it does not necessarily claim to capture the ultimate, complete range of strategic considerations behind policy decisions. In terms of delimitations, the study focuses specifically on the role of the United States and does not attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of all international actors involved in the cases, and when others are mentioned, it is due to their necessity for context understanding. Additionally, the research is limited to formal and institutional discourse, excluding informal communications and currently classified materials. Despite these limitations, the study provides a focused and theoretically grounded analysis that contributes to a deeper understanding of how and why recognition outcomes vary across cases in international politics.

4.0.Presentation of Findings/Analysis

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the study through a structured and systematic comparison of Kosovo and Chechnya. Each section examines one analytical dimension in turn: security framing, normative justification, power asymmetry, and economic interdependence. The chapter concludes by converging these to explain the difference in recognition outcomes. Rather than treating the cases as isolated historical episodes, the analysis reads them comparatively, asking the same theoretically derived questions of each and attending closely to both what is said and what is conspicuously absent in US official discourse.

4.1.Background: Kosovo and Chechnya

The cases of Kosovo and Chechnya provide a good analytical basis for examining variation in recognition practices. Both emerged as secessionist conflicts in the post-Cold War order, both involved sustained large scale violence against civilian populations, and both generated significant international attention, yet they produced fundamentally different recognition outcomes, with Kosovo achieving broad international recognition led by the United States, and Chechnya remaining unrecognized, its secessionist claims treated as an internal matter of the Russian Federation (Ker-Lindsay & Fabry, 2026: 75).

Kosovo, a predominantly Albanian-populated province of Serbia, experienced a period of escalating repression under Slobodan Milosevic during the 1990s. Following the failure of autonomy negotiations and the intensification of Serbian security operations against the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), NATO launched a 78-day air campaign against Yugoslavia in March 1999, framed explicitly as a humanitarian intervention to prevent ethnic cleansing and mass atrocities (U.S. Congress, 2008). An UN-administered interim period followed, governed under UN Security Council Resolution 1244, during which Kosovo's final status remained formally unresolved (*ibid.*). On 17 February 2008, Kosovo's Assembly declared independence and the United States formally recognized Kosovo the following day, with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stating that independence was 'the only viable option to promote stability in the region' (US Department of State, 2008).

Chechnya's trajectory was markedly different. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Chechnya declared independence under Dzhokhar Dudayev, a declaration that Moscow refused to accept (Jennings, 2024: 1-3). The First Chechen War (1994-1996) resulted in enormous civilian casualties and ended in a negotiated withdrawal of Russian forces following significant military setbacks, and the Second Chechen War, launched by Russia in

1999 under then Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, was prosecuted with considerably greater force and framed explicitly within the international discourse of counterterrorism, a framing that was reinforced after the September 11 attacks of 2001. The human toll was severe, and Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Council of Europe documented widespread violations of international humanitarian law by Russian forces, including indiscriminate bombardment of civilian areas, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances (Human Rights Watch, 2000; Amnesty International, 2003). Despite this, the United States did not call for Chechen independence, did not raise the question of self-determination in international forums, and consistently reaffirmed Russia's territorial integrity throughout both conflicts (U.S. State Department, 2008).

The structural similarities between the cases are sufficient to make the difference in recognition outcomes analytically puzzling and questionable. Both involved secessionist claims, both involved well-documented state violence, and both generated international media attention. The difference lies not in the nature of the conflicts themselves but in the strategic context in which they were interpreted and the discursive frameworks through which they were processed in US foreign policy. The following sections trace this difference systematically across the four analytical dimensions of the study in order to present it most coherently.

4.2.Security Framing: Humanitarian Emergency, Stabilization, Counterterrorism

In the Kosovo case, US official discourse constructed the conflict overwhelmingly through a humanitarian and regional security frame, and from the late 1990s onward, senior US policymakers consistently described the situation in Kosovo in terms of ethnic cleansing, mass atrocities, and the destabilizing consequences of Serbian repression for the broader Balkan region. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was among the most prominent persons of this framing, as in her public statements during the Rambouillet negotiations in February 1999, Albright described the conflict as a “humanitarian catastrophe” and argued that international intervention was necessary to prevent a repeat of the atrocities that had occurred in Bosnia earlier in the decade (US Department of State, 1999). President Clinton's address to the nation on 24 March 1999, the eve of the NATO air campaign, invoked the specter of ethnic cleansing explicitly: 'We act to protect thousands of innocent people in Kosovo from a mounting military offensive. We act to prevent a wider war, to defuse a powder keg at the heart of Europe' (Clinton, 1999).

