CEJISS

CENTRAL EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL AND SECURITY STUDIES

cejiss.org

METROPOLITAN UNIVERSITY PRAGUE PRESS

Contents

Volume 16, Issue 3, September 2022

Editorial

CEJISS issues do not usually include editorials. However, we wish to use an editorial this time to draw our readers' attention to the first thematic section ever to appear in the Journal. Thematic sections shall be irregular but recurring features of the Journal. Their purpose is to address topical events, processes or phenomena that define the character of our times or help develop existing or emerging academic debates of critical importance to the discipline of International Relations or to the social scientific understanding of the world in general.

Thematic sections have several unique attributes. Its topics will be defined by the CEJISS Editorial Team. As such, thematic sections represent our (editorial) tool for advancing the Journal's contribution and profile, but we will always look for external contributors to address our call for thematic section pieces. Thematic section texts will generally be shorter, within the suggested range of 4,000 – 8,000 words. They are expected to meet our research article criteria, yet may be more polemic and essayistic in their character, and should directly address the particular topic of a given thematic section. Particularly encouraged are papers with a strong narrative and sophisticated academic essays (op-eds) that develop or build on the existing theoretical repertoire of International Relations (or closely related disciplines), offer a clear argument and contribute to academic debates. The double-blind review policy will be applied, but our editorial commitment is to ensure timely publication so that CEJISS and its authors can more readily react to issues of critical importance.

Our decision to launch the new format coincided with the start of the Russia-Ukraine war in February 2022; hence, there was not much doubt about the choice of the first topic. Despite hoping for a quick resolution, we were (and still are) unaware of how long the conflict may last and what its future course may be. Consequently, we have decided to pose a direct question that could be examined independently on the twists and turns of the ongoing conflict. Hence, the central question of the thematic section, found in this issue of CEJISS, is why the conflict was not prevented. In the call for contributions, we invited texts inspired by different theoretical perspectives and focusing on different actors. We believe the final set of texts satisfies our ambition to offer our readers a plural(ist) discussion of what preceded the war.

Half of the thematic section contributions approach the question from the perspective of hard power, its application or the strategic debates related to it. Vojtěch Bahenský (Charles University) focuses on discussions between Western 'realists' and 'hawks'. Alongside that, he considers the mismatch between strategic goals and resources to explain why the war could not be prevented. Jo-

nas Driedger (Peace Research Institute Frankfurt) develops a similar theme and analyses how German foreign policy contributed to the failure to deter Russia. Emmet Foley (UCC Cork & Dublin City University) and Christian Kaunert (Dublin City University & University of South Wales) inquire into the role of Russian private military companies that, as they argue, contributed to the creation and the perpetuation of insecurities and instabilities in (Eastern) Ukraine.

The other three papers lean on the side of identitarian perspectives. Alexander Bendix (University of Edinburgh) analyses changes in Russia's national role conceptions and the Western responses to them and points to a change when comparing the 2022 war and Russia's previous military actions against its neighbours. Maryna Shevtsova (University of Ljubljana) and Oksana Myshlovska (University of Bern) focus on the narratives and identities of Russia and Ukraine. Shevtsova uncovers changes in Ukrainian nationalism and sees them as the driver of Ukraine's further separation from Russia, while Myshlovska meticulously analyses narrative escalation of the conflict taking into account Russia, Ukraine and also the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine as an international actor.

The thematic section is organised as follows. Bahenský's article opens the thematic section as it covers a large chunk of the Western strategic debate on how to approach Russia. It is followed by a detailed examination of narrative escalation of the conflict provided in the article by Myshlovska. Then, the pieces by Bendix, Shevtsova and Driedger elucidate the role of Russia, Ukraine and Germany, respectively. The paper by Foley and Kaunert on Russian private military companies is the last one in the thematic section.

On behalf of the CEJISS Editorial Team
Aleš Karmazin (Editor-in-Chief)
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Japan-France Relationship under Abe: An Analysis of Security Trends for the Indo-Pacific Region

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Abstract
Since the Meiji Restoration, Japan and France have experienced a special relationship led by strong cultural and economic ties. The present paper analyses their relationship during the second administration of the former prime minister of Japan, Abe Shinzō. The paper focuses on their respective security trends. Security is studied as a(n inter-)subjective and dynamic process. For this reason, the Copenhagen School's 'securitisation' will serve as a theoretical framework to investigate discursive and material practices of both nations. The article has two complementary goals. First, it studies whether and to what extent securitised issues and securitising moves of Japan and France converge to their approach to the Indo-Pacific region. To this end, the article extensively examines official documents and speeches of the two governments, including Japan's annual 'White Paper' and 'Diplomatic Bluebook', and France's strategic documents. Second, by examining transformations of their mutual relations, the paper investigates whether Japan and France have improved their synergy, especially in the defense domain, during Abe's second administration. The paper concludes that Japan and France have a similar view on the security environment of the Indo-Pacific and, for this reason, they share similar concerns and interests. The result was an improvement of their relations which became increasingly more symbiotic towards the region.

