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Central European Journal of International and Security Studies
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CEJISS is published by Metropolitan University Prague Press
Printed in the EU

ISSN: 1802-548X e-ISSN: 1805-482X

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Practical Geopolitics in Cinematic Narratives of *Marvel's The Avengers* Film Franchise

Nikola Novak

This article implies that cinematic narratives project practical geopolitical discourses by using the example of Marvel Cinematic Universe's success – The Avengers film franchise. The conceptualisation of imaginary threats in the films that follow the main storyline of the Avengers assembly, determined by the time and the geographic space, give those threats a symbolical manifestation that tends to overlap with the practical geopolitical notions of American foreign policy, as well as contemporary international politics. The interpretative textual analysis of the films' narratives and their relations to world politics, hence, presents the central methodology of this article. The relation between those two has a capacity to transmit a subconscious message to blockbusters' consumers about preferable practical geopolitical visions in contemporary world politics. Simply, the paper shows how cinematic narratives form an identity that is deeply securitised and able to capture the Zeitgeist of world's politics.

Keywords: popular geopolitics, Marvel's The Avengers film franchise, cinematic narratives, security and defense studies, interpretative textual analysis

Nikola Novak. Practical Geopolitics in Cinematic Narratives of Marvel's The Avengers Film Franchise. *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 15, no. 2: 4–22.

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Introduction

Scholars of critical geopolitics focus their attention on the way in which ideas about places are constructed. By doing so, they are able to establish patterns that help to explain how those ideas shape political behaviour and how agendas are set, as well as how those ideas affect the everyday lives of ordinary people. Governments, supranational organisations, transnational corporations, various non-governmental organisations and every person has certain opinions, a clear or imagined picture of the geopolitical notions that surround us. Most of us have never been to Syria, but almost all of us have a certain perception about what that country currently looks like. Moreover, if you are an American who, e.g., has trouble locating Croatia, certain discourses – *former Yugoslav state, EU and NATO member state, Game of Thrones* – create certain mental maps that help to approximately place this country within a bigger, European context. The methodology of mental mapping is just one of many tools that critical geopolitics explore in its search to deconstruct the existing geopolitical discourses.

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O’Tuathail and Agnew define discourses as ‘sets of socio-cultural resources used by people in the construction of meaning about their world and their activities’¹. Along the lines of poststructuralist thought, Martin Muller upgrades their definition by stating that geopolitical discourse is ‘always more than text, reflecting contextual, supra-subjective structures of meaning that are not exclusively expressed by textual means’². Geopolitical discourses are usually created largely under the strong influence of mediums – sometimes those mediums are political leaders, creators of foreign policies, statespersons or military authorities, other times they can be the mass media or various products of the popular culture. The first one can be defined as the practical geopolitical discourses, whilst the second are popular ones. The borders between these discourses are often blurred and they tend to overlap each other. Using interpretative textual analysis of the films’ narratives and their relations to world politics as a methodological tool, the paper focuses on the latter – to present the general understandings of popular geopolitics and the way in which practical geopolitical discourses appear in the Marvel Cinematic Universe’s success *The Avengers*.

Blockbuster films pose themselves as a crucial part of popular culture. Even though there are bigger film industries, like Indian Bollywood, American Hollywood is, by far, the most famous in the world. Most films produced there are meant for audiences all around the world and

Hollywood cinema has become a synonym for internationally successful films. Furthermore, in the last decade, one of the greatest impacts on this branch was made by the Marvel Cinematic Universe, whose films are in the top ten highest-grossing films in history. Accordingly, this research is focused on their most successful sequels of blockbuster films where the storyline of *The Avengers* develops – *Captain America: The First Avenger*, *The Avengers*, *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, *Captain America: Civil War*, *Avengers: Infinity War*, and *Avengers: Endgame*³. Hence, the simple question this paper seeks to answer is – which geopolitical discourses appear in *Marvel's The Avengers'* blockbusters? By answering this simple question, the paper shows how the Zeitgeist of international politics is well captured in what Klaus Dodds calls 'national security cinema'⁴. Furthermore, it tells us in which way practical geopolitical discourses appear in cinematic narratives and how their appearance forms an identity that is deeply securitised and able to subconsciously send a message to blockbusters' consumers about preferable practical geopolitical visions in contemporary world politics.

Popular geopolitics in the Hollywood cinematography

The world of international politics constantly transforms. Different entrants, factors and conditions at different times on different geographical terrains shape a constellation of relations that are hugely under the strong influence based on power. Power poses itself as a dominant virtue in molding political relations that are sufficient for dominance over specific geographical terrains. Once the terrain, in combination with political relations and built on power creates a political entity, most likely a state, it gets the label of territory. Thus, geopolitics studies politics on the certain geographic space defined as territory. Having the territory in the centre of its analysis, geopolitics develops various tools to approach different phenomena on it. At its early stages, geopolitics was misused as a tool of great powers – before and between world wars – to establish theories of their ideological understandings of territorial expansions. Those theories of classical (imperial) geopolitics were later deconstructed by the instruments of critical geopolitics.

The general idea behind critical geopolitics is that 'intellectuals of statecraft construct ideas about places, these ideas influence and reinforce their political behaviors and policy choices, and these ideas affect how we, the people, process our own notions of places and politics'⁵. O' Tuathail and Agnew give the theoretical framework for the analysis

in critical geopolitics by defining it as a 'discursive practice by which intellectuals of statecraft "spatialize" international politics and represent it as a "world" characterized by particular types of places, peoples and dramas'⁶. This is the general premise that gives us a starting position in learning how to approach certain phenomena in the focus of geopolitical research. The interpretative and discourse analyses pose themselves as the central methodologies and, by doing so, allows the scientific approach to three different ways in which critical geopolitics is developed:

1. formal geopolitics – 'refers to the spatializing practices of strategic thinkers and public intellectuals who set themselves up as authorities on the totality of the world political map'⁷,
2. practical geopolitics – 'refers to the spatializing practices of practitioners of statecraft such as statespersons, politicians, and military commanders'⁸ and
3. popular geopolitics.

In the words of Jason Dittmer, one of the defining notions of popular geopolitics has been its lack of a definition 'not as a subject matter but as a group of people'⁹. Dittmer here explains that many scholars in cultural studies, cultural geography and international relations are doing work that could be considered to be a part of popular geopolitics but do not use the term at all to refer to themselves or their work. Modern technology empowered by the globalisation of information, emphasises, even more, the outcomes of popular culture – both the real and the virtual spaces are filled with products of the mass media aiming to entertain the world's population. The smartphone applications, e-books, magazines, video games, television, social networks, films, series and other means of popular entertainment completely overflow the world's markets. Most of them, however, rely on different discourses that affect consumers' ability to imagine and map the world. Hence, central to the development of critical geopolitics has been the 'recognition of geopolitics as something ordinary that occurs outside of academic and policymaking discourse; this form of geopolitical discourse has been termed "popular geopolitics"¹⁰.

Joanna Szostek clarifies that popular geopolitics places itself in the subfield of human geography and is 'concerned with peoples' perceptions of different parts of the world and how those perceptions are (re)produced in popular culture'¹¹. Basically, the general assumption of

popular geopolitics aims towards a simple goal – to detect and to describe how certain geographical representations of international politics are embedded and presented in the mass media. The visual and rhetorical imagery associated with the mass media has been discursively analysed by popular geopolitics' scholars so that it became possible to discern how specific geographical understandings of regional and global politics were mobilised¹². Popular geopoliticians such as Klaus Dodds, Joanne P. Sharp, Jason Dittmer and Gearóid Ó Tuathail read popular mass media forms as texts, attempting to interrogate the political, social and cultural content of these representations of geopolitical space¹³. The central relationship in those attempts is the one between official geopolitics and the popular conceptualisations of that geopolitics – the mass media in the process of the creation of its products often reflect the official geopolitics provided by the state's structures and elites.

Simon Dalby further develops the concept of the popular geopolitics emphasising the importance of cinema that, according to him, 'provides an important space of confrontation and encounter for viewers and the recognition that the reception of filmic meaning is far from passive'¹⁴. Indeed, in the production of a good-quality film, often referred to in cinema as a blockbuster, territories and political spaces play a crucial role. This pose falls over as one of the most important case studies of critical geopolitics – Hollywood films give an imaginary perception of practical geopolitical notions in the world by framing them in simplified understandings of international politics. The representation of the world politics in Hollywood blockbusters is deeply rooted and intertwined with various geopolitical discourses that appear in the cinemas across the Globe and can be described as informal geopolitics – 'largely silent and darkened space of the theatre provided an opportunity for conveying messages about the world, which few governments could resist, particularly during war and/or crises'¹⁵. As Zorko and Mostarac suggest, informal geopolitics is perceived as the messenger that sends geopolitical messages to the ordinary people, in most cases without the direct influence of the political elites¹⁶.

By being massively popular entertainment, the blockbusters manage to capture the wide attention of millions and millions of people across the Globe and their power lies 'not only in its apparent ubiquity but also in the way in which it helps to create (often dramatically) understandings of particular events, national identities and relationships

to others'¹⁷. The international community is moving to the cinemas in which acts of international politics, history or culture are re-conceptualised in the motion pictures that emit simplified understandings of those issues for the wide range of the audience. In other words, formal geopolitical discourses of world politics are being re-packaged into informal, fictional frames on the big screen.

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Films and TV shows give people the ability to rely comfortably not only on the fact that good always wins, which is the most common outcome of these popular formats, but also to expand the scope of understanding of their national identities within much wider geopolitical narratives without even being aware of it.

The comics also played and still play a role in the re-conceptualisation of international politics – ‘awareness of the political potential of those texts for the distribution of favored messages among less literate populations has resulted in a wide variety of comics being produced either by the US government or by ideological allies of the US government for distribution in areas of Cold War conflict’¹⁸. Furthermore, the political relevance of Captain America’s comics after September 11 not only defines what America is, but it also firmly reminds the reader, tacitly assumed to be American, of his or her individual identity as an American and is told what that means in relation to the rest of the world¹⁹.

Together with the comics, as stated earlier, there are other products of the mass media that capture geopolitical discourses of spatialised reality. However, the attempts of geopolitics to examine ‘the ways in which actors and dramas are arranged on a world stage or a kind of “global chessboard” of political positions’, which makes films a ‘unique way of arranging these dramas and actors and of attempting a kind of specialization and visualization of boundaries and dangers and American identity’ is connected to ‘the geopolitical constructions and ideological codes of Hollywood films’²⁰.

Films provide concrete solutions for geopolitical challenges by building moral geographical concepts able to distinguish *us* from *them*, *good* from *bad*, *allies* from *adversaries*. One could conclude that cinemas have an ideological function led by the direct hand of the political elites, but it requires broader research to prove such a hypothesis. Instead, my idea is to put focus on these films in order to try to understand outlines of practical geopolitical discourses captured by the film industry in their projects. By doing so, I contribute to the particular

understandings of how and with what outcomes some places become a part of self-estimation, identity and relationships with other stakeholders of international politics, no matter which, positive or negative, contexts that relationship is built on. Moreover, the interpretative textual analysis of *Marvel's The Avengers* narratives correspond with practical geopolitics, and hence, it subconsciously sends a message to blockbusters' consumers about preferable geopolitical visions in contemporary world politics. In other words, the cinematic narratives influence the consumers' self-identification with certain practical geopolitical phenomena of international politics' Zeitgeist.

The way in which practical geopolitics of (American) foreign policy is staged in popular geopolitics of the Hollywood cinematography starts to be clearer once one takes into consideration the concept of, what Dodds calls, 'national security cinema'²¹. This concept presents highly imaginative threats that the USA faces: The Soviets and communists in general, the Nazis, terrorists, extraterrestrials, meteors, uncontrollable natural forces and machines. These threats are simple tools of Hollywood filmmakers and represent different geopolitical discourses of the factual American foreign policy. The conceptualisation of the imaginary threats in films, determined by time and geographical space, gives those threats a symbolic manifestation – the discourse – that tends to overlap with practical geopolitics. The ability to read those discourses, interpret them and even compare them to others is a general premise of popular geopolitics.

The post-September-11 paradigm in practical geopolitics completely changed across the world, especially in the United States. Perceiving terrorism and new security threats like cyberterrorism, human trafficking, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, radicalism, regional threats, etc., became the central focus of security and defense strategies. Soon enough, this practical geopolitics' paradigm was applied to popular geopolitics of Hollywood cinematography. *Behind Enemy Lines* from 2001, *The Bourne Ultimatum* from 2007, *War of the Worlds* from 2005, *The Iron Man* from 2008, *The Dark Knight* from 2008 and others provide opportunities for people to watch, to get entertained, but also to reflect on contemporary international politics²². Even more, some of those blockbusters, more successfully than others, breathe the life of comics into these characters creating live-action cinematographic sequels capable of capturing the geopolitical Zeitgeist of international politics.

Without a doubt, the Marvel Cinematic Universe, an 'American media franchise and shared universe that is centered on a series of superhero films, independently produced by Marvel Studios and based on characters that appear in American comic books published by Marvel Comics'²³, is the most successful in its field of business with more than \$22.5 billion total income from the world box offices²⁴. The series of superhero films are divided into four phases and this paper focuses on the films published so far where the storyline of *Marvel's The Avengers* develops²⁵ – *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011)²⁶, *The Avengers* (2012)²⁷, *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015)²⁸, *Captain America: Civil War* (2016)²⁹, *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018)³⁰, and *Avengers: End Game* (2019)³¹.

The Avengers is a group of superheroes with different supernatural abilities that fight imaginary threats to the USA and the world. The six films mentioned earlier engage deeply in the constellation of international relations based on power, influence and practical geopolitics. Case studies were selected based on three assumptions: the great impact of *The Avengers* on the world, the profit these films make, the fans and the targeted audience. The first film of the Avengers from 2012, simply titled *The Avengers*, is according to Box Office Mojo eight the highest-grossing film in history with more than \$1.5 billion profit³². Its sequel, *Avengers: Age of Ultron* from 2015 takes eleventh place with a profit of more than \$1.4 billion, *Infinity War* is fifth with more than \$2 billion, whilst the last sequel – *End Game* – breathes down *Avatar's* neck as the second in the history of all-time box office worldwide grosses³³.

Besides having one of the most profitable and notable film characters in the world, *Marvel's The Avengers* have numerous fans and followers around the Globe. Finally, the targeted audience is not just limited to the young population and children. Some of the most eminent names in Hollywood cinema like Samuel. L. Jackson, Anthony Hopkins, Tommy Lee Jones and Robert Downing Jr., as well as the multilevel approach towards the complexity of the struggles and threats in films, often attract 40+ audiences. Taking all these variables into account, one can understand the importance of researching outlines of formal geopolitical discourses in those films. Hence, the central interest of this paper is to seek an answer to a simple question – which geopolitical discourses appear in *Marvel's The Avengers* blockbusters?

This article approaches the interpretative textual analysis of geopolitical notions in *The Avengers'* storyline by introducing two levels

of the practical geopolitical discourses coded into two factors: the American foreign policy and the contemporary international politics. Methodologically, I interpret geopolitical discourses that appear in the films, clarify fictional foundations based on which the films are created and seek to connect them with the lived reality in both the American foreign policy and the contemporary international politics. In the final stage of this research, the elaboration is coded into twelve different geopolitical discourses, six for each factor. Finally, an adequate interpretation and the conclusion are offered at the end of this article.

Understanding fictional through factual discourses in *The Avengers* storyline

American foreign policy

The first film in this research is *Captain America: The First Avenger*³⁴. The Marvel Cinematic Universe gave special attention to this Avenger, presenting him as the leader of the team. This is something that audiences learn in *Avengers: The Age of Ultron* film when Tony Stark clearly states that he was the one paying for everything, but that Captain America was the boss³⁵. A great impact that the Marvel comics, especially the ones about Captain America, had in World War II^{36 37 38}, is now revised and revisited in the blockbuster *Captain America: The First Avenger* by presenting, within the Marvel Universe, Steve Rogers as the patriotic super-soldier, dressed in American colours and fighting the Nazis. Symbolising the USA, Captain America in this film reminds the audience of the crucial role that the USA played in the war against the Nazis. Moreover, the whole plot shows the importance of American interference in European affairs. After this engagement, in geopolitical terms, the USA never left this continent. The central part of the film's plot illustrates the strong Transatlantic/Euro-Atlantic bond. Captain America symbolises not just the heroism of American war veterans engaged in War World II, but also of the whole state that selflessly helps those who stand with the Americans. Even the act of sacrifice Captain America did in the end by crashing the plane on the no man's land of the Arctic³⁹, shows how America always sacrifices itself for the sake of its allies.

An era of absolute world supremacy of one power, the USA, starts immediately after World War II⁴⁰. With small ups and downs, it is kept until today. However, after waking up from a 70-year coma, Captain quickly learns about the time and the things he missed. One of them is

when an agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. (an espionage and anti-terrorist agency) informs him about the little modifications to his uniform and Captain surprisingly asks: 'Aren't the stars and stripes a little...old fashioned?' and gets the answer: 'Everything that's happening, the things that are about to come to light, people might just need a little old fashioned'⁴¹. These surprises indicate how seriously America was agitated after September 11, and this reminder stresses the importance of values that the *stars and stripes* represent and that they will never go out of fashion as long as America stands.