This humanitarian framing was reinforced at the institutional level through US interventions in the UN Security Council. In statements before the Council in 1998 and 1999, US representatives invoked the language of civilian protection, war crimes accountability, and regional spillover risk as justifications for NATO action and, subsequently, for the establishment of the international administration of Kosovo under Resolution 1244 (US Department of State, 2003). The framing positioned the United States as a defender of universal humanitarian norms rather than a partisan actor, lending normative authority to what was in practice a unilateral military and political decision.

Notably, the security framing applied to Kosovo was stabilizing rather than escalatory in character, and recognition, when it came in 2008, was presented not as a reward for secession but as the only remaining mechanism for consolidating the post-conflict order and preventing a renewed descent into instability. Secretary of State Rice's statement on 18 February 2008 noted that recognizing Kosovo was the "right decision for us and the international community" (US Department of State, 2008). The conflict had been framed as a European security problem, and recognition was framed as the solution. Securitization here produced a discursive logic in which recognition became a stabilizing instrument rather than a destabilizing one, consistent with Wæver's (1995: 4) argument that securitization determines what extraordinary measures are rendered legitimate in response to a constructed threat.

The security framing applied to Chechnya by US officials was almost entirely inverted and rather than a humanitarian emergency requiring international response, Chechnya was framed throughout both wars as an internal security matter falling within Russia's sovereign authority: In statements before the UN Security Council during the First Chechen War, US representatives declined to invoke humanitarian protection language and instead emphasized the importance of a political settlement within the framework of Russian territorial integrity (US Department of State, 2002). While US officials occasionally expressed concern about civilian casualties in private diplomatic channels, public discourse carefully avoided any language that might be construed as supporting Chechen independence or subjecting Russian conduct to the same humanitarian scrutiny applied to Serbia, and President Bush noted that partnership with Russia is in the US interest (*ibid.*).

The second war dramatically reinforced this framing as, following the apartment bombings in Moscow in September 1999, which Russian authorities attributed to Chechen militants, and the subsequent launch of the second military campaign, Russia framed its operations explicitly as a counterterrorism effort (CRS, 2003). This framing found immediate purchase in Washington, and Secretary of State Colin Powell, in a statement in 2001, acknowledged Russia's 'legitimate

security concerns' in Chechnya, a formulation that effectively endorsed the counterterrorism frame and foreclosed any possibility of treating the conflict as a humanitarian emergency requiring external intervention (The White House, 2001). Moreover, after September 11, the alignment became explicit as the declassified transcripts show: President George W. Bush informed President Putin: "I want a Bush-Putin agreement... This is your opportunity to lead the Europeans..", indicating that the relationship with Russia was a priority (The White House, 2001).

This counterterrorism framing had profound consequences for the discursive space available for recognition, and by accepting Russia's construction of the conflict as a domestic security operation against violent extremists, the United States effectively preempted any normative basis for recognizing Chechen independence. Where Kosovo's conflict had been framed as a case of state-perpetrated ethnic cleansing that rendered Serbian authority illegitimate, Chechnya's conflict was framed as a case of state-led security response to terrorism that reinforced Russian authority. The same categories threat, security, stability, protection were activated in both cases, but with opposite political implications for recognition. This differential activation of securitization is consistent with Hansen's (2011: 68-69) argument that the failure to securitize a situation in humanitarian terms is itself a political act with real policy consequences.

4.3. Normative Justifications: Self-Determination vs Territorial Integrity

US discourse on Kosovo underwent a significant normative evolution between 1999 and 2008, as in the immediate aftermath of NATO intervention, US officials were careful to avoid any suggestion that Kosovo set a precedent for unilateral secession. Resolution 1244, which the US supported, reaffirmed 'the commitment of all Member States to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.' (UNSC, 1999). This reflected a deliberate attempt to manage the normative implications of intervention without triggering a cascade of secessionist claims elsewhere.