Introduction

The establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and France occurred in 1958, a few years after the arrival of Commodore Perry in Edo (now Tokyo) Bay. In order to remove the clauses of the 'unequal treaties', Japan's policy-makers saw the modernisation of the country as the only solution to achieving this goal. It is during the Meiji Restoration (1868) that Japan and France started to intensify their relations: Japan decided to adopt the French model for its military modernisation (Holcombe 2017), while France was astonished by Japan's arts to the extent that Japanese artistic influence resulted in the so-called *japonisme*, and later on in the *néo-japonisme* (Fregonese & Sakai 2021). The consolidation of a military regime in Japan and its withdrawal from the League of Nations constituted critical factors for the setback of the relations between the two countries. Even after the end of the Second World War, the tension between Japan and the European nations continued. Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru flew to Europe in 1954 with the intention of reconstituting a dialogue with the European allies of the U.S., but with few results. European countries, among others France, showed their reluctance to accept Japan into the GATT in 1955. Japan was seen as a 'peril' for the economies of those countries, especially for their textile sector (Frattolillo 2019). The end of the Cold War changed the nature of the relations. Thaw between the two counterparts occurred, as it was testified by the signing of the 'Japan-EC Joint Declaration of 1991' and, on a bilateral level, the 'Japan-France 20 Actions for the Year 2000' which promoted cultural, economic and technological exchanges. Once again, the reciprocal cultural attraction between Japan and France facilitated new and synergic relations.

At the same time, the end of the Cold War signified the emergence of a new international scenario, which modified the former power balance. It is the case of Northeast Asia. In recent years, the security environment of the region has gone through a series of dramatic changes, causing a growing number of confrontations in the region. Some authors highlighted the triggers of such instability that can be summarised briefly as follows: China's rise as global superpower and the so-called 'power shift' from West to East undermining the order created by the U.S. (Layne 2012; Abbasi, Qambar & Minhas 2017); North Korea's brinkmanship strategy (Ha & Chaesung 2010); the 'history problem' related to Japan's imperialism and its Second World War crimes (Cumings 2007; Wang 2009); and the territorial disputes (Sidorov 2014; Choi 2005; Wei 2014). These factors altered

deeply the perception of the environment in the region of both France and Japan which adjusted their foreign policy to it.

As the Cold War ended, the main interest of France was to preserve its partnership in Asia, and to profit, as other European countries, from the economic growth experienced by the countries of the region. The institution of ASEM (Asia-Europe Meetings) in 1996 was an attempt to deepen the relations between Europe and Asia and it became the last formal rawlplug in the triangular relations among Europe, East Asia and North America (Dent 1997). However, the posture of France changed as the tension in the region increased. In the White Paper of 2008, Asia is described as:

> L'Asie est aussi, en effet, l'une des zones principales où pourraient s'exprimer des rivalités ou des conflits susceptibles de déstabiliser le système de sécurité international. [Asia is, indeed, one of the main areas where rivalries or conflicts, that can destabilize the system of the international security, could take place] (Livre Blanc 2008: 32).

Over the past fifteen years, France has shown its growing regional defense commitment, creating new partnership and strengthening the old ones. The French Army was actively involved in military exercises and programmes with its partners in the Pacific and Indian Oceans (Regaud 2016). These relations continue to develop for the mutual benefit of France and its partners.

The end of the Cold War had a severe impact on Japan's foreign policy as well. The result was the crisis of its leading doctrine during those years: the Yoshida Doctrine. The pursuit of pacifism and economic prosperity, the delegation of the security of the archipelago to the U.S. combined with a low-profile posture in the foreign arena were principles that could only be applied in the bipolar context (Mazzei & Volpe 2014: 92-93). The redefinition of Japan's strategy has been particularly evident under Abe Shinzō, Japan's former prime minister, who served both from 2006 to 2007 and from 2012 to 2020. The creation of the National Security Council in 2013, the revision of the 'Three Principles of Arms Exports' in 2014 and the enactment of the 'Legislation for Peace and Security' in 2015 together with other transformations of the Japanese security apparatus are a few examples of the reforms implemented by Abe in his second administration. These have drawn the attention of different scholars like Christopher Hughes (2015) and Akimoto Daisuke (2018) who envisaged a shift towards an 'Abe Doctrine' in Japan's foreign policy.