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In World War II, Captain America only needed minor help from normal soldiers to fight evil, but this time he needs an assembly of superheroes, equal to him, to stand together for a set of desirable or shared values. The supremacy and triumphalism the USA had after the collapse of the Nazi Reich, and later the Soviet Union, slowly vanishes after September 11. Contemporary threats are hybrid, the uprising of the Russian Federation and other BRIC countries shadows US supremacy, and the world's order shifts from unipolarity to multipolarity of international relations⁴². Suddenly, the USA should rely on allies to fight contemporary security challenges. Not just one superhero, but a team of them, the Avengers, are required to fight (imaginary) threats.

The way this geopolitical constellation is mapped throughout the films can be noticed by paying attention to the geographical location of sets. The locations breach the traditional borders of Western Europe as the only trustworthy ally and move the sets further east to Central and Eastern Europe, South Korea and Africa. The imaginary Republic of Sokovia in Eastern Europe vividly illustrates the American geopolitical perspective on the sources of contemporary threats. First, locating something in the East relates to orientalism, contrary to the West and western values^{43 44}. Second, the discourse of Eastern Europe is used to illustrate the traditional place of hostility due to factual Cold War discourse. Third, the terrorists they deal with are agents of HYDRA, a secret organisation created during World War II. Eastern Europe (the communists) and HYDRA (the Nazis) represent and/or symbolise traditional American enemies that the audience recognises from the comics, but in the films, they are re-branded in such a way that they are given a certain geographical illusion of *easternisms*⁴⁵ and political violence that cherishes hybrid warfare methods. In this portrayal, it is notable how the USA's practical geopolitical focus shifts from the Cen-

tral and Eastern Europe, further east, towards the Middle East where the Republic of Sokovia can symbolise Syria, and HYDRA represents terrorist organisations like the Islamic State's fighters. This is discussed further within contemporary international politics.

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Another important narrative that appears in the films, especially in the original *The Avengers* film from 2012, *Avengers: Infinity War* from 2018 and *Avengers: Endgame* from 2019, is the geopolitical imagination of New York as the unofficial capital of the world⁴⁶. In the films, the extraterrestrial attacks happen in New York City – first by the Asgardian Loki who opens a breach above the City⁴⁷, then by Thanos' servants who land in Downtown Manhattan searching for the Time Stone, one of the six Infinity Stones⁴⁸, and, finally, in the last sequel that reflects on previously mentioned events due to time travel⁴⁹. Moreover, the Avengers Headquarters is in the downtown of this city, and there's the fact that some of the most important Avengers are born and raised in the city (for example, Spiderman is from Queens, Captain America from Brooklyn and Iron Man is from Long Island). The geopolitical imagination of New York as the world's unofficial capital is deeply rooted in the ability of the American cultural diplomacy that branded the city through the export of their cultural product, and also in the fact that the world's most important organisation, the United Nations, is located there.

On one hand, as the story develops further, the character of Captain America progressively weakens. On the other hand, the Avengers present an assembly of the most superior individuals in the world. These two factors intertwine from the first time the Avengers were introduced⁵⁰, all the way to when they directly clash causing the division between former teammates in *Captain America: Civil War*⁵¹. The tensions between the members of the 'world's antiterrorist coalition' led by (Captain) America, reach its peak soon after someone – like the United Nations in the film – questions the supremacy of judgment of the leader, one man or country. The Sokovia Accords, proposed as the political measure of the United Nations to control the superheroes' war on terror, weakened Captain America and left him only with the most faithful allies. Captain America, while attending a funeral of his close friend, Agent Carter, at one point in *Civil War* is advised by Carter's granddaughter: 'When the mob and the press and the whole world tell you to move, your job is to plant yourself like a tree beside the river of truth, and tell the whole world – No, you move'⁵². How

far (Captain) America is willing to go, is illustrated by his readiness to engage in a war against former teammates. However, in *Infinity War*⁵³ and *Endgame*⁵⁴, he is ready to team back up with his former allies in order to save the world from a greater threat, Thanos.

Contemporary international politics

Discourses such as the USA's world supremacy and the question of the legitimacy of the United Nations, fall into the practical geopolitical discourses of international politics. The direct confrontation of world nations, represented by the UN, with the exceptional individuals, the Avengers, who seem to intervene in all parts of the world without a legitimate international mandate to do so, resembles actual incapacity of the highest international body to keep the strongest countries in line and prevent them from intervening in the internal affairs of other, weaker, countries. The source of that incapacity is the lack of legitimacy.

Captain America: Civil War has two main characters in this confrontation with completely different views on the Sokovia Accords⁵⁵. On one side there is Captain America with his followers who represent free-market capitalism and patriotism, while on the other, Iron Man with his team feel guilty for the damage the Avengers, and he personally, have caused around the world, representing in this way perverted global techno-determinism. The two fractions among the assemble engage in an open fight. The patriotic team of Captain America refuses to yield under the pressure of the UN, while their former teammates gather around Iron Man and pose themselves as guardians of the international order that favours the neoliberal paradigm of international relations. In practical geopolitical understanding, the civil war between the Avengers presents the clash of political ideas – the contemporary political situation in the world - that now more than ever questions if democracy and all its values are universal⁵⁶. Based on the same notions, Team Captain America questions the legitimacy of Iron Man's team to pose themselves as defenders of international order. This clash of political ideas on the international community transmits to nation-states – while on the international level the clash happens because of the 'right' of stakeholders to act in a certain way, on the national level the clash is between liberal and illiberal democracy.

Furthermore, Iron Man himself presents military-industrial complexes, one of the most profitable industries in the world. Upgraded

*Practical
Geopolitics
in Marvel's
The Avengers*

due to serious threats that threatened the USA and the world after September 11, the military-industrial complexes expanded their capacities with one simple goal: to achieve perfection in the further development of military technology^{57 58 59}. The same pattern follows the character of Iron Man in films – as the CEO of Stark Industries, the world's leading company for military technology, Tony Stark, aka Iron Man, pushes very hard the idea of further development of military technology. Hiding under the veil of neoliberalism, Tony Stark becomes a technofascist. However, when he accidentally develops Ultron, an AI interface that turns against the Avengers, it takes over the Internet and decides to exterminate the human race from the planet. Then Stark feels guilty for all the bad the Avengers did while saving the world from Ultron⁶⁰. This is the main reason he yielded in front of the UN and the Sokovia Accords – not because of his beliefs, but because of the guilt and worries that he has about his profit.

Related to the previous discourses, another storyline occurs – Tony Stark and the Avengers search for the Tesseract, 'a crystalline cube-shaped containment vessel for the Space Stone, one of the six Infinity Stones that predate the universe and possess unlimited energy'⁶¹. The Tesseract is mentioned in all of the films in this research – it appears in 1942 when Johann Schmidt, the head of the HYDRA, a secret Third Reich organisation, uses it to defeat the Allies in World War II. Eventually stopped by Captain America and his unit, the Tesseract is lost in the Arctic ice with the Captain himself⁶². After recovering it from the sea, Stark Industries try to use its enormous energy for further military development and as a device that can create clean and sustainable energy. However, Thor's brother Loki from the planet Asgard, breaches through and uses its energy to open a wormhole above New York City for the extraterrestrial attack on the Earth⁶³. Later, Tony Stark uses it to create the AI, Ultron, which, as mentioned before, takes over the Internet and turns against the Avengers⁶⁴.

The Tesseract and other Infinity Stones in practical geopolitical terms of international politics represent the search of humanity for technology that can produce clean and sustainable energy, while these battles between the Avengers and different adversaries in the films reflect another discourse – the global war on terror. Throughout all the films, it is more than clear who the good guys and who the terrorists who want to conquer the world or dominate it are. To achieve that, all bad guys, no matter if they are the members of HYDRA, east-

ern mobs or extraterrestrials, use hybrid warfare methods similar to those used by contemporary terrorists: confiscation of modern technological achievements from the Avengers and the Stark Industries, cyber-attacks, terrorist bombings, espionage, sabotage and infiltration. Old Marvel's enemies from the Cold War comics still stay a big part of contemporary Marvel films, with a slight change – methods they nowadays use greatly resemble the ones used by the Middle-Eastern terrorist fractions, e.g. the Islamic State or Al-Qaida.

Within these two factors, the article offers 12 different narratives altogether from the films, six for each factor, that are interpreted and compared with the practical geopolitical discourses of the American foreign policy and international politics. As seen in Table 1, each of those narratives is coded and placed within the two factors. In order to establish a better understanding of popular geopolitics and outlines of practical geopolitical discourses in *Marvel's The Avengers*, Table 1 offers the codification of narratives that appear in the films and its practical geopolitical understandings. Bearing in mind the complexity of struggles in both, the reality of practical geopolitics and the films, this table brings only the outlines of potential interpretations regarding the application of contemporary geopolitical challenges to Marvel's Avengers.

Table 1. The codification of geopolitical narratives in Marvel's Avengers films

	The American foreign policy	Contemporary international politics
1.	(Captain) America as the first Avenger in the world	Supranational control (The Sokovia Accords)
2.	Importance of euro-Atlantic relations	Geography of movies' sets
3.	The US involvement in world affairs	Clean and sustainable energy
4.	Patriotism and the (Captain) America's stars and stripes	Clash of political ideas and erosion of democracy
5.	American heroism in wars	Military-industrial complexes
6.	The Sokovia Accords – (Captain) America is right!	Islamic State and terrorism

The first factor frames the most notable narratives of chosen films that reflect the practical geopolitical discourses of the American foreign policy, while the second one does the same, only relating to contemporary international politics. The fact that all these films are made in Hollywood and they were a big international success explains why

there are geopolitical narratives not only on the national level but also on the international. All coded narratives in this table represent a combination, or better yet, an integration, of practical geopolitical discourses in the films' discourses.

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Conclusions

The codification of twelve different geopolitical discourses that appear in films where the central role is the plot about *Marvel's The Avengers* assembly indicates a very important conclusion – not only do they appear in the films, but they all come under the common denominator of what Klaus Dodds defines as 'national security cinema'⁶⁵. This notion narrows the two factors, the American foreign policy and the contemporary international politics, used in this research, into one frame. Within this, it is possible to conclude that even though both factors differ regarding the geopolitics of scale within which they study geopolitical discourses, they still stay deeply rooted in the American perspective on both geopolitical levels. The first level, the American foreign policy factor, focuses more on the national level of analysis, whilst the second one, the contemporary international politics, goes out of the national borders and deals with the practical discourses that appear in the international arena. The common ground, however, remains deeply Americanised in the case of both of the factors.

The central goal of this research has been achieved – to show outlines of practical geopolitical discourses captured by the cinematic narratives in *The Avengers* film series, to code them into two different factors and to frame them back in Dodds notion of the national security cinema. The research contributes to the understanding of how and with what outcomes some places and events in the films can become a part of the geopolitical self-estimation and identity, as well as the awareness of the US geopolitical relationships with other stakeholders of international relations. The threats that appear in the films are simple tools of the Hollywood filmmakers and represent different geopolitical discourses of the factual American foreign policy and contemporary international politics. The conceptualisation of the imaginary threats in the films, determined by the timeframe, limited understandings of practical geopolitics and geographical space, give those threats a symbolic manifestation capable of capturing the geopolitical Zeitgeist of the Americanised view on both the American foreign policy and contemporary international politics.

Bearing in mind the complexity of threats that occur all around the world, different mechanisms American administrations apply to tackle them, as well as constant and unpredictable changes in the globalised world, one could conclude that cinemas have an ideological function led by the direct hand of political elites. Cultural diplomacy, political warfare, fake news and/or propaganda are all mechanisms that can tackle complex threats in front of the American administrations, create a better image for the global and for the domestic audiences, reshape interpretations of practical geopolitical discourses or deal with contemporary challenges.

Nevertheless, the interpretative textual analysis of *Marvel's The Avengers* narratives showed that, in examined cases, they not only correspond with practical geopolitics, but also have an ability to subconsciously send a message to blockbusters' consumers. By answering the central research question, I was able to show that capturing national and international politics' Zeitgeist in films enables a transmission of preferable geopolitical visions and forms an identity that is deeply securitised. The securitised identity represents an unaware self-identification of the blockbusters' consumers with practical geopolitics and lived realities, and it is built in their national identities through the lenses of often dramatical cinematic narratives. Hence, the interpretation of these narratives in *Marvel's The Avengers* film franchise showed that what Dodds calls national security cinema has a capacity to capture and transmit subconscious messages about preferable practical geopolitical visions in contemporary world politics.

In the end, the intention of this research was to establish a clearer picture of intertwining cinematic narratives of *The Avengers* films with practical geopolitical discourses. Questions like how this intertwining happens, if it's orchestrated by the government, if the Hollywood cinematography is used as a tool of political warfare; etc., are all questions for future research in this field. This article, hence, contributes to similar research in the field by implying that cinematic narratives in Hollywood are, as *The Avengers* case study shows, often a reflection of lived geopolitical realities and they have a capacity to influence subconsciously or even to shape and reshape national identity of millions of their consumers worldwide.



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Conditions of External Military Interventions in African Internal Conflicts

Complexity of Conflict Intensity, Social Dislocation and Raw Materials¹

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External interventions are one of the most important aspects of intra-state conflicts since a majority of them are significantly internationalised, especially in Africa where the interventions most often occur. Factors that lead to the military intervention remain, however, puzzling. The authors therefore apply the method of fs/QCA to understand not only conditions behind intervention into African intrastate conflicts, but also to catch interactions among them. The results show high complexity of various possible combinations, mainly of high intensity, massive social dislocation or presence of raw materials in case of interventions in African internal conflicts.

Keywords: conflict, interventions, Africa, QCA, set-theoretical approach, fuzzy-set analysis

Introduction

With a growing interconnection of states not just within a shared region but globally, internal conflicts pose a considerable threat for se-

Martin Schmiedl, Jan Prouza. Conditions of External Military Interventions in African Internal Conflicts: Complexity of Conflict Intensity, Social Dislocation and Raw Materials. *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 15, no. 2: 24–55.

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curity of neighbouring states as well as of a whole international community. Intrastate conflicts can easily spill-over the borders, especially if they are connected with huge social dislocations. They could be also a proximate cause of massive migration to quite distant destinations, as the recent influx of immigrants from Syria or Afghanistan to Europe showed. Moreover, intrastate conflicts are usually connected with immense suffering of civilians, notably women and children. Therefore, an effort of external actors to end or to manage the conflicts is quite reasonable, especially if we add a promising opportunity to increase their power in the region or to secure various assets through the intervention. But which of all the above-mentioned reasons are crucial for the decision of a third party to intervene? Are there any significant interactions (trade-offs, synergies) among them? Those are the most important questions that we are going to address in this study.

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The external military interventions have naturally become a critical part of internal conflicts, having a substantial (sometimes even crucial) influence on the length as well as on the results of the conflicts.² The studies, however, focus mostly on interventions' outcomes,³ or the probability of success in ending the violence,⁴ leaving the very important issue of conditions of the interventions rather at the edge of academic interest. Of course, there are a few considerable exceptions, but they usually concern the motivations or conditions *per se* – without any specific geographical regard.⁵

Since it is obvious that some regions are much more affected by intrastate conflicts and subsequent interventions than others, it is important to find out whether the conditions under which interventions occur vary across the regions or not. This study aims to contribute to this dilemma as it focuses solely on the African continent, trying to compare the motivations to intervene in African conflicts with the generally assumed motivations derived from the previous research.⁶ The limitation on Africa is mostly motivated by its higher rate of external interventions in comparison with other regions.⁷ Consequently, there are enough cases to investigate and possibly generalise, and at the same time they share (at least to some extent) common geographical, demographical, sociological, historical, economic, political and geopolitical conditions. Of course, there are many substantial differences among African states (especially between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa) but they also have much in common – for example membership in the African Union and participation in its security efforts, or

common sub-regional threats such as al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb which threaten both Sub-Saharan and North African countries. Shortly, Rwanda is quite different from Libya but even more different from Colombia or Germany.

CEJISS
2/2021

The importance of external interventions in Africa is far from being a recent phenomenon as interventions have played a significant role in the all of 'post-colonial' history. In fact, they were a central instrument of foreign policy towards Africa both for colonial powers (France, UK, Belgium) and for the two new superpowers of the Cold War.⁸ Regarding recent political development (especially in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo or Mali) in connection with the threat of terrorism and/or migration waves, there is no reason to consider external military interventions as by-gones or unlikely events. Quite the contrary, external intervention will remain a very important part of international politics, particularly in Africa. Consequently, the causes and likelihood of external interventions in internal conflicts seem to be very important for understanding the dynamics of those conflicts as well as for predicting their courses and consequences.