By 2007 and 2008, however, as the status process led by UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari concluded that supervised independence was the only viable outcome, US normative discourse shifted significantly. The Ahtisaari Plan, endorsed by the United States, explicitly invoked Kosovo's unique circumstances, the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the sustained period of international administration, and the impossibility of restoring Serbian authority, as the basis for treating independence as a legitimate outcome (US Department of State, 2007). US

statements in this period repeatedly emphasized the word 'unique,' framing Kosovo's independence as an exceptional case that did not challenge the general norm of territorial integrity.

In its submission to the International Court of Justice in the 2010 advisory opinion proceedings on Kosovo's declaration of independence, the United States argued that Kosovo's independence was consistent with international law precisely because it was the product of an extraordinary and unrepeatable set of circumstances: supervised international administration, sustained international engagement, and the complete breakdown of the relationship between Kosovo and Serbia (US Written Statement to the ICJ, 2009). This allowed the US to support self-determination in Kosovo while maintaining a formal commitment to territorial integrity as the general norm, a good example of the selective application of normative principles that Krasner terms organized hypocrisy.

In contrast, US normative discourse on Chechnya treated territorial integrity as essentially non-negotiable, and throughout both Chechen wars, US official statements consistently affirmed Russia's sovereign right to maintain control over its territory, making no use of self-determination language and drawing no parallels with Kosovo.

The normative contrast with Kosovo is especially different when examined through the lens of humanitarian justification, as in the Kosovo case, Serbian failure to protect civilians was central to US normative arguments for intervention and eventual recognition. In the Chechnya case, Russian conduct was subject to comparable international documentation of civilian harm, yet US discourse did not invoke the language of state failure to protect, war crimes accountability, or the responsibility to protect. Human rights concerns were raised in bilateral diplomatic contexts and in State Department human rights reports, but they were carefully far from any suggestion that Russia's territorial authority over Chechnya was thereby delegitimized (US Department of State Human Rights Reports, 2002).

This reflects the selective mobilization of normative vocabularies identified by Cassese (1995: 46) that the same principles: civilian protection, accountability for atrocities, the relationship between state conduct and territorial authority, were applied to Kosovo in ways that supported recognition and applied to Chechnya in ways that precluded it. The normative architecture of US foreign policy discourse was not abandoned in either case, and it was activated and deployed in strategically differentiated ways.

4.4. Power Asymmetry and Strategic Constraints

Serbia's position in the post-Cold War international system was one of relative weakness. Following the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the wars of the 1990s, Serbia had lost significant territory, economic capacity, and international standing; it was subject to international sanctions, its military had been substantially degraded by the NATO air campaign of 1999, and it had no major power patron willing to exercise a Security Council veto on its behalf, Russia and China abstained or avoided direct confrontation with NATO over Kosovo, reflecting the limits of their willingness to expend political capital on behalf of Belgrade (Ker-Lindsay & Fabry, 2026: 92).

This structural weakness created a permissive environment for US recognition of Kosovo, and the costs of challenging Serbian territorial integrity were relatively low, as there was no credible threat of military action, no risk of disruption to major strategic partnerships, and no possibility of a Security Council veto blocking international legitimation of Kosovo's status. Bull's (1977: 16-18) analysis of recognition as a gatekeeper mechanism is directly applicable here, as countries, led by the United States, admitted Kosovo when doing so served the ordering interests of the dominant powers and when the parent state lacked the capacity to prevent it. The asymmetry of power between Serbia and the US-led coalition was not just a background condition but an active enabling factor in the recognition decision.

The strategic aspect surrounding Chechnya was fundamentally different as Russia is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a nuclear weapons state, a major energy supplier to Europe, and a significant partner in arms control, counterproliferation, and global governance arrangements that the United States considered central to its foreign policy interests throughout the post-Cold War period. Recognizing Chechen independence would have meant directly challenging the territorial integrity of a state with the capacity to impose severe and credible costs on the United States across multiple strategic domains simultaneously.

The constraining effect of Russian power asymmetry is visible in US diplomatic behavior at the UN Security Council and during both Chechen wars, the United States did not table resolutions critical of Russian conduct, did not invoke Chapter VII enforcement mechanisms, and did not support referrals to international accountability mechanisms. This was not for lack of evidence, as US State Department human rights reports documented violations extensively, but because the strategic costs of confronting Russia institutionally were judged to outweigh the normative benefits of holding it to the same standards applied to Serbia. As Krasner (1999: 18) argues, sovereignty norms are not abandoned in such contexts but are selectively

interpreted in ways that serve the interests of powerful actors. In this case, both parties to the asymmetry, the United States and Russia, benefited from a mutual understanding that Chechnya's status was off the table.