Undoubtedly, the (re-)rise of China as both a global and regional superpower, and the threat posed by North-Korea have made Japan and France question their

role and priorities in the region. Differently from other European countries, France presents a territorial extension in both the Indian and the Pacific Oceans. Territories in this part of the globe make France a dependent actor from regional dynamics and, at the same time, geographically close to Japan. Moreover, as democratic countries and U.S. allies, Japan and France possibly share interests and a similar vision of the region. For this reason, the paper investigates security trends of Japan and France during the second administration of Abe (December 2012-September 2020). In this paper, the notion of security is presented as a process that is continuously defined by actors, thus it is neither objective nor static. Security is studied according to the 'securitization theory' formulated by the Copenhagen School which constitutes the analytic framework of the article.

The article has two complementary goals. These are to investigate, first, whether and in which ways securitised issues of Japan and France converge to their approach to the Indo-Pacific and, second, how the cooperation between the two countries evolved throughout the years and whether Japan and France have improved their synergy during Abe's second administration, especially on the defense domain and the Indo-Pacific. The paper enriches the existing literature on Japan and France relations, giving a particular focus on their views of the Indo-Pacific region. The analysis illustrates how France has become an echo chamber reproducing and amplifying Japan's securitisation moves and vice versa. Correspondingly, the paper concludes that security symbiosis of the two concerned countries in the Indo-Pacific increased during the examined period.

The paper has the following structure. The first section will analyse official documents and speeches produced by the Japanese government during Abe's administration to understand what security issues were prioritised. At the same time, the section will clarify the geostrategic nature of the Indo-Pacific region as conceived by Japan. The second section will contain an analysis of France's official documents produced by the government, in order to compare the contents to ones of the first section. This first part will focus on discursive practices. The second part, which constitutes the third section of the paper, will focus on material practices by looking at the historical transformations of the relations between Japan and France. By making this step, I intend to show how discursive practices and material practices correspond with each other.

Analytic framework
As mentioned above, in order to examine the security practices of Japan and France during Abe's second administration, the analysis will move from the 'securitisation theory' of the Copenhagen School to set the analytic framework of the paper.

With the end of the Cold War, the realist notion of security as an objective was questioned by new theoretical patterns and theories. One of the most innovative approaches to security studies was the framework created by the Copenhagen School. The new approach proposes analysing the articulation of security practices starting with their discursive presentations (speech acts) in order to understand the action implemented by a certain actor. In the words of Wæver, one of the main theorists of securitisation, 'by uttering "security" a state-representative moves a particular development into a specific area, and thereby claims a special right to use whatever means are necessary to block it' (Wæver 1995: 55). In accordance with this view, securitisation was defined as: 'an intersubjective process in which an issue is presented as an existential threat that requires emergency measures to be undertaken' (Buzan, Wæver & de Wilde 1998: 25). It can be described as an intensification of politicisation, but it differs from the latter since the securitised issue is presented as objective and not just a mere political choice. An actor, who presents something as an existential threat, makes a securitising move, but only if and when their audience accepts it as such, will securitisation happen (*ivi*: 21-31). Securitisation theory is a fundamental part of the Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory of the Copenhagen School which theorise security as a hybrid. It shares the materialist ideas of bounded territoriality and distribution of power with neorealism, but, as constructivism, it conceives the nature of security and patterns of amity/enmity among states in terms of social structures (Buzan & Waever 2003). Still, since its formulation, the concept of securitisation was transformed and applied to different fields of social sciences, which only served to enrich its theoretical structure.

The notion of securitisation was widened as:

> an articulated assemblage of practices whereby heuristic artifacts (metaphors, policy tools, image repertoires, analogies, stereotypes, emotions, etc.) are contextually mobilized by a securitizing actor, who works to prompt an audience to build a coherent network of implications (feelings, sensations, thoughts, and intuitions) about the critical vulnerability of a referent object, that concurs with the securitizing actor's reasons for choices and actions, by investing the referent subject with such an aura of unprecedented threatening complexion that a customized policy must be immediately undertaken to block it (Balzacq 2011: 3).

In other words, securitisation theorists believe that security issues are socially constructed in terms of relations between a securitising actor who, by means of discursive and material practices, legitimates their actions and an au-

dience to support them. It can be said that securitisation is composed of four key elements: audience, context, power relations, and instruments and practices (Balzacq 2016). The present case study identifies the securitising agents and these elements as follows:

1. Context: as already mentioned in the Introduction, increasing tensions among states are stressing out the Northeast Asia context in the post-Cold War era. The paper clears up the context from a Japanese and French point of view. In the Introduction of the paper I individuate four main reasons of regional instability. Putting aside the 'historical problem' which exclusively concerns Japan and its neighbours, the three main factors are: first, China's rise as global and regional power, second, and linked with the latter, territorial disputes, and finally North Korea's brinkmanship.