In order to uncover conditions under which external military interventions occurs, our study innovatively employs the QCA method which has been used in just a few cases before.⁹ A benefit of QCA rests in providing a reliable understanding to relationships among conditions (independent variables). In comparison to quantitative methods (especially to the most used linear regression), QCA requires much fewer cases and stresses inter-connections among independent variables instead of an influence of a single variable. Therefore, our approach can discover the interactions between independent variables that makes it different from more conventional statistical approaches.¹⁰ We also assume that the different method could bring different results and/or contribute to the discussion about methodological aspects of interventions' research. To sum it up, the main aim of our study is not to derive a new theory but to test conventional hypotheses through the non-mainstream method that can show us relations among variables from a set-theoretic perspective.

Our research question is as follows: *What are the conditions of third-party military interventions in African internal conflicts?* Our paper is more focused on characteristics of the conflict and states where the intervention could happen.¹¹ The time scope of the study is limited purely to the Post-Cold War era as we suppose that the Cold War

substantially influenced behaviour of the states. The cases in our study therefore come from 1989 (the year of the symbolic fall of the Berlin Wall) to 2015.

First, we present a theoretical discussion and a short methodological framework which introduces QCA. Then we describe the results of the QCA analysis of the tested hypothesis, which we subsequently discuss from the theoretical standpoints and illustrate in examples of military interventions to Sierra Leone and Mali to draw the final conclusions.

Theory review

Before we step to theoretical approaches toward conditions of interventions, we must define the intervention itself more precisely. Intervention is a longstanding and broadly used concept, its definition is, however, rather rigid and substantially uncontested. The reason may lie in interventions' intrinsic connection with sovereignty which is inconceivable with an external (and unwanted) intervention on its territory.¹² The principles of sovereignty and non-intervention are fundamental norms of international relations (despite different practices) and even though there is a debate on changing sovereignty in the context of globalisation, the fundamental defining criteria of intervention remain nearly unchanged.

A pioneering definition was written up by James Rosenau who perceives intervention as 'convention-breaking' and 'authority oriented'.¹³ Rosenau describes *'the behavior of one international actor toward another as interventionary whenever the form of the behavior constitutes a sharp break with then-existing forms and whenever it is directed at changing or preserving the structure of political authority in the target society'*.¹⁴ Rosenau's definition was criticised for several aspects – for example, Richard Little drew attention to Rosenau's neglect of intervenors' motivations as well as excluding foreign aid as a common instrument of foreign policy.¹⁵ Another criticism targeted the absence of any underpinning of his research in empirical evidence which consequently limited his statements to a pure theoretical position.¹⁶ Nevertheless, Rosenau's emphasis of a third party's impact on conflict and power in other states remains at the centre of our common understanding of interventions.

Most of authors have been using the narrow 'military definition' – they perceive intervention as an occurrence of regular soldiers or mili-

tary actions of one state in another state's conflict.¹⁷ However, recently there have been several attempts to use a different theoretical perspective and consequently also a new operational definition. For example, to add economic aspects of interventions¹⁸ or, as Martha Finnemore¹⁹ did, to use a constructivist approach when she stressed the acknowledgement and self-identification of an intervenor. Patrick Mello relates military intervention to a concept of 'military participation' (i.e. military engagement within a 'multilateral military operation').²⁰ Just a few authors are trying to empirically investigate other (non-military) forms of intervention.²¹ Last but not least, there is a tradition of humanitarian military intervention scholarship that introduces different definitions and different understanding of the conditions causing them.²²

Although the non-military forms of intervention represent an interesting field of further research, we have decided to focus solely on the military forms as defined by UCDP/PRIO. Therefore, we understand the intervention in military, state-centric terms, where the intervenor represents a state that actively participates in conflict and side with one primary actor of the conflict with its military units.²³ This definition is easily distinguishable in comparison with other, not so flagrant methods of external support or influence.²⁴ Moreover, we assume that conditions for the military forms may substantially differ vis-à-vis to the non-military forms, their differentiation is therefore necessary. Finally, as it is clear from the definition, we understand interventions in state-centric way without the focus on international organisations. Whereas there is a mainstream consensus on military character of interventions, the debate about the conditions of interventions is less consistent as we are going to show in the rest of the theoretical part.

During the Cold War, reasons for interventions were understood in a logic of superpowers' competition and proxy wars as (for example) Herbert Tillema's study showed.²⁵ The importance of the Cold War was also stressed in Patrick M. Regan's influential study of unilateral military and economic interventions, according to which interventions were more likely (1) during the Cold War; (2) with a lower intensity of the conflict; and (3) with large social dislocations and humanitarian issues.²⁶ The Cold War and proxy-war politics was a thoroughly scrutinised and highlighted factor but how then to explain the reasons for interventions after the Cold War? There are lots of different answers – for example, David Carment and Patrick James²⁷ and later Carment,

James and Zeynep Taydas²⁸ investigated the role of domestic politics and the internationalisation of ethnic conflicts. Jacob Kathman²⁹ focused on potential war contagion and regional motivation as reasons for intervention. Mi Yung Yoon³⁰ examined, quite uncommonly, interventions of African states into African conflicts. She tested several variables (geographic proximity, economic motives, ethnic affinity or security concerns, or the presence of an internal conflict in potentially intervening countries) and found that the most important factors consisted of economic motives and geographic proximity. Her findings are therefore in sharp contrast with those of Regan.³¹ The inconsistency, however, could be a result of the geographical focus of her research on African states' interventions.

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Although the abovementioned authors concentrated on various supposed causes of interventions, they resigned to pay attention to possible interactions and interrelations among the independent variables. Therefore, we will firstly draw our hypotheses following the previous findings of the mentioned authors, and then we will focus on the variables' interactions.

Hypotheses

The first hypothesis is based on Regan's geographic proximity thesis which he operationalised through a number of neighbouring countries.³² However, we consider the geographic proximity and the number of neighbouring countries as two different factors which may, but also may not, overlap. From the reasons stated below, we consider the number of neighbouring countries as more coherent with the theoretical assumptions and therefore we won't confuse it with the geographic proximity. Firstly, according to Regan's hypothesis, intervention by neighbouring states should be of greater value.³³ Similarly, Yoon (as she analysed interventions of African states in Africa) stressed the stronger interaction of states with their neighbours.³⁴ Secondly, states are also believed to be more prone to intervene in the internal conflicts within neighbouring countries because of the possibility of war contagion, as Regan³⁵ or Kathman³⁶ argued. This could be true especially in the case of Africa (or more generally in the 'Global South') where states are mainly oriented towards their closest neighbourhood in seeking for their own as well as for the regional security policy,³⁷ whereas 'First World' countries could take a safe neighbourhood for granted. Mohammed Ayoub³⁸ argues that this is a consequence of the 'weak state-structure'

in the 'Global South' that leads to spill-over effects from internal conflicts into the nearby region. In dealing with proximity there could also be an important distinction between the conditions important for African states and their non-African counterparts, especially European states. Unfortunately, the selected method does not allow us to catch this difference because the variables must be coded both for interventions and for non-interventions, and for the latter, the 'African vs. non-African intervenor' variable would be pointless. Nevertheless, we will at least partially focus on this issue within the two short case studies of the UK's intervention in Sierra Leone and France's intervention in Mali at the end of the discussion part.

The first hypothesis thus states that: (H1) *Increasing the number of neighbouring states with a conflict-ridden country increases willingness to intervene.*

The second hypothesis is based on economic interests, especially on the attraction of raw materials and other gains that could be obtained from 'successful' (for the intervenor) intervention.³⁹ According to Yoon, the pursuit of gains substantially influences the foreign policy of states. In Africa, the gain is mainly a possibility of looting raw materials.⁴⁰ Other authors point out that intervention is the result of a decision to protect economic position, trade and interests in the country.⁴¹ However, with regard to the usually negligible rate of cross border or cross regional trade, we have decided to stress the first argument.

The second hypothesis therefore supposes that: (H2) *Increasing the presence of raw materials in a conflict-ridden state increases willingness to intervene.*

Another possible and very interesting condition is the intensity of conflict, supposing that higher intensity brings higher costs of intervention, moreover with uncertain outcomes. The costs of an uncertain adventure in the case of intervention in an intense conflict could simply be too high in comparison to possible gains.⁴² On the other hand, from the point of view of humanitarian military intervention one could argue by 'just cause' for intervention to stop human suffering.⁴³ However, we stick to utility and costs-benefits rationale behind the intervenor view of intense conflicts.

Thus, the third hypothesis therefore supposes that: (H3) *Increasing the intensity of a conflict decreases willingness to intervene.*

Our fourth hypothesis is partly connected with the problem of human suffering (humanitarian aspect) but also with the regional conta-

gion (security aspect). Refugee flows from a warring neighbour state can destabilise domestic policy and thus cause instability.⁴⁴ However, such massive social dislocation can also cause humanitarian concerns. Although there is a conventional link between a conflict's intensity and social dislocations, it is important to stress here, as Regan⁴⁵ shows, that the intensity of conflict itself might not be only or an automatic source of large social dislocations.⁴⁶ That's why we have decided not to perceive dislocation just as the consequence of the conflict intensity but to focus on conflict-driven social dislocations *per se* as a possible determinant of interventions. As we are using qualitative comparative analyses, which allow us to catch interconnections and interactions among conditions, the whole issue of a link among intensity, social dislocation and number of neighbouring countries seems very interesting to understand.

The fourth hypothesis supposes that: (H4) *Great social dislocations during the conflict increases willingness to intervene.*

The fifth hypothesis is based on the notion of ethnicity. States in Africa are generally very ethnically heterogeneous. Furthermore, ethnic groups often find themselves in several different states. Therefore, killing members of an ethnic group in a conflict-ridden state can easily affect a relative group in a neighbouring state which can consequently result in killing relatives (real or alleged) of the perpetrators for revenge. It is not easy to sit on the fence when your kin are being slaughtered in a neighbouring country. That's why intrastate conflict has substantial potential to bring ethnicity to the daylight of the political agenda and over-border ethnic links could be a condition that changes foreign policy agenda and create another rationale for intervention.⁴⁷ Ethnic affinity (especially in connection with the imperative of stopping the suffering of relatives) thus could be the reason for intervention by virtue of the demands of an intervenor's population. On the other hand, it could also serve as a governmental rationalisation of a performed intervention without preceding popular demand and/or with other, and far less humanitarian, intentions.

Either way, we suppose that: (H5) *The great number of ethnic-relative states of a conflict-ridden country increases the probability of their intervention.*

The last hypothesis focuses on the history of the state where the conflict is taking place. As a former colonial power, France has an exceptional relationship with its former colonies. Military and economic

cooperation with several countries led to many French interventions. The close ties between France and African states were so significant that some authors use it as an important variable for conflict occurrence in Africa.⁴⁸ The interventions were an important part of French foreign policy in Africa⁴⁹ and they still are, though now partly concealed with the EU Common Security and Defence Policy. We assume then that in former French colonies interventions occur more often as France still significantly shows its presence in African internal conflicts.

Thus, the last hypothesis presumes that: (H6) *Being a former French colony increases the willingness of France (or its allies) to intervene.*⁵⁰

Methodology – Qualitative Comparative Analyses (QCA) and operational criteria

The QCA, first presented in 1987 by Charles Ragin,⁵¹ has brought new insights into the social inquiry which are broadly discussed to this day.⁵² The QCA should be able to fill the gap between qualitative and quantitative methods in moderate-sized N research.⁵³ It combines the simple generalisation of quantitative methods as well as the complexity of qualitative methods.⁵⁴ The results of QCA are presented as ‘conjunctions of conditions’, thus, the method presents a configuration of mutually connected conditions.⁵⁵ Thereby conditions cannot be understood as self-contained statements that are separated from each other, quite the contrary – as complex ties among conditions, no matter the sole impact of a particular condition. Thus, on one hand, the results of QCA offer unexceptionable insight into great complexity imbued with many interesting interactions among independent variables which the conventional statistical methods are unable to deliver. On the other hand, as well as all other methods, even QCA has been subjected to a lot of criticism, especially for its supposed limited usage in the social sciences.⁵⁶ For example, Simon Hug⁵⁷ mentions that QCA can suffer from measurement errors which cannot be overcome entirely even by involvement of case studies. Such criticism is very useful to realise the limits and pitfalls of the QCA, we consider its benefits for a complex view of surveyed phenomenon to be prevailing,⁵⁸ especially dealing with issues of security.⁵⁹ Besides, a similar criticism could also be targeted on the conventional statistical methods anticipating certain quality and quantity of data which is hardly reachable within the realm of social science.

The results in QCA take the form of combinations of conditions that lead to the outcome. This means that we must perceive causality as an interplay between conditions instead of viewing them in a vacuum.⁶⁰ In this study we are using fuzzy-set QCA that is based on scaling membership in sets, i.e. we calibrate degree of a condition's presence in a given set.⁶¹

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This allows us to understand the continual character of conditions by addressing a membership score between 0 and 1, where 1 means full membership in the set, whereas 0 means that the condition is fully out of the set.⁶² A score of 0.5 refers to a point of 'maximum fuzziness' (point of indifference) that means that it is neither in nor out. Points in-between a score of 1-0.5 and 0.5-0 means that it is 'more in than out' and 'more out than in', respectively.⁶³ Thus, one of the most important steps in analyses is the calibration of set membership.^{64,65}

Our first hypothesis is based on the *number of neighbouring countries* (NNC) which we operationalise through the number of states neighbouring with the state where the conflict occurs. In doing so, we suppose (similarly to Regan⁶⁶) that it threatens the stability of the neighbouring countries which consequently tend to stop the conflict to prevent its contagion. The calibration of this condition is then based on mathematical procedure when we operate with the z-score of all cases.⁶⁷ Points of 0.95 (full membership) and 0.05 (full non-membership) match with deviation 1.645 and -1.645 and the point of maximum fuzziness is deviation 0.

For the second hypothesis, we use the *presence of raw materials* (MAT) in the country, supposing that the more lootable resources a conflict-ridden state has, the more attractive it is for possible intervenors. As an indicator for this condition, we use data from the World Bank Databank called total natural resources rents as a percentage of GDP.⁶⁸ To be sure that our indicator is representative and not influenced by conflict we use resources rents of a state one year before the conflict started. The calibration is based on the World Bank publication *The Changing Wealth of Nations*.⁶⁹ A resource-rich country is understood to be a country with resource rents of at least 5 percent of GDP according to the World Bank.⁷⁰ Therefore, we use a dichotomous variable where less than 5 percent of GDP is coded as 0, and at least 5 percent of GDP is coded as 1.

The third hypothesis focuses on the *conflict's intensity* (COINT). An intervention in intense conflicts could pose very high risks and costs.

The calibration is centred around the traditional understanding of conflict intensity and divide the conflicts on wars (1) and minor conflicts (0). Thus, in case the conflict reached the level of war according to UCDP/PRIO⁷¹ we code it as 1, in another case as 0.

The fourth hypothesis relates to the humanitarian issues and also the possibility of a domestic instability caused by large social dislocations (REF). As an indicator, we use the number of refugees of the state in conflict. As a 'large social dislocation', we understand the difference of refugees' population before a conflict and the highest number of refugees during the conflict *episodes*⁷² having the threshold set on 50,000 refugees.⁷³ Thus the difference of at least 50,000 refugees we code as 1, in other cases we coded 0. We use data from World Bank⁷⁴ data that are based on the UNHCR data on refugees.⁷⁵

The fifth hypothesis assumes that a state is more likely to intervene in a conflict-ridden state if both are inhabited (at least partially) by the same ethnic group. It partly addresses the issue of an intervenor's proximity but not absolutely because some ethnic groups are very dispersed (for example Hausa-Fulani in West Africa). Ethnic affinity (ETH) is based on the dataset of James D. Fearon.⁷⁶ To be specific, we count states where an ethnic group endangered by a conflict is the largest or the second-largest ethnic group. Calibration is again based on z-score, as mentioned above.

The last condition that operates with the French condition (FRC) is coded in a dichotomous fashion as 1 is for former French colonies and 0 for the other.⁷⁷

As a case, we use internal conflict based on the UCDP/PRIO data set.⁷⁸ We do not focus on conflict year or event but on conflict as a whole. To be relevant for our study the start date must be after 1 January 1989. We consider this date as the mark of transition between the Cold War and the post-Cold War period as it is a transitional year when we can trace a growing convergence between Russia and the USA.⁷⁹ The dataset consequently comprises 33 conflicts of which 13 were intervened by one or more states.

Results

First of all, in fuzzy-set QCA we have to make a test for the necessity both for presence and absence of the outcome. Analyses of necessity must be made in a separate way (see Appendix 1). The necessity test of outcome presence shows no single condition with a consis-

tency level of at least 0.9.⁸⁰ On the other hand, the results indicate that (at the consistency level of 0.95 and coverage level of 0.73) the absence of high intensity (\sim COINT)⁸¹ is the necessary condition for the absence of intervention. Also, consistency level of social dislocation's absence (0.85) seems interesting but it has not passed the threshold of 0.9.

As the next step, we construct the 'truth table' for the positive and negative outcome. The program fs/qca generates three possible solutions: complex, parsimonious and intermediate solutions. As the names tell us, the complex solution is based just on empirical cases and is the most intricate. The parsimonious uses logical reminders to reduce the solution. Finally, the intermediate solution lies in between as it represents a reduced solution based on previous theoretical knowledge.⁸² This combination makes it the generally preferred solution for analyses including this one.