The post September 11 context deepened this constraint, and as the United States sought Russian cooperation in the broader 'War on Terror', including intelligence sharing, access to Central Asian basing facilities, and support for UN resolutions authorizing operations in Afghanistan, the strategic value of the US-Russia relationship increased. Raising the question of Chechen self-determination in this context would have jeopardized cooperation that US policymakers considered directly relevant to American national security and power asymmetry, in this case, operated not just as a structural constraint but as an active shaper of the discursive and normative space within which recognition was conceivable.

4.5. Economic Interdependence and Policy Costs

In the Kosovo case, economic considerations imposed relatively few constraints on US recognition policy, and the United States had no significant direct economic exposure to Serbia that would have been disrupted by challenging its territorial integrity. US-Serbian trade relations were minimal, and Serbia was not a significant supplier of any strategic commodity to the United States or its major allies. The broader economic context of the Balkans, while relevant to European partners, did not go into compelling material aspects for US recognition of Kosovo.

To the extent that economic considerations featured in US policy deliberations, they pointed toward rather than away from recognition and the uncertainty over Kosovo's final status had decreased foreign investment in the region and created obstacles to its integration into European economic and institutional frameworks and from the US perspective, resolving Kosovo's status through recognition was therefore economically constructive, facilitating the region's stabilization and integration into the European economic order that the United States supported as a strategic objective. This is also seen in the US interest in Kosovo's natural resources, as the US supported projects regarding mining sector (US Department of the Treasury, 2009: 15). Considering that Kosovo's minerals were the main source of Former Yugoslavian economy, it is logical to see why the US would opt for Kosovo's independence and implement its administration there (Kosovo Investment and Enterprise Support Agency, 2011: 8).

Similarly, the Ahtisaari Plan, which underpinned US recognition, included detailed provisions on economic governance, property rights, and integration with regional and European structures, reflecting the view that recognition was a precondition for sustainable economic development in Kosovo (Ahtisaari, 2007).

The economic constraints surrounding Chechnya were of an entirely different order of magnitude, and the United States and Russia were linked by a web of strategic and economic interdependencies that made confrontation over Chechnya costly across multiple dimensions. In the energy domain, Russia was a major supplier of natural gas to US allies in Western Europe, and disruption of the US-Russia relationship risked complicating European energy security at a time especially since the US supported Russia's accession to the WTO and economic organizations (US State Department, 2001-2009). While the United States itself was not directly dependent on Russian energy, its European allies were, and the transatlantic relationship's economic dimension was sufficiently significant to factor into US foreign policy calculations.

Beyond energy, US-Russia interdependence in the post-Cold War period involved arms control, specifically the START treaties and the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction programme for securing Soviet nuclear materials, as well as counterproliferation cooperation and, increasingly after 2001, counterterrorism intelligence sharing (Woolf, 2003: 21). These relationships were considered by US administrations to be of high strategic value and disrupting them through a confrontational stance on Chechnya was judged to carry costs that outweighed the normative benefits of consistency in recognition policy. Keohane's (1977:8-10) argument that institutionalized interdependence raises the costs of unilateral action is directly applicable: the network of US-Russia institutional arrangements created a structural bias toward accommodation rather than confrontation.

Cooley and Nexon's (2020) analysis of how material dependencies shape the field of available political choices is also illuminating here. The patron-client logic they describe operated in reverse in the Chechnya case: rather than the United States using economic leverage to discipline a smaller state, it was the economic exposure created by the US-Russia relationship that disciplined Washington's options in relation to Chechnya. The result was a recognition policy, or rather, a deliberate non-recognition policy, that was not primarily driven by legal or normative calculation but by a rational assessment of material costs.

5.0. Discussion of Results

This chapter situates the empirical findings presented in Chapter 4 within the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2, drawing out the implications of the comparative analysis for the Strategic Recognition Framework and for broader debates on recognition, sovereignty, and international order. The discussion proceeds through each theoretical dimension in turn before synthesizing the findings into a theoretically integrated account of why the United States recognized Kosovo but not Chechnya. The chapter then reflects on the generalizability and limitations of the framework and considers its contribution to the existing literature.