   China's rise has been interpreted by scholars in two different ways. According to pessimists, or 'Dragon slayers', like John Mearsheimer, China, as a revisionist state, cannot rise peacefully. For this reason, war with the U.S. is inevitable (Mearsheimer 2014). According to optimists, or 'Panda Huggers', like Ikenberry, China has no interest in overthrowing the liberal order as it is profiting from it (Ikenberry 2008). At the same time, Ikenberry recognises the existence of a 'dual hierarchy' in Asia (the military one is led by the U.S., whereas the economic one is led by China) (Ikenberry 2016). Chinese leaders claim that China rise will be peaceful. At the same time, since the end of Cold War, China has implemented an assertive diplomacy. Chinese budgets for military expenditure is expanding every year (according to the data of the World Bank, China is the second state for military expenditure since 2008). Moreover, starting from the third Taiwan Strait Crisis (1995-1996), the maritime posture of China has become increasingly aggressive. Since 2013, the Chinese government is constructing artificial islands in the South Chinese Sea and its vessels have penetrated the contiguous zone and the territorial seas of other countries, claiming its sovereignty on Spartly, Parecels and Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. This controversy is strictly related to the second factor of regional instability – territorial disputes. China's actions have to be analysed in light of the economic and geostrategic importance that these islands have, in particular in the international trade (Tønnesson 2002; Fravel 2011; Yiallourides 2017). Moreover, China has exerted its power through its economic power. Xi Jinping launched the 'Belt and Road Initiative' in 2013, an infrastructural plan originally created to connect Asia, Africa and Europe. It represents China's efforts to improve its economic and security interests, and its power projection to influence the decision-making process of the countries that it encompasses (Mobley 2019).

North Korea's nuclear and missile diplomacy is another important fac-
tor of regional instability. Since the end of the Cold War, North Korea has
developed mass-destruction weapons. In 1998, the government launched
a Taepodong-1 rocket over Japan, while in 2003 it announced the with-
drawal of the country from the NTP. In order to handle the situation, the
Six-Party Talks (North Korea, China, Japan, Russia, South Korea and U.S.)
was created. However, the forum did not bring any effective results. In
2006, North Korea conducted its first nuclear test. Since then North Korea
has periodically destabilised the regional environment by conducting nu-
clear and ballistic tests. Pyongyang priority remains to preserve its regime.
For this reason, its opening to the region is pretty limited and restricted
(Kim 2012).

2. Power relations and audience: both Japan and France are middle range
   power and there is not any formal or informal submission of one state to
   the other. Thus, it can be assumed that power relations are equal.
3. Discursive instruments and practices: the study will focus on the analysis
   of official speeches and documents, political tools and historical relations
   among the two states.

Security trends during Abe's administrations: The securitisation of maritime routes and the Indo-Pacific

The present paragraph focuses on Japan's political orientation towards securi-
ty during the second Abe administration. I will examine and interpret official
documents produced in the period between 2013 and 2020 as discursive prac-
tices implemented by Japan. Before presenting the analysis, it is important to
note three important elements. First, since the government of Prime Minister
Nakasone Yasuhiro (1982-1987), Japan has been through a series of changes of
its internal apparatus which have brought the Prime Minister's office (*Kantei*)
to the centre of the organisation of the foreign policy of the country. Second,
the government centralisation under Abe generated a general trend in Japanese
official documents consisting of the increment of the threat assessment related
to Japan's neighbours, particularly China and North Korea (Oren & Brummer
2020). Third, Abe served as prime minister of Japan for one year, from Septem-
ber 2006 to September 2007. Although his first administration was short, Abe
paved the way for his political vision that he followed in his second administra-
tion. The transformation of the Defense Agency, created in 1954, into the Minis-
try of Defense in 2007 showed Abe's willingness to convert Japan into a 'normal
country' (*Futsū no Kuni*) or, in other words, a country with a regular military
power. Besides this reform, in 2007 Abe launched his geopolitical vision of the
region which took a much more coherent shape during his second administra-

tion. Abe's 'Confluence of the Two Seas' (*Futatsu no Umi no Majiwari*) discourse, translated as *Confluence of the Two Seas* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007), together with the creation of the Quadrilater Security Dialogue (or QUAD I), marked a significant shift in Japan's approach to the regional environment. Describing the relations between Japan and India in front of the members of the Indian Parliament, Abe covers different subjects. On a national level, he affirmed the importance that the sea plays for Japan, as well as for India, described as '*kaiyō kokka*', two maritime states. Through this linkage with the sea, Abe highlights how Japan and India's vital interests depend on the *security of the sea lanes*. On a regional level, it can be said that Abe's discourse is the first discursive attempt to merge the security interdependence between the Indian and the Pacific Ocean. The concept of 'Broader Asia' (*Kakudai Ajia*) introduced in the discourse can be considered as the precursor and the seed of the Indo-Pacific geopolitical construction (Heidukand & Wacker 2020). Maritime security, bound with liberal values such as freedom of navigation, the rule of law, democracy and peace have remained the most securitised subjects under Abe.