Appendix 4 displays solutions and all the conjunctions that lead to the positive outcome – presence of the intervention.⁸³ As we mentioned above, we will mainly focus on the intermediate solution.

The intermediate solution for positive (presence) outcome contains four paths:

1. Low number of neighbouring countries * Great social dislocation
2. High intensity * Great social dislocation
3. Presence of raw materials * Great Social dislocation * Former French colony
4. High intensity * Presence of raw materials * Great number of neighbouring countries * Absence of ethnic affinity * Former French colony

Thus, we can find four possible ways to the intervention. The coverage and consistency of the solutions is promising. The intermediate solutions as the main explanation to discuss reaches coverage level of 0.51 and consistency level of 0.91. The parsimonious solution also shows relatively high consistency and coverage even if the coverage of a complex solution drops a little bit.

Appendix 5 displays solutions and all the conjunctions that lead to the negative (absence) outcome, thus for the absence of the intervention. Overall, the consistency for the intermediate solution again shows sufficient levels with consistency at 0.94 and coverage slightly above 0.41. The paths for negative outcome to discuss are:

1. Low intensity * Great number of neighbouring countries * Not a French colony
2. Absence of raw materials * Absence of ethnic affinity * Former French colony
3. Absence of raw materials * Low number of neighbouring countries * Low social dislocation * Former French colony
4. Low intensity * Presence of raw materials * No ethnic affinity * Low social dislocation * Not a French colony

Discussion – Back to the theory

In the following section, we will go through every condition and how they work in different combinations to contrast our results with the previous research. We will discuss just the intermediate solutions that are of the best analytical use. We find the results important in two regards – we have re-examined influential theoretical presumptions with the use of this unusual method and show that some of them do not match. Secondly, the results indicate that the QCA method can reflect interventions as more interconnected and complex phenomena than a purely quantitative approach of our predecessors.

Let's take a closer look at every condition in our study while also discussing the path they are part of. The number of neighbouring countries seems not to unequivocally support previous theoretical assumptions. If we focus on its interplay with other conditions, we can find it in two positive (i.e. the presence of intervention) and in two negative paths (i.e. the absence of intervention). Within the former, it appears in the solution with great social dislocation. A possible explanation could rest in the assumption that the lower number of neighbouring states, the larger share of refugees falls on every single state. Therefore, they are motivated to intervene in order to prevent the contagion (e.g. Guinea as the only relatively stable neighbour of conflict-ridden Sierra Leone). The second path, however, presumes the opposite effect of this variable – interventions are caused in situation of a great number of neighbouring countries, high intensity and abundant raw materials in a former French colony with low ethnic affinity. Even if this solution is too complex to call, we will discuss it below. The number of neighbouring countries is ambivalent even for a negative outcome. However, this is one of the main signs of QCA that in different combinations the same condition can lead to a different outcome. A great number of neighbouring countries don't lead to intervention if it is

accompanied by low intensity in a non-French former colony. But we can see the same outcome if the number of neighbouring countries is low, accompanied by no refugees, no raw materials and being a former French colony. It could mean that these states are on the very edge of interest, for both France and states in the region due to other conditions like absence of raw materials or low intensity.

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Our analysis shows that the number of states *per se* could be an important factor, but its rationalisation differs from the geographic proximity as is commonly understood in theory. Although we suppose that the number of neighbours is a relevant factor (especially in combination with refugees as shown above and in the subsequent case of Sierra Leone), we suggest that the operationalisation of proximity should be addressed more profoundly in future research, especially in order to cover a distance from an intervenor to the intervened conflict, and an importance of the region for overseas actors (given by for example proximity to an important sea route, geo-strategic position and so on).

To the second variable, the economic interests and raw materials proves to be of high importance. Therefore, Yoon's⁸⁴ finding that raw materials are important for African states' willingness to intervene is plausible. However, it is not a solely sufficient condition for intervention. The variable is present in two out of four positive outcomes' paths and in three out of four negative outcomes' paths. For the positive outcome, the raw materials are important in combination with the refugee's flux and French colonial history that is consistent with theoretical (and empirical) expectations (e.g. French intervention in Mali – see below). The second path combines raw materials with high intensity, a great number of neighbouring countries, absence of ethnic affinity and being a former French colony. The combination could be interpreted from a costs and profits perspective: the great costs of military intervention in a highly intensive conflict are compensated with possible economic gains, and also by a threat of destabilisation of the whole region resulting from hesitation. The possibility of French intervention just increases the probable success of the intervention and thus also its utility.

For the negative outcomes, the absence of raw materials appears in combination with the absence of ethnic affinity and French colonial history. French colonial history is present also in the second solution, together with a low level of social dislocation, and a low number of neighbouring states. The last solution describes the situation when

even a high amount of raw materials is not perceived as a sufficient reward to balance missing security variables (high intensity, social dislocation) or ethnic affinity.

The frequent combination of raw materials and French colonial history could indicate a possible relation between these variables, both within positive (two of four) and negative (three of four) outcomes. It seems that raw materials (and connected economic interests) could be an important factor not only for African states (as Yoon suggested⁸⁵) but also for France as we could see for example in Mali, Niger, the Central African Republic and so on.

The intensity of conflict seems to be of high importance, mainly because it contests the results of Regan's study.⁸⁶ Namely, we found that high intensity does not bring any exorbitantly high cost for a potential intervenor; quite the contrary, intense conflicts are more likely to be intervened. Moreover, the first combination – high intensity and large social dislocation – could indicate that a potential intervenor pays more attention to the humanitarian and security concerns than to the costs. This issue is obviously complicated to understand, and it is hard to distinguish humanitarianism from political and security goals where humanitarian arguments are only a 'veil' of justification. Obviously, humanitarian military intervention presents a specific kind of military intervention where other conditions, like just cause, intention, etc., are also questioned.⁸⁷

The conflict intensity seems at least equally interesting for negative outcomes, mainly because the low intensity is the (only one) necessary condition for absence of intervention. The results of the conflict intensity, both the positive and negative outcomes, mostly contest the previous research and show that the security concerns or even humanitarian issues (together with the issue of social dislocations) are important. We have already mentioned the issue of social dislocations several times. Most of our results show that social dislocations relate to humanitarian concerns of intervening states.

The issue of ethnicity seems to be much more complicated and confusing for intervenors' motivations. Even though ethnic affinity is included in some solutions, it seems not so strong in the explanatory ways. It is important to stress here that ethnicity in Africa is a very hard issue to study and especially hard to collect relevant data about. In general, data about ethnicity are far from being rigorous and up-to-date, which could also have affected our inconclusive findings.

Last but not least, French colonial history seems to be important. In two paths of positive solutions being a former French colony was relevant to the presence of intervention. In this case, it was accompanied by great social dislocation and (in both cases) raw materials. This means that French military relations to former African colonies remained and it is enhanced with an economic significance for France, or great social dislocation may serve as justification for the intervention.⁸⁸ However, French colonial history is neither a solely necessary condition nor a solely sufficient condition.

French colonial history is important also for understanding the absence of intervention since it is present (always with absence of raw materials) in two out of four negative paths. A possible explanation could rest in a reluctance of prospective intervenors to interfere in matters of France's 'clients', expecting France to intervene instead. In combination with a low level of raw materials and social dislocation, an intervention is not worthy, not even for France. In former non-French colonies, intervention does not occur even if abundant material resources are present together with low conflict intensity, low social dislocation and no ethnic affinity.⁸⁹

To sum up, our results show great complexity of the decision to intervene or not. States must consider costs and benefits whereas every single factor added could substantially change the equation through various interconnections with the others. That's why the conditions must be seen in the mutual interactions and not separately. However, resulting equations may then appeal rather theoretically and even artificially. That's why we are going to show their logic in two brief examples of military intervention – Sierra Leone and Mali.

In the case of Sierra Leone, there were three intervening states – Guinea, Nigeria and later also the UK. There are two possible explanations for the intervention – interplay of (1) a low number of neighbouring countries and great social dislocation, or (2) great intensity and great social dislocation.

For Guinea - as for one of the two neighbouring countries – the fear of great social dislocation and possible contagion of the very intensive conflict played a significant role for the decision to intervene, as for example David Keen proves.⁹⁰ Moreover, Sierra Leone's second neighbour, Liberia, was far from being a safe haven for immigrants since the whole country had been inflicted with civil war. Guinea, as the only

one relatively safe neighbouring country, was therefore legitimately afraid of contagion and a great refugee influx, especially when over 140,000 refugees from Sierra Leone came in just the first year of the more than decade-long civil war (1991–2002).⁹¹ Both explanations are therefore plausible.

The second intervenor, Nigeria, is not a neighbouring country to Sierra Leone, but it does not necessarily mean that the low number of neighbours in combination with social dislocations were not relevant factors. Nigeria could be concerned with a possible influx of immigrants from Sierra Leone (and Liberia) especially with regard to bitter experiences from clashes between Nigerians and immigrants (for example with Liberians in Oro). It is important to stress, however, that the number of Sierra Leonean refugees in Nigeria was negligible in comparison to Guinea. The threat of social dislocation in combination with a high intensity of conflict and/or with a low number of neighbouring states should be rather perceived in a context of the Nigerian hegemonic position in West Africa. Nigeria has often portrayed itself as a regional peace-keeper and as a champion of the English-speaking countries of West Africa against the threat of French interventional politics. A conflict of high intensity in an English-speaking country would notably contest Nigeria's reputation.

Since the decision to intervene is quite multi-causal, there were many reasons beyond our analysis – especially the role of personal relationships and animosities among West African presidents.⁹² Their real impact on the decision, however, could be hardly measured and incorporated into the model.

Intervention by the UK cannot be explained by the first solution, as it was clearly not threatened by refugee flows or conflict contagion, but the second solution seems plausible. The incentives for interventions might therefore lie in an instability that threatened the UK's investments in Sierra Leone and the broader region all together with an imperilment of the UK citizens in Sierra Leone which helped with the justification of intervention.⁹³ Great social dislocations played a crucial role by spilling the conflict over the borders and having a substantially affected majority of countries within the region, including Ghana – an important partner of the UK. The UK's intervention could be therefore explained as a reaction to great instability (caused by the high intensity of the conflict and great social dislocations) that jeopardised its interests in the region.

The combination of high intensity and great social dislocations was also important in the case of the military intervention to Mali in 2013 that followed the civil war which started in 2009.⁹⁴ Mali has kept quite close trade and political ties to France, thus representing a typical example of the former French colony condition. France has traditionally been one of the biggest importers to Mali, although the export to Mali in 2012 represented just 0.079% of total French export and Malian export to France was negligible.⁹⁵ However, Mali's importance for France is not been derived from total capacity of trade, but rather from its composition because Mali (together with Niger) are important sources of raw materials, especially uranium. Moreover, stability in the area of Malian and Nigerien Sahel is crucial for the stability of Algeria, which is an important source of crude oil and petroleum gas.⁹⁶ Also as Douglas Yates aptly writes: 'the economic importance of Africa to France's African policy must be understood as less about its macroeconomic importance to France as a whole than about its importance to a small predatory lobby of influential French profiteers'.⁹⁷ Therefore, the reasons why France so swiftly intervened, besides the Malian government's request for the intervention in January 2013,⁹⁸ rested primarily in the quest for stability in the Sahelian part of Mali, Niger and Algeria. Although uranium (or raw materials in general) in Mali itself could contribute to the decision, it didn't play a crucial role vis-à-vis the risk of contagion and spreading the conflict into the whole region. The Malian case could be therefore explained both by the combination of high intensity and great social dislocation, destabilising the region of France's interest, and by the combination of raw materials, great social dislocation and a former French colony (the request of Malian government). In the case of Mali, the two combinations are very close to each other.

For the minor intervening states (mostly states of West Africa), the reasons rested mostly in the imminent threat of contagion of a high intensity conflict with great social dislocation, especially after the bitter experience from the civil wars of the 1990s that had spread so quickly over the region. The possible contagion through the Sahelian and Saharan area was so dangerous as the area is very hard to control.⁹⁹

In the beginning, we argued that intensity is more likely seen as an obstacle to intervention. In the end situation seems to be different. Great intensity of conflict together with great social dislocation seems to be important from regional stability point of view. It is not

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the bloody conflict alone. Conflict needs other reasons to pull the attention of the states. An interesting fact is that great intensity does not show together with great social dislocation every time in the solutions and the interplay between these two variables should be investigated. The number of neighbours or as some use it as a proxy for geographic proximity still seems to be confusing. Also, it is important to mention that the reasons for intervention probably differs for African and extra-African countries as was the French and the UK case in Mali or Sierra Leone. As we have already mentioned, 'French colonial history' condition is not solely a necessary nor sufficient for intervention therefore France still needs other pull factors to participate in conflict.

To sum up, our results show great complexity as the decision to intervene or not. States must consider costs and benefits whereas every single factor added could substantially change the equation through various interconnection with the others. That's why the factors (conditions) must be seen in the mutual interactions and not separately.

Conclusion

The reasons for interventions into African internal conflicts need to be perceived as a complex and interconnected phenomenon. We pointed out this complexity using the QCA method which revealed some interesting results. Firstly, in sharp contrast to previous assumptions, we showed that the high intensity of conflict and large social dislocations led to external intervention. On the other hand, intervention was generally unlikely in the conflicts of low intensity. Secondly, occurrence of raw materials (and economic interests of the intervening states in general) played a very important role for the decision to intervene not just in the case of African states (as for example Yoon¹⁰⁰ presumed) but also in the case of France.

To assign appropriate motives to these factors is very complicated and not the goal of the article. Rather, we have focused on conditions under which interventions occur. Nevertheless, we could conclude that balancing possible costs and benefits is important for intervenors even though the complexity of the solutions is high.

Despite many limitations (especially representativeness of data or static character of QCA¹⁰¹), the results and the research design bring a specific understanding of the issue of military interventions in Africa after the Cold War. With this article we contribute to the growing number of research based on a configurational approach. QCA as

a method offers an important insight into the study of security in Africa as it is highly complex. Military interventions are not easily grasped by one factor. Rather we have to understand the tangled net of relations between several conditions as in our example where a mutual influence of high intensity, great social dislocation or raw materials contributed to presence of interventions.

*Conditions
of Interventions
in African
Conflicts*



This work is part of the project „Internal conflicts in Sub-Saharan Africa“ and it was supported by grant of the Specific research projects of Philosophical Faculty of University of Hradec Králové.