The main finding of this thesis is that variation in US recognition outcomes across Kosovo and Chechnya is best explained by the combination of security framing, power asymmetry, and economic interdependence. This finding confirms the core argument of the Strategic Recognition Framework: recognition is a strategic act shaped by the intersection of discourse, hierarchy, and material interests, rather than an automatic or principled response to the existence of humanitarian need or legal criteria for statehood.

The study's most significant theoretical contribution is empirical confirmation that these three variables do not operate independently but reinforce one another in producing recognition outcomes, as in both cases security framing, power asymmetry, and economic interdependence pointed in the same direction, toward recognition in Kosovo and against it in Chechnya. This suggests that recognition decisions by hegemonic states are rarely the product of a single overriding consideration but mirror a broader strategic context in which multiple factors simultaneously operate. The Strategic Recognition Framework's integrative design, drawing on securitization theory, organized hypocrisy, and interdependence theory, is strengthened by this finding, as no single theoretical lens could have captured the full explanatory picture independently, as it would undermine its complexity.

This also goes for a methodological point: by applying the structured focused comparison approach of George and Bennett (2005), the study was able to ask identical questions of both cases and isolate the variables that differ, rather than just documenting what happened in each case separately. The design was appropriate precisely because it controlled for shared structural features and directed analytical attention toward the configuration of variables that actually explain the difference.

5.1.Explaining Variation in Recognition Outcomes

The preceding analysis shows that the divergence in US recognition outcomes between Kosovo and Chechnya cannot be explained by just a single variable operating in isolation, and neither the severity of violence, the strength of the secessionist claim, nor the degree of international attention differs sufficiently between the cases to account for the outcome. What differs systematically is the configuration of the three independent variables, security framing, power asymmetry, and economic interdependence, and it is this configuration that the Strategic Recognition Framework identifies as explanatory.

In the Kosovo case, all three variables aligned to facilitate recognition, as security framing constructed the conflict as a humanitarian emergency and regional stability threat in ways that made recognition a stabilizing rather than destabilizing response. Power asymmetry between the United States and Serbia was such that challenging Serbian territorial integrity carried minimal strategic costs and economic interdependence between the US and Serbia was negligible, removing any material disincentive for recognition. The result was a decision that could be presented as both normatively motivated and strategically costless.

In the Chechnya case, all three variables converged to preclude recognition: Security framing constructed the conflict as an internal Russian counterterrorism operation, making recognition discursively illegitimate. Power asymmetry between the United States and Russia was such that challenging Russian territorial integrity carried severe and credible strategic costs across military, diplomatic, and institutional dimensions. And economic interdependence between the US and Russia, spanning energy security, arms control, and counterterrorism cooperation, created substantial material disincentives for any confrontational stance. The result was a decision that could be presented as a principled commitment to sovereignty norms while reflecting a calculated strategic accommodation.

The coding analysis of US official discourse confirms this interpretation. Humanitarian language, ethnic cleansing, civilian protection, war crimes, and failure to protect appear with high frequency and intensity in Kosovo-related statements from 1998 onward and are absent from Chechnya-related statements across the same period despite comparable levels of documented violence. Self-determination language appears in Kosovo discourse from 2007 onward but is absent from Chechnya discourse. References to territorial integrity, internal affairs, and counterterrorism appear with high frequency in Chechnya-related discourse and are notably absent from Kosovo-related discourse after 1999, and this systematic pattern of discursive differentiation, consistent across administrations, policymakers, and institutional

contexts, reflects a strategic deployment of normative vocabularies shaped by the underlying configuration of security, power, and economic interests.

5.2. Securitization and the Politics of Legitimacy

The analysis provides strong empirical support for the relevance of securitization theory in explaining recognition outcomes, as the findings confirm Wæver's (1995: 4) argument that security is a socially constructed category activated through discursive processes rather than an objective reflection of material threat. In both cases, the United States played a main role in constructing the security meaning of the conflict: framing Kosovo as a humanitarian emergency where Serbia as a parent state failed to protect its civilians, and Chechnya as a counterterrorism challenge while respecting Russia's territorial integrity as a parent state, and these constructions directly shaped the boundaries of legitimate international response.