The 'Confluence of the Two Seas' discourse has served as base to Abe's formulation of the '*Anzen Hoshō Daiyamondo*', translated as the 'Asian Democratic Security Diamond'. As suggested by the name itself, the discourse focuses on two main elements: security dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region and its actors. It presents China's aggressive posture in the South China Sea as the main threat to regional maritime security. To avoid the creation of a 'Lake Beijing', to preserve the freedom of navigation and respect of the international law, Abe proposes a greater involvement of Japan. Assuming the role of *guardian* of liberal values both in the Indian and Pacific Oceans together with the U.S., India and Australia, the nations would create a free and democratic space, shaping a diamond. While the cooperation with these states is fundamental, Abe's auspice was to improve cooperation with Great Britain and France as well (Abe 2012).

In 2014, at the 13th IISS Asian Security Summit The Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, Abe gave a speech called *'Peace and prosperity in Asia, forevermore. Japan for the rule of law. Asia for the rule of law and the rule of law for all of us'*. The speech refers to the ongoing situation in the South China Sea which is undermined by the assertive policy of China. In order to maintain a stable maritime environment, he advocates for the 'Three Principles on the Rule of Law at Sea' which are described as follows:

> The first principle is that states shall make and clarify their claims based on international law. The second is that states shall not use force or coercion in trying to drive their claims. The third principle is that states shall seek to settle disputes by peaceful means (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2014).

In 2016 during the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI), Abe gave a more incisive form to this strategic vision which culminated in the presentation of the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) strategy. During this discourse Abe highlighted the strong bonds existing between the Asian and the African continents. However, as he explains, these relations rely on the sea lanes that connect the continents physically. For this reason, stability and prosperity can only be pursued through the union of two free and open oceans (the Pacific and the Indian) and two continents (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016). Despite the generic discourse, the aim of Abe was to expand Japan's strategic horizon beyond Northeast and Southeast Asia. In other terms, the FOIP can be described as Japan's search for allies in order to stabilise the environment of the Indo-Pacific. Through the instrumentation of a discourse that opposes the coercive and expansionist actions in the sea to liberal values, Japan's goal with its allies is to make the region free and open like an international public good. Japanese discourse about the FOIP has not remained stationary.

A strategy defined as 'tactical hedging', in the sense of an ambiguous, temporal declaratory policy doctrine used to bide time in order to follow the opponent's steps, Japanese FOIP has changed from its first formulation, Koga (2019) individuates three phases. The first one (from mid-2016 to mid-2017) focused on the geographical domains comprising the Indian and the Pacific Oceans and the promotion of two key issues: connectivity and maritime security. The speech of State Minister for Foreign Affairs Kishi Nobuo at the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) Summit in 2017 is consistent with this framework in which words such as 'freedom of navigation', 'maritime security' and 'maritime law-enforcement' can be found ('The World and Japan' Database 2017). The application and protection of the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, also known as the Montego Bay Convention or UNCLOS, and its principles assumed a straategic importance in the Japanese narrative. The second phase, from mid-2017 to 2018, was characterised by the adoption and promotion of Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific by other actors, such as the United States, and the resurgence of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in 2017 (QUAD II) (Smith 2020). The third phase is marked by the announcement on the 'White Paper on Development Cooperation 2017' issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2018 of the three pillars on which FOIP rests:

1. the promotion and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation and free trade,
2. the pursuit of economic prosperity through enhancing connectivity, including through 'quality infrastructure' development in accordance with international standards,

3. initiatives for ensuring peace and stability that include assistance for ca-
pacity building on maritime law enforcement, anti-piracy and disaster risk
reduction (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2018: 2).

Together with these three guiding principles, the FOIP was enlarged from
a geostrategic point of view. Remarking the ASEAN centrality in Japan's perspec-
tive, this new phase saw the possibility of including new actors who showed
their interest to cooperate with Japan in the Indo-Pacific region like the U.K. and
France. The result of the geographic dilatation of the original concept created
the possibility for the inclusion of new nations also in the institutional frame-
work of the QUAD, reorganised in a QUAD Plus.

As already shown, the discursive practices of securitisation of maritime secu-
rity and freedom, together with liberal values in the Indo-Pacific, can be detected
not just in Abe's and Japan's officials' speeches between 2012 and 2020. These
trends can also be found in official documents. *Bōei Hakusho* (Defense of Japan)
issued by the Ministry of Defense *and Gaikō Seisho* (Diplomatic Bluebook) is-
sued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs provide strong evidence. The following
elements have been drawn by analysing the transformation of Defense of Japan
in its contents and design through the years. From 2013 to 2020 the design of
the document changed, putting major security issues in evidence. In particular,
three major changes can be found. Two of these changes are related to Part I,
while the third is related to Part III.