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Appendix I. Necessary conditions

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Presence of outcome	Consistency	Coverage	Absence of outcome	Consistency	Coverage
COINT	0.461538	0.857143	COINT	0.050000	0.142857
~COINT	0.538462	0.269231	~COINT	0.950000	0.730769
MAT	0.769231	0.416667	MAT	0.700000	0.583333
~MAT	0.230769	0.333333	~MAT	0.300000	0.666667
NNC	0.483846	0.368915	NNC	0.538000	0.631085
~NNC	0.516154	0.420690	~NNC	0.462000	0.579310
ETH	0.446154	0.366856	ETH	0.500500	0.633143
~ETH	0.553846	0.418848	~ETH	0.499500	0.581152
REF	0.538462	0.700000	REF	0.150000	0.300000
~REF	0.461538	0.260870	~REF	0.850000	0.739130
FRC	0.538462	0.368421	FRC	0.600000	0.631579
~FRC	0.461538	0.428571	~FRC	0.400000	0.571429

Source: Made by authors in program fs/qca Ragin, Davey 2016

Appendix 2. Truth table for positive outcome

COINT	MAT	NNC	ETH	REF	FRC	number	INT	cases ¹	RAW consist.	PRI consist.	SYM consist
I	O	O	O	I	O	I	I	I-179	I	I	I
I	I	O	O	I	O	I	I	I-187	I	I	I
I	I	I	O	I	O	I	I	I-270	I	I	I
I	I	O	I	I	O	I	I	I-292	I	I	I
O	I	I	O	I	I	I	I	I-222	I	I	I
I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I-274	I	I	I
I	I	I	O	O	I	I	I	I-214	0.910714	0.910714	0.910714
O	O	I	I	I	I	I	O	I-177	0.694215	0.694215	0.694215
O	I	O	I	O	I	I	O	I-267	0.425373	0.425373	0.425373
O	O	O	O	O	O	2	O	I-130;I-217	0.360976	0.360976	0.360976
O	I	I	O	O	I	4	O	I-178; I-212; I-255; I-290	0.330189	0.330189	0.330189
O	I	I	I	O	I	5	O	I-289; I-291; I-111; I-298; I-287	0.25641	0.25641	0.25641
O	I	O	I	O	O	3	O	I-216; I-249; I-250	0.253112	0.253112	0.253112
I	I	I	I	O	I	I	O	I-271	0.204545	0.204545	0.204545
O	I	O	O	O	O	2	O	I-192; I-268	0.167382	0.167382	0.167382
O	O	I	O	I	I	I	O	I-225	0.135593	0.135593	0.135593
O	O	I	O	O	O	I	O	I-294	0.0555556	0.0555556	0.0555556
O	O	O	O	O	I	2	O	I-167; I-213	O	O	O
O	I	I	O	I	O	I	O	I-254	O	O	O
O	I	I	I	I	O	I	O	I-269	O	O	O
O	O	O	I	O	I	I	O	I-184	O	O	O

¹ Cases are under the ID code of UCDP database

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Appendix 3. Truth table for negative outcome

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COINT	MAT	NNC	ETH	REF	FRC	number	~INT	cases	RAW consist.	PRI consist.	SYM consist
0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	I-167; I-213	1	1	1
0	1	1	0	1	0	1	1	I-254	1	1	1
0	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	I-269	1	1	1
0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	I-184	1	1	1
0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	I-294	0.944444	0.944444	0.944444
0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	I-225	0.864407	0.864407	0.864407
0	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	I-192; I-268	0.832618	0.832618	0.832618
1	1	1	1	0	1	1	0	I-271	0.795455	0.795455	0.795455
0	1	0	1	0	0	3	0	I-216; I-249; I-250	0.746888	0.746888	0.746888
0	1	1	1	0	1	5	0	I-289; I-291; I-111; I-298; I-287	0.74359	0.74359	0.74359
0	1	1	0	0	1	4	0	I-178; I-212; I-255; I-290	0.669811	0.669811	0.669811
0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	I-130; I-217	0.639024	0.639024	0.639024
0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	I-267	0.574627	0.574627	0.574627
0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	I-177	0.305785	0.305785	0.305785
1	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	I-214	0.0892857	0.0892857	0.0892857
1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	I-179	0	0	0
1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	I-187	0	0	0
1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	I-270	0	0	0
1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	I-292	0	0	0
0	1	1	0	1	1	1	0	I-222	0	0	0
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	I-274	0	0	0

Source: Made by authors in program fs/qca Ragin, Davey 2016

Appendix 4. Solutions for positive outcome

Conjunction	Consistency	Raw Coverage Coverage for solution)	Unique Coverage	Cases in solution
Intermediate solution	0.914952	0.513077	-	
~NNC*REF	0.848806	0.246154	0.0123076	Sierra Leone (1991-2001) Nigeria (2015), Rwanda (1990-2012)
COINT*REF	1	0.384615	0.109231	Mali (2009-), Nigeria (2015), Rwanda (1990-2012), Sierra Leone (1991-2001), South Sudan (2011-)
MAT*REF*FRC	1	0.153846	0.0538461	Central African Republic (2001- 2013), Mali (2009-)
COINT*MAT*NNC*~ETH*FRC	0.921875	0.0453846	0.0392308	Congo (1993-2002)
Parsimonious solution	0.918421	0.536923		
COINT*~ETH	0.986911	0.29	0.0630769	Sierra Leone (1991-2001), South Sudan (2011-), Congo (1993-2002), Rwanda (1990-2012)
MAT*REF*FRC	1	0.153846	0.0538462	Central African Republic (2001- 2013), Mali (2009-)
~NNC*REF	0.848806	0.246154	0.0123077	Sierra Leone (1991-2001), Nigeria (2015), Rwanda (1990-2012)
COINT*REF	1	0.384615	0.0538461	Mali (2009-), Nigeria (2015), Rwanda (1990-2012), Sierra Leone (1991-2001), South Sudan (2011-)
Complex solution	0.990494	0.400769	-	
COINT*~NNC*~ETH*REF*~FRC	1	0.165385	0.0523077	Sierra Leone (1991-2001), Rwanda (1990-2012)
COINT*MAT*~ETH*REF*~FRC	1	0.157692	0.0446154	Sierra Leone (1991-2001), South Sudan (2011-)
COINT*MAT*~NNC*REF*~FRC	1	0.146154	0.0330769	Sierra Leone (1991-2001), Nigeria (2015)
COINT*MAT*NNC*~ETH*~REF*FRC	0.910714	0.0392308	0.0392308	Congo (1993-2002)
~COINT*MAT*N-NC*~ETH*REF*FRC	1	0.0538462	0.0538462	Central African Republic (2001- 2013)
COINT*MAT*NNC*ETH*REF*FRC	1	0.0646154	0.0646154	Mali (2009-)

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Source: Made by authors in program fs/qca Ragin, Davey 2016

Appendix 5. Solutions for negative outcome

Conjunction	Consistency	Raw Coverage Coverage for solution)	Unique Coverage	Cases for solutions
Intermediate solution	0.941581	0.411		
~COINT*~NNC*~FRC	0.97	0.194	0.133	DRC (1998-2008), Sudan (2011), Kenya (2015)
~MAT*~ETH*FRC	0.968254	0.122	0.0315	Comoros (1989), Comoros (1997), Ivory Coast (2002-2011)
~MAT*~NNC*~REF*~FRC	1	0.1395	0.049	Comoros (1989), Comoros (1997), Djibouti (1991-1999)
~COINT*~MAT*~ETH*~REF*~FRC	0.84585	0.107	0.046	Ethiopia (1991), Angola (1991-2009)
Parsimonious solution	0.942953	0.4215		
~COINT*~NNC*~FRC	0.97	0.194	0.092	DRC (1998-2008), Sudan (2011), Kenya (2015)
~MAT*~ETH*FRC	0.968254	0.122	0.0315	Comoros (1989), Comoros (1997), Ivory Coast (2002-2011)
~COINT*~MAT*~ETH*~FRC	0.883582	0.148	0.046	Ethiopia (1991), Angola (1991-2009), DRC (1998-2008)
~MAT*~REF*FRC	1	0.15	0.0595	Comoros (1989), Comoros (1997), Djibouti (1991-1999)
Complex solution	0.938922	0.392		
~COINT*~MAT*~NNC*~REF*FRC	1	0.1395	0.1395	Comoros (1989), Comoros (1997), Djibouti (1991-1999)
~COINT*~MAT*~NNC*~REF*~FRC	1	0.096	0.096	DRC (1998-2008), Sudan (2011)
~COINT*~MAT*~NNC*~ETH*~REF*~FRC	0.832618	0.097	0.097	Angola (1991-2009), Ethiopia (1991)
~COINT*~MAT*~NNC*~ETH*~REF*~FRC	0.944444	0.034	0.034	Kenya (2015)
~COINT*~MAT*~NNC*~ETH*~REF*FRC	0.864407	0.0255	0.0255	Ivory Coast (2002-2011)

Source: Made by authors in program fs/qca Ragin, Davey 2016

Endnotes

- 1 This manuscript is partially based on a master thesis written by Martin Schmiedl and defended at the University of Hradec Králové in 2015. However, it is deeply reworked with use of different, newer data.
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- 83 In case of the tied prime implicants we have made decision according to the theoretical knowledge (Legewie (2013)).
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- 85 Yoon (2005)
- 86 Regan (1998)
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101 The static character of QCA does not allow us to understand the dynamics of decision-making, especially related to an issue of possible endogeneity of intervention and conflict intensity.

*Conditions
of Interventions
in African
Conflicts*

Revisiting the Causes of Russian Foreign Policy Changes

Incoherent Biographical Narrative, Recognition and Russia's Ontological Security-Seeking

Tanya Narozhna

This paper examines the relationship between international practices of recognition and state quest for ontological security, on the one hand, and Russia's most recent identity makeover as well as increasingly aggressive foreign policy, on the other. I argue that in order to understand Russia's growing belligerence in foreign and security policies we need to examine the connection between Western refusal to recognize Russia's great power self-image, the effects this refusal has had on Russia's ontological security, and a subsequent shift in Russia's self-description from pro-Western to civilizational.

Keywords: ontological security, international recognition, Russian foreign policy

Introduction

The causes and implications of Russia's increasingly assertive foreign policy have been the subject of much debate among academics and policy makers. Burgeoning literature on the subject has provided dif-

Tanya Narozhna. Revisiting the Causes of Russian Foreign Policy Changes. Incoherent Biographical Narrative, Recognition and Russia's Ontological Security-Seeking. *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 15, no. 2: 56–81.

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ferent explanations that focus on a variety of individual, domestic, geopolitical and ideational factors.¹ The last set of explanations, developed by constructivist scholarship, is of central interest in this manuscript. Constructivists have scrutinised a series of Russian identity overhauls that occurred after the Soviet demise. The first overhaul took place in the early 1990s, when the ruling elites attempted to align collective identity with the liberal ideal of modern market democracy. By the mid-1990s, it was supplanted by a centrist vision of identity built on an eclectic combination of liberal and conservative values. A decade later, yet another identity change was prompted by the Eurasianist vision of civilisational identity built on an antithetical commitment to Orthodox Christianity and conservative values, on the one hand, and glorification of Stalin and Soviet great power status, on the other. According to constructivists, the shift from liberal to civilisational identity has been directly implicated in Russia's increasingly assertive foreign policy and changing relations with the West, i.e., from partnership and cooperation in the wake of the Cold war to conflict and competition in the course of the last decade.

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Constructivist scholarship has offered valuable insights into the changing nature of Russian foreign policy by drawing attention to Russia's history and culture as the repository of competing collective identities - Westernist, centrist and civilisational - and by demonstrating how the ruling elites have utilised divergent identity discourses to guide different foreign policies intended to help Russia maintain, or regain, great power status.² However, a constructivist line of argument is not without analytical blind spots. While accepting that domestic drivers, such as history and culture, matter in determining both identity and foreign policy, critics have pointed out that constructivist analyses are generally lacking 'a good theory to explain the persuasiveness of any normative claim over others'.³ In other words, the question of identity *change*, or what drives the rise of one vision of identity over another, has not been systematically addressed. This leaves open some important questions: If elite-driven identity discourse determines the direction and character of Russian foreign policy, then why is it that the liberal vision of identity, actively promoted by the ruling elites in the early 1990s, has fallen by the wayside? Or why was the centrist vision of identity, which has been so influential since the mid-1990s, eventually displaced by civilisational identity discourse, a fringe discourse throughout the 1990s? Equally baffling is the constructivist argument

about Russia's quest for status. Constructivist scholars generally agree that the West, and the US in particular, is an essential external other in Russia's pursuit of great power status and that Western recognition, or lack thereof, plays a key role in determining the character of Russia's international behavior. In the context of this argument, however, it is unfathomable why Russian ruling elites have opted for the strategy of pursuing great power status by antagonising the West, while simultaneously seeking Western recognition of Russia's greatness.

This paper takes the above criticisms seriously and seeks to contribute to existing constructivist scholarship by turning analytical attention to the background factors, i.e., ontological security and international recognition. It argues that the explanations produced by the bulk of research on Russian identity, quest for status and foreign policy are inevitably incomplete because they overlook 'the ontological [security] costs'⁴ of international politics of recognition for Russia. Attention to ontological security and international dynamics of recognition can help us understand in a more nuanced way a full pendulum swing in Russia's identity and foreign policy in a span of three decades. More specifically, the paper investigates the linkages between collective identity and collective perceptions of ontological (in)security, state foreign policy and ontological security-seeking, and international 'recognition games',⁵ arguing that the underlying impetus behind the changes in Russian identity and foreign policy is the need for ontological security.⁶ The latter requires both a coherent biographical narrative *and* an international recognition of the prevalent collective self-image.⁷ Recognition ensures that reflexively formed self-identity is aligned with how external others view the state and society in question. This alignment is essential to the collective sense of ontological security.⁸ Conversely, refusal to recognise a given state and society under their self-description will generate incongruence between reflexive and social aspects of collective identity threatening to undercut the collective sense of ontological security. In this situation, a state will face a serious foreign policy challenge of how to maintain, and achieve international recognition of, the prevalent collective self-image in order to mitigate the collective perceptions of ontological insecurity.⁹

The proposed theoretical framework helps us understand Russia's growing foreign policy assertiveness by bringing to the forefront the importance of Russia's great power self-description for the collec-

tive sense of ontological security and the effects of Western refusal to recognise this particular self-description on Russian identity and foreign policy.¹⁰ Admittedly, this is not the first suggestion to turn to ontological security in an attempt to add analytical cohesion to existing constructivist analyses of Russian foreign policy. For instance, Hansen (2016) has used the ontological security lens to argue that Russia's conflictual relations with the West have strengthened the collective sense of ontological security in Russia.¹¹ Unlike Hansen, who sees Russia's ontological security-seeking as a result of domestic preferences and political manipulation, this manuscript brings into picture the influence of external recognitive dynamics on the collective sense of ontological security. Attention to international recognition suggests that a link between increasingly aggressive foreign policy towards the West and a stronger sense of ontological security is not as straightforward as Hansen's analysis implies. On the contrary, this paper maintains that, short of Western recognition, Russian ruling elites and the majority of society will remain ontologically insecure.

In examining present-day Russia's ontological security-seeking and concomitant changes in self-identity and foreign policy, the paper situates these developments within the broader historical context.¹² History matters for a few reasons. First, it is through historical reflection that we become cognisant of the continuities and changes in Russian self-identity and foreign policy in the *longue durée*, thus properly appreciating that Russia's ontological security dilemma is not unique to the current historico-political context.¹³ Second, modern-day Russia's ontological security-seeking stands in close relationship with Russian history in that the politicised constructions of Russia's past powerfully shape its present-day self-image and are deeply imbricated with Russia's ontological security-seeking and foreign policy choices. Last but not least, a *longue durée* perspective allows us to identify some deeper features of continuity and persistence, i.e., fragmented collective identity, incoherent biographical narrative, a lingering sense of ontological insecurity and international dynamics of recognition, that create underlying conditions for changes in Russian foreign policy. As such, this perspective allows us to understand Russia's ontological security-seeking as a continuum and not as a series of discrete developments.

I observe that since the 18th century Russian identity has been continuously contested under antithetical Westernist, Slavophile and Eur-

asianist influences. Amidst these contestations, one trope in the Russian biographical narrative has remained unaltered, i.e., that of Russia's great power status. I argue that the great power self-description serves the collective ontological security needs as it provides continuity in Russian self-identity. This self-description is deeply sedimented and, while in theory it can be revised, such revision would come at a considerable ontological security cost to Russian society, not to mention the political cost to the elites undertaking such a task. Even in the 1990s and early 2000s, when Russia 'was a failing state by many classical indices of state capacity',¹⁴ Russia's ruling elites and the majority of Russian society insisted on Russia being recognised as a great power equal to the West, because this self-description fulfills the collective ontological security aspirations.

Nonetheless, throughout the 1990s and early 2000s Russia struggled to be recognised under the great power self-description. Against the backdrop of failing domestic socio-economic and political reforms,¹⁵ Western refusal to grant recognition, compounded by an incoherent biographical narrative, contributed to an increased sense of ontological insecurity, propelling securitisation of identity and a shift towards civilisational self-image. I argue that there is a connection between the widespread perception of ontological (in)security in Russia, an incoherent biographical narrative, the desire to be recognised as a moral and political equal of the West/US and the rise of civilisational identity and assertive foreign policy in Russia. The most recent collective identity makeover is inseparable from the collective need and the ruling elites' quest for ontological security, a pursuit that requires, alongside a coherent biographical narrative, Western recognition of Russia's great power status.

My argument proceeds in two parts. In the first part, I introduce the scholarship on ontological security and recognition demonstrating the relations between international recognition, the collective sense of ontological security and state foreign policy. In the second part, I trace the historic roots of Russia's ontological security predicament and examine the effects of Western refusal to recognise Russia's great power self-description on the collective sense of ontological security and foreign policy in the post-Soviet Russia.

Ontological security, recognition and the constitution of self-identity

Ontological security

The concept of ontological security, or security of identity, highlights the importance of a coherent sense of self in sustaining cognitive and emotional orientation in the world. Initially coined by psychiatrist R.D. Laing,¹⁶ the concept of ontological security was further developed by sociologist A. Giddens. Drawing on existential phenomenology and Wittgensteinian philosophy, Giddens premised ontological security on the idea that reflexive awareness characterises all human action 'bracketing out' existential questions about ourselves, others and the world in general.¹⁷ To be ontologically secure, individuals must possess the answers to existential questions about time, space, continuity and identity. In the absence of such answers, they become overwhelmed by the uncertainty of the modern world and succumb to deep existential anxieties. The pragmatic function of ontological security is, therefore, to make the world intelligible to the individuals, sustaining continuity of their identity. For Giddens, identity is inherently reflexive: it refers to '*the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography*'.¹⁸ That is, a relatively coherent sense of self-identity is anchored first and foremost in a continuous biographical narrative.

Giddens' conceptualisation centred on the *individual* aspirations for ontological security. IR scholars have demonstrated that the concept is also applicable to states because they, too, possess personhood and self-identity.¹⁹ No doubt, such personification of the state is problematic. However, as I have argued elsewhere, it is analytically justified to talk about *state* ontological security-seeking if we conceive of the state as a single *state-society complex* that serves as an essential ontological security referent for individuals and groups in society. This conceptualisation suggests that ontological security-seeking at the individual, societal and state levels is fundamentally intertwined.²⁰

Since its debut in IR, the ontological security scholarship has grown increasingly diverse. Two insights, in particular, are of importance here. First, many ontological security scholars underscore the importance of maintaining stability of identity, thus reducing ontological security-seeking to identity preservation.²¹ Accordingly, any changes in identity are seen as a source of ontological insecurity. This view essentialises identity and collapses ontological security into securitisation. The latter stabilises identity by highlighting fundamental enmity of

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others and rendering their very presence an existential threat to self. In practice, securitisation entails state efforts to impose a single 'true' biographical narrative, and self-identity based on such narrative, by whatever means necessary.