The findings also confirm the extension of securitization theory offered by Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998: 25), who emphasize that securitization requires public support and must resonate within institutional contexts to produce political effects. In the Kosovo case, the humanitarian framing resonated within NATO and was endorsed by the UN Security Council in Resolution 1244, even if the Council did not explicitly authorize the air campaign. This institutional legitimation amplified the framing and created a path-dependent logic in which recognition became the natural culmination of the stabilization process. In the Chechnya case, the counterterrorism framing resonated within the post 9/11 context and was endorsed by Western governments collectively, closing any institutional space for a competing humanitarian framing to gain traction.

Hansen's (2011: 67-68) argument about the politics of silence is well supported by the Chechnya findings as the failure to securitize the Chechen conflict as a humanitarian emergency despite evidence of civilian harm that would have met the threshold applied in Kosovo, was not an oversight but a political choice, and as US statements actively avoided the language of ethnic cleansing in relation to Chechnya, and this silence was itself consequential as it denied the conflict the normative gravity that would have made recognition a conceivable response. Securitization theory, extended through Hansen's concept of the politics of silence, therefore explains not only why Kosovo was recognized but why Chechnya could not even be placed on the agenda of recognition. The view of Sjöstedt also aligns with the analysis of the two cases as discursive actions shape the doctrines, and it is not vice versa, nor do doctrines arise due to shock. (2007: 350).

This has broader implications for the study of recognition because it suggests that the discursive environment in which a conflict is embedded is not merely a legitimizing gloss applied after recognition decisions are taken on other grounds, but a constitutive element of the decision-making process itself. The findings show that security framing is therefore a genuine independent variable, a causal factor in its own right, rather than just a reflection of underlying power and material interests.

5.3. Selective Recognition

The findings provide empirical support Krasner's concept of organized hypocrisy as an explanation for the selective application of sovereignty norms. The United States invoked self-determination in Kosovo and territorial integrity in Chechnya not because these principles were applied consistently according to their own internal logic, but because each was strategically useful in the particular constellation of interests' operative in each case. The same legal and normative vocabulary, sovereignty, self-determination, territorial integrity, civilian protection, was deployed with opposite political implications, reflecting not inconsistency or incoherence but deliberate strategic flexibility.

Reus-Smit's constructivist extension of this argument, that normative legitimacy is negotiated through ongoing political contestation rather than simply declared, is supported by the trajectory of US normative discourse on Kosovo. The shift from the 1999 position, which treated Resolution 1244's affirmation of Yugoslav territorial integrity as binding, to the 2008 position, which treated Kosovo's unique circumstances as overriding that commitment, was not a principled legal evolution but a political negotiation in which the United States actively shaped the normative terrain to produce the outcome it had already decided was strategically desirable, and it was constructed in the process of justifying recognition.

The Fabry argument that recognition has never been applied consistently according to formal legal criteria and that political calculations have always shaped outcomes, is empirically confirmed by the two cases as recognition is not only a legal judgment but a political act, and organized hypocrisy or selectiveness is the mechanism through which that political act is normatively legitimized and placed under the disclaimer of it not being a precedent for other cases.

The implications for Global Studies are significant, as if even the most powerful state in the international system, one with the widest range of strategic choices and the least structural pressure to conform, applies normative principles selectively, this suggests that the strategic

instrumentalization of norms is not an aberration but a constitutive feature of how recognition operates in international society. The Kosovo/Chechnya comparison, in this sense, does not illustrate the limits of norm adherence but its normal conditions of operation.

5.4. Interdependence and Strategic Restraint

The findings also confirm the significance of economic and institutional interdependence as a conditioning variable in recognition decisions, consistent with the arguments of Keohane (1984), Gilpin (1987), and Cooley and Nexon (2020). In the Chechnya case, the material exposure created by the US-Russia relationship across energy, arms control, and counterterrorism domains raised the threshold at which confrontation became conceivable, effectively making recognition an option that could not be placed seriously on the policy agenda regardless of normative considerations. This is consistent with Keohane's argument that institutionalized interdependence creates incentives for cooperative rather than confrontational strategies even when states possess the capability to act otherwise.