First, Part I, called *Waga Kuni wo Torimaku Anzen Hoshō* (Security Environ-
ment Surrounding Japan) in the part called *Gaikan* (Overview), has been chrono-
logically modified as follows. In 2013 it contains a paragraph called *Waga Kuni
Shūhen Anzen Hoshō Kankyō* (Security Environment in the Vicinity of Japan). The
title does not contain the word Asia-Pacific, the content of the paragraph does.
From 2014 to 2018 the paragraph title is substituted with *Ajia Taiheiyō Chiiki no
Anzen Hoshō Kankyō* (Asia Pacific Security Environment) clearly referring to the
Asia-Pacific region. In 2019 the title of the paragraph is replaced with *Waga Kuni
Shūhen nado no Gunji Dōkō* (Military Trends in the Neighboring Countries of
Japan), while in 2020 it is changed to *Waga Kuni Shūhen Anzen Hoshō Kankyō* like
in 2012. In both documents, the term Indo-Pacific is introduced to replace the
term Asia-Pacific. Second, Part I underwent other changes through the years.
From 2013 to 2018 it contains a chapter called *Kokusai Shakai no Kadai* (Issues
in the International Community) whose name has been changed to *Uchū, Saibā,
Denjiha to itta Aratana Ryōiki wo meguru Dōkō, Kokusai Shakai no Kadai* (Trends
Concerning New Domains including Outer Space, Cyberspace, and Electromag-
netic Spectrum, and Relevant Challenges Facing the International Community).
This chapter has changed both the title and the sections. In the document of

2013, section titles are: Cyberspace, Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, International Terrorism and Complex and Diverse Regional Conflicts and Approaches of the International Community. In the latter one of 2014, section titles Outer Space, and Military Science and Technology were added to the document. From 2015 to 2018 the following six section titles and their order were preserved: *Kokusai Terorizumu, Chiikifunsō nado no Dōkō* (Trends in International Terrorism and Regional Conflicts); *Tairyō Hakai Heiki no Iten, Kakusan* (Transfer and Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction); *Kaiyō wo meguru Dōkō* (Maritime Trends); *Uchū Kūkan to Anzen Hoshō* (Outer Space and Security); *Saibā Kūkan wo meguru Dōkō, Gunji Kagaku Gijutsu to Bōei Seisan* (Trends in Cyberspace), *Gijutsu Kiban wo meguru Dōkō* (Trends Concerning Military Science and Technology as well as Defense Production and Technological Bases). Compared to the sections contained in 2014, in the period 2015-2018 'Maritime Trends' acquired an important relevance creating a section itself. In 2019 and 2020 the sections remain the same with the addition of a section called *Denjiha Ryōiki wo meguru Dōkō* (Electromagnetic Domain Trends) in both of them, and *Shingata Korona Uirusu Kansenshō wo meguru Dōkō* (Developments regarding the Novel Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)). The order of presentation of the topics changed: terrorism and weapons of mass destruction have been moved to the end of the chapter and replaced by the sections regarding military science and technology, space, cyberspace and electromagnetic domains. Finally, Part III is the most varied, both in terms of sections and titles. The title of the part changes in 2013 and 2014. From 2015 to 2018, the title becomes *Kokumin no Seimei, Zaisan to Ryōdo, Ryōkai, Ryōkū wo Mamorinuku tame no Torikumi* (Initiatives to Protect the Lives and Property of the People and Secure the Territorial Land, Water and Airspace). The name is substituted once again in 2019 and 2020 with *Waga Kuni Bōhei no Mittsu no Hashira (Bōei no Mokuhyō wo Tassuru tame no Shudan)* (Three Pillars of Japan's Defense (Instruments to Achieve the Objectives of Defense)). Structure coherence in terms of chapters and sections in the document is achieved from 2016 to 2018 and from 2019 to 2020. In the last two documents the Three Pillars mentioned in the titles correspond to the titles of the three chapters (Japan's own defensive architecture, Japan-U.S. Alliance and Security Cooperation). Moreover, from 2016 the sections called *Kaiyō Anzen Hoshō no Kakuho* (Ensuring Maritime Security) and *Gunji Kanri, Gunshuku oyobi Fukakusan he no Torikumi* (Initiatives for Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation) can be found in all the documents of the following years. The same can be said about the sections called *Uchū Ryōiki oyobi Saibā Ryōiki no Riyō ni kakeru Kyōryoku* (Cooperation in Use of Space and Cyber Domains) and *Takakuteki, Tasōtekina Anzen Hosho Kyōryoku no Senryakutekina Suishin ni mukete* (Strategic Promotion of Multi-Faceted and Multi-Layered Defense Cooperation)

from 2019. In this Part, multilateralism, maritime, space and cyberspace security are the leading topics of the sections.