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An alternative understanding of ontological security - the one employed in this analysis - suggests that identities are never fixed but constantly evolving, shifting an emphasis from identity stability to reflexivity towards identity, i.e., ability to revise identity in the face of change without impairing a cohesive sense of identity.²² This understanding of ontological security calls for openness towards one's biographical narrative and perceptions of various others. In practical terms, it requires availability of discursive societal space, relatively free from state interference, where individuals and groups can deliberate on their collective self-image. This conceptualisation also suggests that ontological security is an ongoing process of seeking a coherent self-articulation in a changeable socio-historical environment.

Second, recent research on ontological security has underscored interconnections between reflexive and social dynamics in the constitution of self-identity. Accordingly, self-identity, albeit historically specific and subject to change, is continuously reproduced through the biographical narrative - a narrative open to societal contestations. However, state-society complexes are constructed not only through biographical narrative but also through social relations with external others. Therefore, an ontologically secure state-society complex is the one whose reflexively formed, historically specific self-conception is *recognised* at a particular historical juncture by significant others.

Recognition

Recognition is an inherently intersubjective phenomenon in the context of which the self reaffirms the claim to individuation.²³ It is 'an act of self-appropriation through social mediation'.²⁴ Since the desire to be recognised is one of the fundamental human aspirations, it is not surprising that the struggle for recognition can be found at the heart of many socio-political conflicts, from interpersonal to international. In Anglo-American academe there are two strands of recognition theory. A multiculturalist strand emphasises that a lack of recognition for minority groups not only forecloses group members' access to wealth and power but amounts to a form of symbolic violence that devaluates group traditions and identity.²⁵ A Marxist strand, rooted in the Critical

Theory tradition, points to the emancipatory potential of recognition as an underlying condition of individual agency and self-fulfillment.²⁶

Both currents are deeply indebted to G.W.H. Hegel's classic master-slave dialectic which foregrounds recognition as the means to social survival.²⁷ Indeed, Hegel's dialectic reveals that the struggle for social survival is fundamentally about 'who should [and does] have the right to impose what description on whom',²⁸ highlighting the interrelated issues of authority, agency and status in the struggle for recognition. The master and the slave seek recognition within historically specific context in which social inequality superimposes upon their ontological equality as persons. Effectively, Hegel's struggle for recognition is the struggle between unequals: both the master and the slave recognise not only each other's personhood but also their respective social positions within the status hierarchy that bestows dominant standing and agential capacity on the master. Crucially, social practices of recognition reaffirm not only one's self-identity but rather self-identity *in conjunction with* social status, authority and agency.

Both currents of recognition theory have influenced IR scholarship on the subject which argues that states, too, advance claims to recognition.²⁹ The process of international recognition takes place within highly stratified international environments in which formally equal sovereign states have a differential capacity to make effective claims in regard to their biographically narrated collective identities. The entwinement of collective identity with international recognition carries far-reaching implications for the collective sense of ontological security and state foreign policy. An act of international recognition ascribes positive value to collective identity that is being recognised, indicating respect for the state and society in question. In contrast, withholding recognition amounts to symbolic devaluation and stigma.³⁰ By determining the ambit of acceptable identity, international recognition produces exclusionary dynamics that sustain international status hierarchies. Invoking the Hegelian scenario, slaves are not admitted to, and have no relative standing within, the social circle of masters. They are 'seen', but only as a commodity, rather than as autonomous, conscious and purposeful agents. Withdrawal of recognition thus amounts to the denial of agency, authority, and social standing and is detrimental to the subject's sense of ontological security.

Even though Hegel emphasises the importance of reconciliation in the struggles for recognition, the master-slave dialectic leaves open

the possibility that these struggles will never reach a positive resolution, i.e., emancipation and solidarity. In today's highly complex globalised world, a suggestion that all claims for recognition can be satisfied seems implausible. When confronted with persistent refusal of international recognition, the state will be forced to choose between, or a combination of, the assenting foreign policy - i.e., abandoning biographically narrated self-identity in favour of externally imposed image, thus accepting the authority and agency of other states to determine its collective identity and international status - and dissenting foreign policy - i.e., pushing for the international recognition of its self-identity by increasingly aggressive means.

In the remainder of the paper I illustrate the converging dynamics of international recognition, ontological security-seeking and foreign policy by examining the case of Russia.

Russia's ontological security challenges through history: Fragmented Identity, incoherent biographical narrative and wanting Western recognition

History weighs heavily on modern-day Russia's ontological security predicament. As such, history provides helpful context and the primary reference point for examining present challenges to Russia's ontological security. Although often described in imperial terms, Russia has always been 'an elusive entity'³¹ fending off numerous physical threats and, equally important, wrestling with the formidable challenges of developing a coherent biographical narrative and getting its self-image recognised by the relevant other(s). These challenges have had profound implications for Russian self-identity, the collective sense of ontological security and foreign policy.

As discussed earlier, a sense of ontological security emerges as a result of a coherent biographical narrative and external recognition of the biographically narrated self-image by a significant external other. At present, the prevalent, Kremlin-endorsed biographical narrative is fraught with ambiguities.³² It begins with the medieval period of Kyivan Rus'.³³ This point of origin is problematic: as an unstable constellation of allying and competing princedoms located on the peripheries of three empires - Byzantium, Lithuania and the Golden Horde - Kyivan Rus' cannot be analytically captured by means of modern concepts, i.e., the state, nation or empire, which muddles Russia's historical lineage and clouds its point of origin. Moreover, Kyivan Rus' has tenuous con-

nections to contemporary Russia as Kyiv is now the capital of Ukraine. The biographical story continues with the Mongol-Tatar invasion after 1237. The invasion imposed the 'Yoke' on Rus', reducing it to the periphery of the *Pax Mongolica*. The Mongol empire maintained control over far-flung places and peoples by ruling through differentiation, i.e., co-opting local elites as the intermediaries of the Chigissids' dynasty and entering into different arrangements with various subjugated communities.³⁴ In the second half of the fifteenth century, following the collapse of the Mongol empire, the state of Muscovy emerged on the lands of North-East Rus'. As it grew in both strength and territory, Muscovy's rulers embraced the imperial form of governance founded on the idea of divinely ordained authority. Having conjoined the notions of the autocratic tsar, empire and Orthodoxy into a single system of 'responsive authoritarianism',³⁵ they replicated and expanded Mongol rule through differentiation. Subsequently, this model of differential rights, privileges and responsibilities seriously undermined the search for a unifying conception of Russia and Russianness.

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Historically, Russia's ever-expanding empire faced a unique blend of interrelated physical and ontological security challenges. On the one hand, an imperative to protect its territories and subjects from treacherous frontiers drove Russia's territorial expansion. Physical security was ensured by conquering dangerous borderlands and incorporating them into Russia's sovereign domain. On the other hand, Russia's sprawling landmass and kaleidoscopic diversity presented colossal problem for the emergence of a unifying identity. To develop a self-conception that would clarify how ethnic Russians and various colonised peoples fit into a single whole was not an easy task. This task became even more challenging as Russia transitioned to modernity that was marked, among other things, by the emergence of a Europe-centred international society and the rise of nationalism.

As a political entity that pre-existed European international society, the Russian empire had for centuries sustained a social universe in which it enjoyed the normative authority to set the standards by which the centrality of Russian self and inferiority of various others were established. As Russia accepted the values of modernity, it started to emulate them within the socially stratified international environment. Russia's desire to attain a 'rightful' place in modern European international society made European recognition essential to the collective sense of ontological security. At the same time, the desire to

belong to a family of 'civilised' European states 'necessitated giving up a self-affirming position of relative privilege and accepting a self-negating position of an outsider instead'.³⁶ In the process of catching up with modern European states, Russian ruling elites and society grew acutely aware of their inferior status and were forced to cope with the stigmatising label of relative backwardness, which some perceived as a defect to be overcome and others as an asset to be exploited.

Eighteenth century Petrine's Russia is symptomatic of a deeply fragmented character of Russian identity and concomitant ontological insecurity, fuelled by real or perceived inferiority vis-à-vis Europe. Under the rule of Peter the Great (1682-1725) a series of Westernising reforms were launched with the intent of erasing the common perception of Russia as an obscure and backward Orthodox tsardom. Westernising reforms included, among other things, the introduction of the European technological innovations, the imposition of beardlessness and a Western dress code, a new European-style capital in St. Petersburg as a 'window on the West', and the rebranding of the title of tsar into emperor. In order to set Russia apart from 'barbaric' states and to bolster its European credentials, Peter instructed one of his advisors, Peter Shafirov, to produce formal justification of Russia's martial conquests in expressly European terms of the just war theory.³⁷ This move openly conveyed Russia's recognition of Europe's normative authority and its willingness to comply with European norms in order to gain Europe's recognition.

Indeed, the Westernising impetus of Petrine reforms, which Catherine II brought to completion, went hand-in-hand with the aspiration to recast Russia as both civilised and European. Importantly, Peter's campaign encountered fierce backlash from different quarters of Russian society, including his son Aleksei, his grandson Peter II, traditionalists, Old Believers and schismatics. Peter's opponents underscored fundamental differences between Russia and the West, stressing Russia's historic role as the centre of its own civilisation based on Orthodox spirituality, moral superiority and unique culture. This early opposition to the imitation of the West culminated in the emergence of the Slavophile and Eurasianist movements in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, respectively, when the Westernising drive accentuated the full magnitude of the collective sense of inferiority and ontological insecurity in Russia. Slavophiles and Eurasianists attempted to invert the Russian-Western relationship by presenting

Russia as superior to the 'decaying' West and by promoting assertive foreign policy towards the West. Considering the intensity of the intra-Russian rift on the issues of identity and relations with the West, one could argue that 'two rival nations were forming',³⁸ i.e., of the Westernised nobility and of the anti-Western traditionalists.

Russia's search for a cohesive identity became further complicated with the rise of nationalism in the late eighteenth century when the Russian nation and empire were forced to co-exist 'like oil and water: they appeared to blend together in a common emulsion but in fact kept their own identity and over time slipped apart'.³⁹ While Russia's monarchs began to invoke territoriality as the basis of common identity, they continued to categorise Russian subjects by religion, ethnicity and culture, sharpening distinctions between the colonising Russian core and the colonised peripheries. Such contradictory impulses of unifying and differentiating peoples and cultures sustained the deeply fragmented character of the Russian biographical narrative and self-identity.

Equally important, the rise of Russian nationalism meant that the Russian nation had to form itself in opposition to the European states which had advanced to modern nationhood earlier. In Russia's biographical narrative, Europe⁴⁰ thus emerged as a critical external referent that deeply influenced Russian self-conceptions and foreign policies. As Greenfeld put it, Europe became 'an integral indelible part of the Russian *national* consciousness. There simply would be no sense of being a nation if the West did not exist.'⁴¹

Petrine reforms and internal identity contestations point to a degree of reflexivity towards identity in Russian society, as well as the willingness to revise collective self-image and adapt to a changing international environment - all indicators of ontological security. However, a failure of the above reforms and contestations to produce a unifying identity, or to gain a 'rightful' place in Europe through international recognition, speak to the contrary. Russia's transition to modernity produced a deep, debilitating sense of ontological insecurity.⁴²

Since the 18th century, while disagreements on the issues of identity and belonging persisted, the only consistent trope in the Russian biographical narrative, a trope widely shared in Russian society, was the idea that Russia was "'naturally" destined' to be a great power.⁴³ Henceforth, the great power self-description became a constant trope in Russia's biographical narrative, regularly activated, especially in times of

crises, by the ruling elites for political purposes to justify foreign policy choices and sustain continuity of self-identity.

Crucially, Russia's self-identification against Europe - after 1945, the US/West - generated intense desire to be recognised not as any great power but as a distinctly European/Western one. This desire, however, fell on deaf ears with the West, feeding Russia's continuous 'obsession with status'.⁴⁴ Western refusal to recognise Russia under its great power self-description generated strong resentment⁴⁵ towards the West - an indication of the lingering sense of ontological insecurity. Resentment denotes a psychological state deriving from 'suppressed feelings of envy and hatred' towards an allegedly superior object of imitation.⁴⁶ Sustained by Western refusal to recognise Russia as a full-fledged Western great power, resentment toward the West became one of the key factors in the development of modern Russian identity. It fomented ongoing comparisons and contradictory self-appraisals vis-à-vis the West, deepening existential anxiety and an ambiguous sense of belonging.

Examples of resentment abound in Russian literature. In 1863, F. Dostoyevsky wrote: 'How is it that we have not been regenerated once and for all into Europeans? ...I think all will agree... that we have not grown up enough for regeneration..., and I cannot understand this fact'.⁴⁷ A baffling question of belonging was also central to Chaadaev's *Philosophical Letters* when he wrote: '[W]e have never advanced along with other people; we are not related to any of the great human families; we belong neither to the West nor to the East; and we possess the traditions of neither. ... [A] brutal barbarism, then crude superstition, after that fierce degrading foreign domination by strangers whose spirit was later inherited by the nation - that is the sad history of our youth'.⁴⁸ Chaadaev's anxiety about Russia's identity and belonging was corroborated by the German scholars, employed by the newly founded Russian Academy of Sciences and Moscow University to 'discover' Russia's history and identity. They found out that

The Russian land had not been "Russian" for very long; the Russian state and the Russian name had come from Sweden; the Russian apostle Andrew had never been to Russia; and the Russian language had been - quite recently - brought in by tribes chased out of the Danube.⁴⁹

Importantly, modern Russian perceptions about Russia's relations with Europe reveal a strong tendency towards the securitisation of identity. One of the prominent tropes in late-18th early-19th century Russia's thinking about its place in the world was a moralistic conservative notion about the existence of Anti-Russian international conspiracy 'by Western governments, Western radicals, Protestants, Jesuits, Jews, and Freemasons, among others'.⁵⁰ Rooted in the perception of Moscow as 'the beleaguered Third Rome', this notion of an anti-Russian plot emphasised inherent European enmity towards Russia. It resurfaced in the late 18th century when Russia embarked on aggressive expansion, i.e., the so-called Greek Project to revive the Byzantine Empire that would serve as Russia's ally. This trope accentuated the perceptions that European states were trying to stymie Russia's destiny to be a great power. The French revolution further reinforced the belief that foreign enemies, together with subversive groups in Russian society, presented an existential threat to Russia. As Martin observed, 'in various guises, such conspiracy theories continued to flourish throughout the tsarist and Soviet periods of Russian history and remain widespread even now.'⁵¹

Indeed, even the revolution of 1917, which promised radical transformation of Russia's identity and equal status with the West, failed to generate a coherent sense of identity and ontological security. Internally, the USSR remained ontologically insecure as imperial and national foci of identification competed with one another. Soviet authorities sought to forge a sense of unity by emphasising single territoriality. However, pan-national Soviet identity remained inherently Russo-centric. Russia's privileged status within the USSR prompted opposition from various ethno-national groups, sustaining Moscow's anxiety about various internal enemies, especially in the borderlands.

Externally, the USSR did not break free from the normative constraints of the international status hierarchy.⁵² The West treated the Soviet Union as a backward 'outcast'.⁵³ While in the early years the Soviet Union pursued aggressive competition in ideological, political and military-political spheres, it failed to gain Western recognition of its self-image as a socially advanced great power.⁵⁴ In the aftermath of WWII, the West reluctantly recognised the USSR as a great power in view of the Soviet contribution to the victory in war. However, instead of harnessing Western recognition to strengthen the collective sense

of ontological security, the USSR remained ‘an insecure superpower wanna-be.’⁵⁵ A persistent sense of ontological insecurity manifested itself in deep Soviet hostility toward, and fixation with racing, the US not only in military, ideological and economic realms, but also in the areas of sports, science and culture.

By the late 1980s, Gorbachev’s *Perestroika* revealed the depth of the ontological insecurity in Soviet society. Critical reassessment of the ‘glorious’ Soviet past gave rise to neo-Westernism. The prospects of becoming ‘like the West’ enjoyed widespread popular support, especially among well-educated urbanites, intellectuals and pro-capitalist elites. In their effort to rescue the collapsing Soviet economy and engender a more democratic socialist identity, Soviet authorities once again openly acknowledged that Russia was part of the West. As Gorbachev put it in 1988: ‘Russia’s trade, cultural and political links with other European nations and states have deep roots in history. We are Europeans.’⁵⁶ Late Soviet Westernism was not uncontested as various segments of Russian society and political establishment emphasised a unique Russian identity and historic destiny. Neo-Slavophiles and neo-Eurasianists included ‘imperial nationalists’ who idealised pre-revolutionary Russia, as well as ‘national communists’ who were unshaken in their belief that Soviet Russia was a great empire. Thus, the antagonism between Westernism and Slavophilism/Eurasianism reemerged in the late Soviet period shaping political and popular debates about Russian identity.