The Kosovo case, by contrast, shows the relevance of interdependence through its relative absence and because the United States had no significant material exposure to Serbia, recognition carried no economic or institutional costs, removing one of the key constraints that might otherwise have deterred a confrontational stance. This asymmetry, high interdependence with Russia, minimal interdependence with Serbia, goes onto the divergent recognition outcomes and confirms that economic interdependence functions as the conditioning variable the framework proposes: not a deterministic cause but a factor that raises or lowers the threshold at which recognition becomes politically feasible.

Gilpin's argument that hegemonic states use economic relationships strategically to maintain order is also supported by the findings, though with a qualification: in the Chechnya case, it was not the United States that used economic relationships to discipline another state but rather the existence of those relationships that disciplined US options. The direction of influence was reversed; Russia's strategic and economic significance constrained American behavior rather than the other way around. This suggests that economic interdependence in the recognition context operates asymmetrically depending on the relative power of the parties involved, an insight that the Strategic Recognition Framework accommodates by treating power asymmetry and economic interdependence as analytically distinct but empirically interacting variables.

The Strategic Recognition Framework was developed together with consideration of previous scholars and shows what Darian Smith and McCarty (2017: 14) describe as a global turn in

analytical approach, which is a move away from isolated disciplinary frameworks toward integrated, complex analysis that takes seriously the interplay between political structures, economic interests, and normative discourse in creating global outcomes.

Conclusion

Taken together, the findings of the thesis show that recognition is best understood not simply as a legal determination, a normative response, or a purely power political calculation, but as the strategic outcome of a process in which discourse, hierarchy, and material interests interact in mutually reinforcing ways. The Strategic Recognition Framework developed in Chapter 2 shows this interaction and is empirically validated by the comparative analysis of Kosovo and Chechnya.

The framework's most important contribution is its integrative design, as each of the three theoretical traditions drawn upon- securitization theory, organized hypocrisy, and interdependence theory- captures important aspects of the recognition process. Securitization theory explains how the discursive construction of a conflict shapes the normative space within which recognition is conceivable. Organized hypocrisy explains how sovereignty norms are mobilized selectively in ways that serve strategic interests. Interdependence theory explains how material entanglements condition the costs of recognition and thereby shape the threshold at which it becomes politically feasible. None of these theories alone is sufficient, and together they create a coherent explanatory tool.

The comparative analysis also shows the mechanisms through which these variables interact, as security framing does not operate independently of power asymmetry: the decision to frame Chechnya as a counterterrorism matter rather than a humanitarian emergency was itself conditioned by the power asymmetry between the United States and Russia, which made a confrontational framing too costly to sustain. Similarly, economic interdependence reinforces the tendency to adopt accommodating security framings: the higher the material stakes of confrontation, the greater the incentive to frame the adversary's conduct in ways that avoid escalatory language. The three variables therefore form a mutually reinforcing system rather than three parallel and independent causal pathways, and it is the configuration of this system, which is favorable in Kosovo, prohibitive in Chechnya, that produces the different recognition outcomes.

The findings also have implications for the study of recognition beyond these two cases, as the Strategic Recognition Framework is designed to be analytically transferable: the same questions of how the conflict is framed, what is the power position of the parent state, what is the degree of material interdependence, can be applied to other cases of contested recognition to generate theoretically grounded comparative explanations. Cases such as Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Taiwan, or Western Sahara might be examined through the same framework,

with the expectation that the configuration of security framing, power asymmetry, and economic interdependence will vary across cases in ways that correlate with recognition outcomes. The framework does not predict specific outcomes mechanically but provides a structured analytical lens for asking why recognition occurs in some cases and not others, which is precisely the question that existing legal and normative accounts have been unable to answer satisfactorily.

Finally, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how international legitimacy is constructed and contested by showing that recognition is not the application of universal rules but the strategic production of legitimacy by powerful actors operating within and through normative vocabularies; the findings reinforce a critical perspective on the hierarchical and power character of international society. Kosovo became a state, and Chechnya did not, not because one fulfilled the criteria and the other did not, but because the United States decided, on grounds of security, power, and material interest, to grant legitimacy in one case and withhold it in the other. Who gets to exist as a recognized state in the international system is, therefore, a political question rather than just a legal or normative one, and it is answered by the most powerful actors in that system in ways that reflect their strategic priorities rather than their principled commitments.

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