With regard to the contents of the document, security trends in terms of actors remain the same throughout the years, identifying Russia, China and North Korea as major challengers. From 2014, the term *gurei zōn no jitai* (gray-zone situation, defined as those situations in which disputes and conflicts occur not from a strict warfare point of view) has been used with more frequency. The term appears in the Overview, which presents the description of Japan's surrounding environment in the Asia and Indo-Pacific region and the main three challengers.

Securitised issues are the same as those presented in the official speeches made by Abe and government officials: non-proliferation of mass-destruction weapons (like bacteriological and nuclear weapons), maritime security related to the freedom of navigation, sea lanes of communication and the respect of UNCLOS in relation to the situation in the South and East China Sea. The substitution of counter-piracy sections with a broader section, called 'Ensuring Maritime Security', shows the importance given to maritime security in reference to the Chinese threat. It integrates the actions of Japan in the Pacific and Indian Oceans as shown in the description of the *Malabar Exercise*. In 2019 and in 2020, the promotion of the military science and technology section and electromagnetic, space and cyberspace domains sections to major security issues can be associated with the threat posed by China's modernisation in technology and development of Artificial Intelligence.

Analysing the Diplomatic Bluebook, a similar chronological transformation can be traced from 2013 to 2020. While the general structure of the document has remained more or less coherent during the years, a few design changes have been made. First, Chapter III, titled *Bunyabetsu ni Mita Gaikō* (Japan's Foreign Policy in Major Diplomatic Fields) in 2013, changed in *Kokueki to Sekai Zentai no Rieki wo Zōshin Suru Gaikō* (Japan's Foreign Policy to Promote National and Global Interests) from 2014 to 2020, is divided into four sections. The first section titled from 2013 to 2020 *Nihon to Kokusai Shakai no Heiwa to Antei ni muketa Torikumi* (Efforts for Peace and Stability of Japan and the International Community) has changed its internal structure according to major issues reaching a formal coherence from 2016. In 2013, the paragraphs were: *Nichibei Anzen Hoshō (Anpo) Taisei* (The Japan–U.S. Security Arrangements)*; Kokusaishakai no Heiwa no tame no Torikumi* (Efforts for Peace in the International Community)*; Gunshuku, Fukakusan, Genshiryoku no Heiwateki Riyō* (Disarmament, Non-proliferation, and the Peaceful Use of Nuclear Energy)*; Kokusai Shakai no Antei ni muteka Torukumi* (Efforts towards Stability in the International Community). In the following years the number of paragraphs has been expanded and from 2016 they became eight and they are: *Anzen Hoshō ni kan suru Torikumi* (National

Security Initiatives)*; Nichibei Anzen Hoshō* (*Anpo*) *Taisei* (Japan-U.S. Security Arrangements)*; Gurōbaru na Anzen Hoshō* (Global Security)*; Gunji, Fukakusan, Genshiryoku no Heiwateki Riyō; Kokusairengō* (*Kokuren*) *ni okeru Torikumi* (Disarmament and Non-proliferation and the Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy)*; Kokusai Shakai ni okeru Hō no Shihai* (The Rule of Law in the International Community)*; Jinken* (Human Rights)*; Jyosei* (Women). Second, in the same section, inside the paragraph called Efforts for Peace in the International Community in 2013 the following subparagraphs are found: *Chiiki Anzen Hoshō* (Regional Security)*; Heiwa Iji, Heiwa Kōzō* (Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding)*; Kaiyō Anzen Hoshō* (Maritime Security)*; Chianjyō no Kyōi ni tai suru Torikumi* (Initiatives to Combat Security Threats*; Saibā* (Cyber)*, Uchū* (Outside Space)*.* In 2014 and in 2015, the subparagraphs which refer to maritime, cyber and space security are contained in a specific paragraph by the title of *Kokusai Kōkyōzai (Gurōbaru Komonsu)* (Global Commons). From 2016 to 2020, these three subparagraphs are moved into the main paragraph titled Global Security, together with the subparagraphs present in the previous years. In 2020 *Aratana Anzen Hoshō Kadai* (Emerging Security Challenges) is inserted as a new paragraph. Third, from 2017 to 2019, the document contains a specific section as *Tokushū* or Special Feature dedicated to the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy' inside Chapter I. In 2020 this part is moved to *Kantō Tokushū* or Opening Special Features.