This overview demonstrates that throughout history a failure to produce a coherent biographical narrative, compounded by lack of Western recognition of Russia’s great power self-image, generated and sustained a widespread sense of ontological insecurity in Russian society influencing state foreign policy choices. Faced with persistent refusal of Western recognition, Russian society oscillated between pro-Western and civilisational identities that called for radically different foreign policies. The former prompted Russia to imitate advanced Western states encouraging cooperation with the West and seeking recognition of Russia as the European great power. The latter set Russia against the West lending support to assertive foreign policy as a means of demonstrating Russia’s superiority.

Russia's quest for ontological security and recognition in the Post-Soviet period

The breakdown of the Soviet Union brought the issue of Russian identity to the forefront, while an 'ontologically insecure relationship with the West'⁵⁷ persisted as one of the key factors in forging it. Amidst collapsed institutional structure, disintegrating societal fabric and general domestic uncertainty, Russia's complex demographic composition and contradictory attitudes towards its communist past significantly complicated the search for a coherent self-image.

In the early 1990s several contending biographical narratives promoted different visions of self-identity suggesting different foreign policy choices.⁵⁸ Importantly, all narratives shared one particular point of consensus, i.e., a belief that Russia is a great power. Yeltsin's government promoted a Westernist self-image arguing that Russia's "genuine" Western identity⁵⁹ was hijacked by the Bolsheviks but the Soviet collapse provided the opportunity to recover it. Yet many post-Soviet Westernisers shared the anxious forebodings of their 19th century counterparts and saw 'the Russian people's own lack of "European democratic consciousness" as perhaps the main problem.'⁶⁰ In 1991 A. Novikov asked: 'If liberal consciousness was not able to take hold during the nineteenth century, how should it be able to do so today?'⁶¹ Given irresolvable contestations of Russia's self-identity, journalist A. Kazintsev wrote: 'We have lost our identity: "The Russians" - this word has become an empty sound without any meaning.'⁶²

Russia's liberal Westernisers in the executive branch recognised Western normative authority and expected unconditional Western acceptance of Russia as a great power. Their ambition was to secure Russia's position in the West in 'the front-rank status of such countries as France, Germany, and the United States.'⁶³ Bound by the great power self-image, Russian elites desired 'proper' recognition that would re-affirm Russia's status and strengthen the collective sense of ontological security. In practice, however, expectations of Western recognition and partnership rhetoric rarely matched the reality of Western-Russian relations. In the eyes of the West 'Russia was not to be integrated into the core West, but managed by it: no NATO but the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC); no Marshall Plan, but International Monetary Fund (IMF) trenches...'⁶⁴ Western refusal to recognise Russia's great power self-image reached to the very core of the collective sense of ontological security: it threatened to create a damaging dis-

sonance between self-described and social aspects of Russian identity threatening to make Russia unrecognisable to itself.

By the end of 1992 the Westernising drive lost much of its appeal, not least because Western reluctance to recognise Russia as an equal partner significantly undermined the Westernist self-image inadvertently strengthening anti-Western voices in the discussions of Russian self-identity and foreign policy. Nationalist and communist elites recast the Western push for reforms as American attempts to lay claims to Russian identity decrying Russia's loss of agential autonomy in determining its self-conception and foreign policy.⁶⁵ They promoted an alternative vision of Russia that promised to set Russia free from the Western-centred global status hierarchy. Journalist S. Morozov captured these sentiments when he wrote: 'we can become European. But then Russia will lose its place as the first member of Russian civilization and will become the last member of Western civilization'.⁶⁶ Foreign policy pundit E. Pozdniakov agreed: 'Russia cannot return to Europe because it never belonged to it. Russia cannot join it because it is part of another type of civilization, another cultural and religious type'.⁶⁷

In response, the President Boris Yeltsin declared that Russian-Western relations had to be balanced while Foreign Minister Kozyrev voiced his disappointment with the Western lack of recognition: 'the "game of demoting" the status of a power that is historically doomed to be a great power is not only unrealistic but dangerous, since it fuels aggressive nationalism'.⁶⁸ By the mid-1990s the government-led biographical narrative shifted towards communist, Slavophile and Eurasianist self-images recasting Russia as a bridge between Europe and Asia, whose identity and values were distinct from, and superior to, those of the West. With this change in self-description the emphasis of Russia's foreign policy shifted from full-scale to limited cooperation and open competition with the US/West.⁶⁹ Increased cooperation with China and India signaled Russia's determination to achieve Western recognition of its great power status by containing American unilateralism and promoting great power balancing in what Russia saw as multipolar world order.

Foreign Minister Primakov, who replaced Kozyrev in 1995, saw Russia as a great Eurasian power and the former USSR, or Near Abroad, as Russia's special sphere of interests. In his own words, 'Russia has been and remains a great power, and its policy toward the outside

world should correspond to that status'.⁷⁰ This view reflected popular sentiments in Russian society and was shared by various elites across the political spectrum. Importantly, despite the revised biographical narrative and modified foreign policy, the US/West remained a key external referent for Russia's self-identity. While condemning Western unilateralism and establishing a strategic partnership with China, the ruling elites 'doggedly pursu[ed] ... Russia's "special relationship" with NATO and equal status in other Western institutions'.⁷¹

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Far from producing a unifying effect and stronger sense of ontological security in Russian society, the ambiguity of the centrist self-image generated major alienations, i.e., Westernists felt excluded from the Kremlin-endorsed self-identity, as did Eurasianists and communists. An identity crisis was visible in the search for a 'national idea' initiated by Yeltsin after his reelection in 1996. The centrist vision of identity, as Tsygankov put it, 'provided the space necessary for reformulating Russia's national identity and moving beyond the post-Soviet identity crisis. Yet that space was yet to be filled with some creatively defined national idea...'.⁷² At the same time, Primakov's foreign policy through great power balancing has had a limited effect on achieving Western recognition. Competition with the US 'only accentuat[ed] Moscow's inferiority to Washington' while cooperation with non-Western rising powers 'merely registered Russia's ... low standing' in the post-Cold war world order.⁷³

With Putin's rise to power, contradictions concerning Russian identity persisted. In the millennium article, Putin offered his view playing to both Westernist and nationalist self-conceptions: 'Soviet power did not let the country develop a flourishing society which could be developing dynamically, with free people. ...[T]he ideological approach to the economy made our country increasingly lag behind the developed states., which took us away from the main track of civilization. ...The mechanical copying of the experiences of other states will not bring progress. Every country, Russia included, has a duty to search for its own path of renewal'.⁷⁴ Strikingly, Putin acknowledged Russia's profound ontological security crisis when he juxtaposed Soviet Russia as the Other of the post-Soviet Russia, speaking 'about the state he rules as having a *discontinuous* history' and, effectively, denying Russian Self 'some degree of permanence in time and space'.⁷⁵

By 2005, Putin corrected his earlier view emphasising Russia's ongoing existence though history as a great European power:

Above all else Russia was, and of course is and will be, a major European power... For three centuries now, we - together with the other European nations - have passed hand in hand through reforms ...⁷⁶

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In matters of foreign policy, Russia continued with great power balancing engaging in a strategic partnership with the US in the global war on terror. However, as the West continued to withhold its recognition of Russia's great power self-image, Russian self-description shifted explicitly towards an anti-Western, nationalist biographical narrative.

The Russian nationalist biographical narrative is based on an anti-theoretical commitment to Orthodox Christianity and conservative values, on the one hand, and glorification of the Soviet greatness, on the other. Imperial imagery, Russian exceptionalism, the loss of superpower status after the Soviet collapse, the vilification of the godless and morally degenerate West, and securitisation of Russian spiritual-moral values emerged as the central tropes of the neo-conservative narrative that shaped Russian civilisational identity.⁷⁷ It frames the West as an existential threat to Russia, while painting the latter as the bulwark of conservatism whose historical mission is to promote paternalist authoritarianism. This biographical narrative also provides justification for aggressive foreign policies geared towards recovering Russia's great power status.⁷⁸

Drawing on a mix of political conservatism and historical revisionism, Putin and his elites institutionalised control over Russian identity, suppressing any alternative biographical narratives by means of intensifying state repressions. With the help of state-controlled media, subservient intellectuals and neo-conservative ideologues, state-sponsored identity politics produced a grand narrative that established a deceptively straightforward lineage between the 'Holy Rus' and 'Grand Russia',⁷⁹ legitimising Russia's claims to the territories and peoples in Russia's Near Abroad. The revised collective identity justifies the attempts to reconfigure the existing world order in a way that would enable Russia to act as 'the ordering power with "privileged interests"'.⁸⁰ Accordingly, the former Soviet republics represent the battleground where Russia has 'to fight for its great power status to be recognized against a large coalition of enemies'.⁸¹ Thus, a revised biographical narrative translates into increasing adherence to conflictual foreign policy.⁸²

Russia's determination to assert its great powerness was on full display in 2008 and 2014 when in response to Western recognition of Kosovo and promises of NATO membership to Georgia and Ukraine, Russia went to war with the former, annexed Crimea from the latter and engaged in the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine. In particular, the annexation of Crimea was received in Russian society as the symbol of 'Russian reawakening' and 'revival'.⁸³ Putin justified this aggressive foreign policy move with references to the 'Russian World' - a concept he first mentioned in 2007 that denotes '*the living space for the many millions of people in the Russian-speaking world, a community that goes far beyond Russia itself*'.⁸⁴ The Russian World emphasises the importance of preserving Russian identity, based on spiritual and historical values, defending Russian interests, especially against the West, and asserting Russia's great power. In the wake of the annexation, V. Solovyov, a popular Russian TV personality with close links to the Kremlin, declared: 'What happened today is that Russia did not hesitate to declare openly: We will never be... a small European country, we will not choose the path that you are trying to impose on us. We are the great Russia! And Russia can either be great or not exist at all'.⁸⁵

For the West, Russia's actions ensued the biggest crisis in relations with Russia since the end of the Cold war prompting the West to impose a series of sanctions against Russia. Not only did Russia's defiance remain unabated in the face of Western sanctions but it rose to new heights. Russia's interference in the 2016 US presidential elections, malicious cyberattacks worldwide and ongoing support for the Assad regime in Syria highlighted the escalating conflictual competition between Russia and the West. This competition signals Russia's refusal to accept status differentials determined by the West and conveys Russia's determination to bolster the collective sense of ontological security by defending Russia's self-image as a great power and by pushing for its recognition by means of aggressive foreign policy.

Conclusion

This paper underscored the importance of converging dynamics between Russia's ontological security-seeking, incoherent biographical narrative and desire for international recognition in explaining changes in collective identity and state foreign policy. I argued that ontological security requires synergy between the biographically narrated self-image and social recognition. Dissonance between reflexive and

social/recognitive aspects of identity is detrimental to a collective sense of ontological security. When confronted with the refusal of recognition, the state will either revise its self-image or assert it by means of aggressive foreign policy.

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The analytical framework based on ontological security and international recognitive dynamics sheds light on the changes in Russian identity and foreign policy. Richard Sakwa once observed that 'much of the post-Cold War malaise is derived from ... Russia's civilizational self-identification as a great power...'⁸⁶ Russia's claim to parity with the West is no longer implicit. It is driven by its quest for ontological security, a quest in which Russian identity became a key stake in the struggle not only for the desired rank within the international status hierarchy, but, ultimately, for a collective sense of ontological security.

Will the revised identity and foreign policy strategy allow Russia to successfully overcome the Western recognition impasse and strengthen the collective sense of ontological security? On the one hand, antagonistic relations with the West may themselves become a source of a deeper sense of ontological security, making Russia more and more attached to conflict, in which case Western recognition may turn out counter-productive to Russia's sense of ontological security.⁸⁷ On the other hand, civilisational identity and aggressive foreign policy may be a poor strategy for Russia. Contrary to repeated claims to moral superiority over the West and a highly advertised 'turn to the East', Russia has not completely rejected Western normative authority. The East, as Curanović observed, is 'mostly a function of the interaction between Russia and the West.'⁸⁸

Russia finds itself in a paradoxical situation where it asserts its civilisational self-image and openly contests Western recognitive authority while continuing to seek Western recognition. Russia is torn between what Ringmar called a 'self-conscious outsider', who tries to construct an alternative status hierarchy to fulfill its status ambitions and to meet its ontological security needs, and a 'social upstart', who selectively upholds existing liberal international norms in its desire to achieve Western recognition.⁸⁹ As long as Russia continues to pursue the strategy of conflictual competition, it is highly unlikely that the West will recognise Russia under its current self-description. Short of Western recognition, collective perceptions of ontological insecurity will persist.



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Endnotes

- 1 For overview, see Elias Götz, "Putin, The State, and War: The Causes of Russia's Near Abroad Assertion Revisited." *International Studies Review* 19 (2017): 228-53.
- 2 See Anne Clunan, "Historical Aspirations and the Domestic Politics of Russia's Pursuit of International Status." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47 (2014): 281-90; Ayse Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Andrei Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, 4th ed. (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016); Iver Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2017).
- 3 Payne, 2001: 38 quoted in Götz, 2017: 238.
- 4 Maria Mälksoo, "The Transitional Justice and Foreign Policy Nexus: The Inefficient Causation of State Ontological Security-Seeking." *International Studies Review* (2018): 1-25 at 5 <https://doi-org.uwinnipeg.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/isr/viy006>
- 5 Erik Ringmar, "The *Recognition Game*: Soviet Russia Against the West," *Cooperation and Conflict* 37, no. 2 (2002): 115-36.
- 6 Although the questions of 'Whose ontological security needs matter in IR?' and 'What is Russia?' are beyond the scope of this manuscript, I would like to note that my take on these issues builds on Rumelili's (2015: 57) insight that '[c]ertainty and stability of identity remain a concern of states as well as of societies and individuals...'. See Bahar Rumelili (2015) "Identity and Desecuritization: The Pitfalls of Conflating Ontological and Physical Security." *Journal of International Relations and Development* 18: 52-74. Elsewhere I have argued that the ontological security-seeking at the individual, societal and state levels are deeply interconnected in IR and that a historical sociological perspective on the state, which views the state in social relational terms and transcends internal-external dichotomy, allows us to avoid both problematic personification of the state and a reduction of the state to the ruling elites. See xxx (2020), *Journal of International Relations and Development*. This means that even though I employ references such as 'the state' and 'Russia' in this paper, their use does not imply analytical state-centrism which treats the state as a unified black box.
- 7 Biographical narrative is self-referential in that it is a story one tells about oneself. Recognition points to the systemic dimension and the importance of external others in the process of identity development. Together, biographical narrative and recognition indicate that both internal and external dynamics are important for achieving a strong sense of ontological security.
- 8 Heterogeneity of modern societies suggests that external recognition of collective self-image will not strengthen a sense of ontological security for *everybody* in society. In fact, individuals and groups alienated from

the prevalent collective self-conception might feel more ontologically insecure once external recognition is granted. Still, recognition of *prevalent* collective self-identity does function as a source of ontological security for the majority of individuals and groups in society who share this particular self-image.

- CEJISS 9 It needs to be noted that a strong sense of ontological security shapes the
2/2021 perceptions of others as non-threatening. Conversely a growing sense of
ontological insecurity adversely affects the degree of trust towards, and the
perception of, others as threatening (see Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and
Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford
University Press, 1991)). After 2010, collective attitudes in Russian society
have demonstrated a growing perception of the US, the EU, Ukraine and
Georgia as threatening external others, indicating an increasing ontological
insecurity (See Tanya Narozhna (2020) "State-Society Complexes in
Ontological Security-Seeking in IR." *Journal of International Relations and
Development* 23: 559-83; Flemming Splitsboel Hansen, "Russia's Relations
with the West: Ontological Security through Conflict." *Contemporary
Politics* 22(2016): 359-75.
- 10 Other cases can illustrate the empirical validity of the proposed theoretical
framework. For instance, Turkey and Serbia have faced Western
misrecognition, Japan has been misrecognised by China, etc. The case
of Russia warrants closer investigation for a number of reasons. First,
the Soviet collapse exacerbated Russia's ontological insecurity making
Russia an exemplary case of state ontological security-seeking. Second,
ignoring Russia's ontological security may come at a cost of misjudging the
catalysts behind Russia's foreign policy choices. Third, intense academic
and policy debates highlight the importance of understanding more fully
Russia's ontological security predicament and status aspirations so as to
develop proper Western policies towards Russia.
- 11 See Hansen 2016.
- 12 The paper utilises interpretive case research methodology as it is well suited
for contextual examination that seeks to shed light on the underlying, or
'hidden' conditions and factors that influence changes in Russian foreign
policy. This methodology also allows us to draw nuanced, contextualised
inferences about Russia's ontological security-seeking.
- 13 The concept of the *longue durée*, most often associated with Fernand
Braudel, suggests that we should be cognisant of the multiple scales of
time in our analysis of social realities. See Fernand Braudel, *On History*,
translated by Sarah Matthews (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).
- 14 Allen Lynch, "The Influence of Regime Type on Russian Foreign Policy
Toward 'the West', 1992-2015," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 49,
no.1 (2016): 101-11 at 106.
- 15 The role of domestic factors in shaping Russian foreign policy has been
extensively examined elsewhere. Grounded in diversionary war and
regime security theories, these explanations attribute the recent shift
in Russia's foreign policy to the stalled socio-economic and democratic
reforms. They underscore the need to prop up Putin's increasingly corrupt
authoritarian regime by diverting public attention from domestic political
failures to external crises, such as the Color Revolutions in Russia's Near
Abroad (see Lilia Shevtsova, "The Kremlin is Winning." 2015. Accessed
April 20, 2018. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-kremlin-is->

- winning/; Thomas Ambrosio, *Authoritarian Backlash: Russian Resistance to Democratization in the Former Soviet Union* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009).
- 16 Ronald Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960).
 - 17 Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 37.
 - 18 *Ibid.*, 53 (emphasis in the original).
 - 19 See Zarakol, *After Defeat*; Jennifer Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma," *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (2006): 341-70.
 - 20 Tanya Narozhna, "State-Society Complexes in Ontological Security-Seeking in IR", *Journal of International Relations and Development* 23 (2020): 559-83 (the article appeared online first in 2018 but since then has been published in vol 23 in 2020).
 - 21 See Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics"; Brent Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self-Identity and the IR State* (New York: Routledge, 2008).
 - 22 Tanya Narozhna, "State-Society Complexes in Ontological Security-Seeking in IR", *Journal of International Relations and Development* 23 (2020): 559-83 (the article appeared online first in 2018 but since then has been published in vol 23 in 2020); Chris Browning and Pertti Joenniemi, "Ontological Security, Self-Articulation and the Securitization of Identity," *Cooperation and Conflict* 52, no.1 (2017): 31-47.
 - 23 Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), 69.
 - 24 Victoria Fareld, "The re- in Recognition: Hegelian Returns," *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory* 13 no.1 (2012): 125-138 at 125.
 - 25 See Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition" In *Multiculturalism*, edited by A. Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25-74.
 - 26 See Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*.
 - 27 G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).
 - 28 Ringmar, "The Recognition Game," 120.
 - 29 See Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Thomas Lindemann and Erik Ringmar, eds., *The International Struggle for Recognition*, (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012).
 - 30 See Thomas Lindemann, "Interest, Passion, (Non)recognition, and Wars: A Conceptual Essay," *Global Discourse* 4, no.4 (2014): 483-96; Zarakol, *After Defeat*.
 - 31 Valerie Kivelson and R.G. Suny, *Russia's Empires* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 2.
 - 32 Since Russia's current biographical narrative received significant attention in the literature, in this discussion I draw on the secondary sources to highlight the challenges of articulating and sustaining a coherent biographical narrative and a clear sense of identity, on the one hand, and attain external recognition of its self-image, on the other. On Russia's biographical narrative see Marielle Wijermars, *Memory Politics in Contemporary Russia: Television, Cinema and the State* (London: Routledge, 2019); Kathleen Smith, *Mythmaking in the New Russia: Politics and Memory during the Yeltsin Era* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2002); Thomas Sherlock, *Historical Narratives in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia*

- (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Iver Newmann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe: A Study in Identity and International Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017).
- 33 The historical timeframe in this analysis follows Russia's prevalent biographical narrative which insists on Russia's origin in the Kyivan Rus'.
- 34 Donald Ostrowski, *Muscovy and the Mongols: Cross-Cultural Influences on the Steppe Frontier, 1304-1589* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
- 35 Kivelson and R.G. Suny, *Russia's Empires*, 8.
- 36 Zarakol, *After Defeat*, 10.
- 37 Kivelson and R.G. Suny, *Russia's Empires*, 94.
- 38 Roman Szporluk, "Nationalism After Communism: Reflections on Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Poland," *Nations and Nationalism* 4, no. 3 (1998): 301-20 at 306.
- 39 Kivelson and R.G. Suny, *Russia's Empires*, 116.
- 40 This is not to suggest that modern Europe had a single stable identity. As European states evolved from monarchist into liberal democratic polities, Europe was torn between progressive and conservative camps. Russia's self-identification against Europe often required a choice between 'old' and 'new' Europe.
- 41 Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism. Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 254.
- 42 Zarakol, *After Defeat*, 30.
- 43 Olga Malinova, "Obsession with Status and Ressentiment: Historical Backgrounds of the Russian Discursive Identity Construction," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47, no. 3-4 (2014): 291-303.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Greenfeld, *Nationalism*; Malinova, "Obsession with Status and Ressentiment."
- 46 Malinova, 292.
- 47 Quoted in Zarakol, *After Defeat*, iiiv.
- 48 Quoted in Yuri Glazov, "Chaadaev and Russia's Destiny," *Studies in Soviet Thought* 32, no.4 (1986): 281-301 at 284-5.
- 49 Yuri Slezkine, "Naturalists Versus Nations: Eighteenth Century Russian Scholars Confront Ethnic Diversity." In *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700-1917*, edited by Brower, D., and E. Lazzerini (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997), 48.
- 50 Alexander Martin, "The Invention of "Russianness" in the Late 18th-Early 19th Century" *Ab Imperio* 3 (2003): 119-34 at 132.
- 51 Ibid., 133.
- 52 Zarakol, *After Defeat*, 213.
- 53 Ringmar, "Recognition Game," 123.
- 54 Ibid.; Malinova "Obsession with Status and Ressentiment".
- 55 Ringmar, "Recognition Game," 128.
- 56 Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe*, 143.
- 57 Zarakol, *After Defeat*, 30.
- 58 See Vera Tolz "Forging the Nation: National Identity and Nation Building in Post-Communist Russia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 50, no.6 (1998): 993-1022.
- 59 Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 61.
- 60 Shevtsova quoted in Neumann *Russia and the Idea of Europe*, 147, emphasis in the original.

- 61 Quoted in Neumann, 148.
- 62 Quoted in Tolz "Forging the Nation," 966.
- 63 Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 62.
- 64 Dmitri Trenin, "Russia's Spheres of Interest, not Influence." *The Washington Quarterly* 32, no.4 (2009): 3-22 at 8.
- 65 Clunan, "Historical Aspirations," 283.
- 66 Quoted in Tolz, "Forging the Nation," 998.
- 67 Quoted in Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe*, 154.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 159.
- 69 Deborah Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, "Russia Says No: Power, Status and Emotions in Foreign Policy," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47 (2014): 269-79; Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*.
- 70 Quoted in Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 97.
- 71 Clunan, "Historical Aspirations," 286.
- 72 Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy*, 170.
- 73 Larson and Shevchenko, "Russia Says No," 273.
- 74 Quoted in Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe*, 172.
- 75 *Ibid.*, emphasis added.
- 76 Quoted in Neumann, *Russia and the Idea of Europe*, 172-3.
- 77 Jardar Østbo "Securitizing 'Spiritual-Moral Values' in Russia," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 33, no. 3 (2017): 200-16.
- 78 Miguel Vázquez-Liñán, "Historical Memory and Political Propaganda in the Russian Federation." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 50, no. 2 (2017): 77-86.
- 79 Natalia Naydenova "Holy Rus: (Re)construction of Russia's Civilizational Identity," *Slavonica* 21, no.1-2 (2017): 37-48.
- 80 Quoted in Richard Sakwa "Russia's Identity: Between the 'Domestic' and the 'International.'" *Europe-Asia Studies* 63, no. 6 (2011): 957-75 at 957.
- 81 Marlene Laruelle, "The Three Colors of Novorossiia, or the Russian Nationalist Mythmaking of the Ukrainian Crisis." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32, no. 1 (2016): 55-74 at 55.
- 82 Admittedly, the 'reset' policy of the Obama administration temporarily improved Russian-US relations but was ultimately unsuccessful in assuaging Russia's status anxiety and bolstering its sense of ontological security.
- 83 Yuri Teper, "Official Russian Identity Discourse in Light of the Annexation of Crimea: National or Imperial?" *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32, no.4 (2016): 378-96 at 388.
- 84 Russkiy Mir Foundation at <https://ruskiymir.ru/en/fund>
- 85 Quoted in Teper "Official Russian Identity Discourse", 389.
- 86 Sakwa "Russia's Identity," 957.
- 87 Hansen 2016.
- 88 Alicja Curanović "Why Don't Russians Fear the Chinese? The Chinese Factor in the Self-identification Process of Russia" *Nationalities Papers* 40, no. 2 (2012): 221-39 at 221.
- 89 Ringmar "The Recognition Game".

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MARSDEN, Lee. *Religion and International Security*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019. ISBN 978-1-509-53431-9.

Religion and International Security

Reviewed by Abhishek Choudhary

The discipline of International Relations (IR) has undergone a major renewal in recent decades. The ambit of security has expanded to include non-traditional threats. Scholars have sought to deepen and widen the concept by including newer arenas and actors that remain beyond the domain of mainstream IR. The move towards the sub-systemic level of explanation, however, does not penetrate deep enough to provide deeper ontological engagement. The idea of security, specifically, remains preoccupied with traditional conceptualisations that undermine the furtherance of such conceptualisations that challenge the immutability of states. In this regard, the book under review provides a deeper engagement with the concept of emancipation. The central – and novel – claim of the book is that religion carries emancipatory potential.

Tracing the deliberate marginalisation of religion in IR, the book begins by assessing the tendency of mainstream theoretical traditions towards secularisation. It provides an overview of Habermas's post-secular discourse and assesses other theoretical traditions that seek to include, albeit peripherally, religion in their approach. The next two chapters engage with the link between religion and conflict - a point that would interest even mainstream scholars. These chapters pro-

vide a lot of detail on variations within and among religions and serve as an excellent primer. The inter- and intra-faith conflicts are examined in short, yet adequately, to provide a foreground for assessment. The debates around jihad and just war are also addressed, debunking mainstream constructions. The fourth chapter addresses the issue of peace-making and the potential role of religion in it. It examines sacred texts of different faiths along with the use of such texts by practitioners and activists. The problem, however, begins when the state begins to choose sides and declare one religion as good while the other as bad.

The fifth chapter engages with faith-based diplomacy and the use of military chaplains that the US has adopted to fulfil political goals by co-opting religion. Faith-based humanitarian assistance has also gained prominence owing to its efficacy. A problem, as with the case of peace-making, arises when assistance is provided on a partisan basis and certain communities are excluded from the benefits. The sixth chapter addresses the issue of religious persecution and advocates for enhancing human security. It lists the declarations on religion and human security and then provides a brief overview of countries that have high levels of social hostility and where specific minority communities are harassed routinely.

The concluding chapter reiterates the social construction that 'makes' a particular religion violent or non-violent, emancipatory or otherwise. The book points out the fluidity in the meaning of religion, that is dependent on time, space and context. Though there are some basic tenets of every religion, no religion can be attributed with fixed features. The bidirectional impact of politics on religion is what makes it an interesting variable to address issues pertaining to international security. The role of religion in legitimising political authority and the role of politics in preferring one religion over others is an obvious reality that can hardly be ignored. This point is brought out when the issues of diplomacy, humanitarianism and conflict are addressed.

The author points out the need to move beyond the secular paradigm and that there is no need to have a separate international relation of religion. While the point carries merit, it would typically go beyond the presumptions of mainstream IR theories that are based on parsimony. By including a new variable, howsoever relevant, the claimed explanatory potential of mainstream IR would be lost. The book provides hope through an appeal to replace norms of intolerance

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and violence with that of tolerance and compassion. The book is very informative and mixes descriptive elements with normative aspects in a very balanced way. It is a must-read for scholars of international security who, in general, tend to ignore the intersections that are produced by the practice of religion across the world. The religion of politics and the politics of religion is essential in understanding the international implication of religiously induced peace, violence, emancipation and conflict. Rather than being biased as a supporter or a critique of religion, the book opens up multiple avenues where nuances pertaining to religion and security can be examined.

ROBERTSON, Jeffrey. *Diplomatic Style and Foreign Policy. A Case Study of South Korea*. Routledge, 2019. ISBN 9781138334151.

Diplomatic Style and Foreign Policy

A Case Study of South Korea

Reviewed by Martin Zubko

We usually understand diplomatic practice as disciplined, hierarchic, pertaining to protocol, non-emotional and elitist. These prejudices refrain us from acknowledging the virtuosity of diplomacy as a discipline of diversities. Although diplomatic practice contains universal characteristics across national representations, each country has formed its diplomacy by including a portion of culture, traditions, mentality and a way of dealing with problems. Therefore, Jeffrey Robertson inquires into the neglected importance of diplomatic style as a necessary element of the analytics of foreign policy.

We can divide Jeffrey Robertson's book into two parts. In the first one, the author guides us through the theoretical arguments of adding diplomatic style among our priorities when studying international relations. The author establishes a definition of diplomacy in chapter one, constitutes diplomatic style in chapter two, renders *ideal diplomat* and *ideal diplomatic style* in chapter three and constructs four ideal types of diplomatic style based on classic readings of international relations studies in chapter four.

The second part examines the South Korean diplomatic style by using methodology based on Weber's interpretive sociology. Implementing a narrative phenomenological inquiry, the author analyses the South Korean diplomatic practice in chapters five, six and seven. Finally, Robertson reveals his findings on South Korean diplomacy in chapter eight.

So, where does the author identify the shortcomings of proper research on the phenomenon of diplomatic style? First, many authors concentrate on diplomatic culture while not touching on the diplomatic style as a research topic. Second, scholars and diplomats, particularly in the USA, use the terms *diplomacy* and *foreign policy* interchangeably. Third, authors write about the diplomatic practice while elaborating only marginally on diplomatic style. Consequently, there is a significant deficiency in the phenomenon of diplomatic style in reputable contemporary academic literature.

One of the author's primary sources of knowledge is the work of British diplomat Harold Nicolson, who expounded on the meaning of a diplomatic profession from a practitioner's point of view. This helps Robertson to figure out that 'diplomats recognise, comprehend and adapt to the diplomatic style of their counterparts' (p. 5). Moreover, the author correlates the quality of knowledge about diplomacy between academics and diplomats; concluding that there is an enormous gap.

Thus, the first chapter develops a definition of the phenomenon of diplomatic style based on four assumptions. First, the author compares *style as categorisation* to a parallel of jazz and rock 'n' roll in music categorisation. Second, *style as communication* as a message that a musician sends to the audience by a selected music style. Third, *style as explicit knowledge* that we commonly see in forms of books, documents, various formulations or graphical aids. Fourth, *style as tacit knowledge* – not recorded or stored anywhere; essentially, this turns into mental activities, consciousness and something inside us which we cannot define with words.

Even though a German diplomat will consistently have powerful state support compared to a Moldavian one, the latter might be honoured with advanced tacit knowledge shaping the notion of negotiation. On the other hand, diplomats of more influential states might contemplate the role of tacit knowledge in the diplomatic practice of less powerful states. Thus, Robertson stresses the importance of tacit knowledge and our ability to include it in analyses of diplomatic style.

However, we should also consider convenient and inconvenient aspects influencing diplomatic style, notably technological development, information extraction and surveillance. These aspects form a DNA of national representations and negotiation practices. Thus, I would slightly question Robertson's statement in the book that 'diplomacy is built upon tacit knowledge' (p. 46). Nonetheless, he is perfectly right to include all four assumptions to support his definition.

Robertson uses an astute manoeuvre to come up with ideal types of diplomatic style by adopting Weber's four models of social action in the following readings: purposive-rational – *The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli; traditional – *De la Manière de Négociier* by Francois de Callières; emotional – *A Guide to Diplomatic Practice* by Ernest Satow; and value-rational – *Diplomacy* by Harold Nicolson. By this, Robertson completes his theoretical part. He endorses using those four concepts to analyse any type of diplomatic practice to determine the working style. So, where does the Republic of Korea stand in Robertson's four diplomatic styles?

Based on 64 narratives, Robertson concludes that the South Korean diplomatic practice involves an emotion-oriented diplomatic style. Asian diplomats have the reputation for being very pragmatic, rational and devoid of emotion. So, where can we see those emotions?

According to Robertson, Korean diplomatic practice has four virtues – 'status, generational change, cosmopolitanism and estrangement' (p. 164). It is the last theme, estrangement, which appears as the most interesting component influencing South Korean diplomatic style (an emotional layer of it).

Structuring on James Der Derian's text *On Diplomacy: A Genealogy of Western Estrangement*, the author explains the theoretical ground of his reasoning about estrangement. The most prominent factors causing estrangement are the geographical position and historical development of South Korea. Perpetual interactions of major powers in the region determine the former. The latter demonstrates that the history of South Korea was often modified by decisions of China, Japan and the USA. This finding points to the gravity of South Korean estrangement through diplomatic practice.

The innovative aspect of Robertson's research draws a valuable theoretical framework of diplomatic style, focusing on the understanding of the analytical insights of foreign policies. The book also delivers a message to academic and professional communities calling for

a more intense mutual partnership. In conclusion, Robertson's book presents a way to strengthen the quality of diplomatic practice by scrutinising the principles of diplomatic style.

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