With regard to the contents of Diplomatic Bluebooks, we find the same type of discursive practices as in the Defense of Japan and Abe's and other government officials' speeches. Japan's security linkage with the sea and the oceans is justified by defining the country as a maritime state. Freedom of navigation, maritime security and stability combined with Japan's promotion of UNCLOS principles remain central in the documents and in the cooperation with the U.S. but also with ASEAN and European States. From 2016 specific subparagraphs explain the situation in the South and East China Sea, presenting China actions as a threat for liberal values. The FOIP is presented as a strategy to maintain the Indo-Pacific region as a *Kokusai Kōkyōzai* (international public goods). In 2020, the FOIP is presented as an inclusive and open concept apt to the promotion of an international law-based order, a free and fair economy, connectivity, maritime security and safety with many countries besides the U.S., India and Australia. Moreover, from 2017 in Chapter III, in the section related to Japan's international cooperation and development, and economic diplomacy (section II and III), the Indo-Pacific strategy is presented as a political reality to achieve through economic means.

Eventually, from the analysis of the documents, it is possible to have a close reading about the securitising moves, which are mainly focused on topics that are linked to Japan's greatest challengers: China and North Korea. Over the

years, the government has put significant stress on some specific security issues. In particular, the maritime security dimension has implied an important and systematic securitisation process throughout the years. This is mainly related to the South and East China Sea and the freedom of navigation. Moreover, the government has inserted liberal values such as international law, rule of law and democracy as important principles to protect, in line with the so-called 'value-oriented diplomacy' launched by Abe in 2007.[1]

Securitisation practices in France from 2013 to 2020: The importance of the Indo-Pacific

This paragraph analyses the official documents published by the French governments and speeches given by its officials. It is important to specify that French official documents, like the White Paper (*Livre Blanc*), are not issued every year, but they are published as the national strategy is revised. It is just as important to clarify its historical position in Asia and in the Pacific in order to understand France's national interests in the region.

Addressed as a European country, France's role in the region is usually underestimated despite its long-lasting historical bond with the area and the fact that the EEZs of the overseas territories located in the Indian and in the Pacific Ocean correspond to 93% of its entire EEZ. France's presence in the Indo-Pacific is rooted in the controversial heritage of its colonial past in the world. It dates back to the seventeenth century with the first colonial wave and it enlarges with the second wave in the nineteenth century. France's presence in Asia (French Indochina) starts to decrease considerably with the revolutionary movements born in the aftermath of the Second World War in order to obtain independence. The Geneva Conference in 1954 marked the formal end of its colonial experience in the continent. Thereafter, the French presence in the Indo-Pacific region has been relegated to the territories in the Pacific and in the Indian Ocean and its interests limited to the security environment of these territories. France's engagement in the region continued through the stipulation of different partnership agreements with neighbouring countries in the development of their military capabilities and through the participation in regional fora and organisations. This trend is particularly visible from the nineties during which

1   The annual version of the Defense of Japan from 2015 to 2020 in its original language are accessible at the following website: Ministry of Defense, Bōhei Hakusho: https://www.mod.go.jp/j/publication/wp/index.html. The version of 2013 is accessible at the following website: http://www.clearing.mod.go.jp/hakusho_data/2013/w2013_00.html. The version of 2014 is accessible at the following link: http://www.clearing.mod.go.jp/hakusho_data/2014/w2014_00.html.
The annual version of the Diplomatic Bluebook of Japan is accessible at the following website in the original language: https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/bluebook/index.html

France undertook strategic dialogues, military and technological cooperation initiatives with countries like South Korea (1992), Vietnam (1997) and Singapore (1998), and cooperation initiatives to ensure the security in the Pacific with the United States, Australia and New Zealand which materialised in the QUAD in 1998 (Regaud 2017).

The beginning of the millennium marked an evident shift in the interests shown towards the Asian continent not only by France but also by the European Union and its Member States. Two main factors explain the uptick in the region, which correspond to the description contained in the 'Guidelines on the EU'S Foreign and Security Policy in East Asia of 2007' (Council of the European Union 2007) published by the EU and in the 'Défense et Sécurité nationale: le Livre blanc' of 2008 published by the French government (Ministère des Armées 2008). From a geo-economic point of view, Asia is defined as home to different fast-growing economies, with a particular regard to India and China, from which European states' economies depend. From a military point of view, the continent is described as precarious and a potential future site of clashes: terrorism, proliferation of nuclear weapons and weapons of mass destruction (e.g. North Korea), fast-modernising countries and increase in their military expenditures (in particular, China). In both these documents there is not a specific and strong securitisation of maritime issues linked with Asia. However, in the French document, the prevention of potential military conflicts in the area is considered a general priority to pursue in order to avoid an impact on maritime routes.

The linkage between this topic and Asia starts to appear in the documents published from 2012. The European Guidelines of 2012, which reviewed those of 2007, present North Korea as a key issue along with two others which involve China directly. The first one is the relations with Taiwan; the second one is related to the unstable situation in the South China Sea and the necessity to maintain the freedom of navigation with a clear reference to UNCLOS. It presents China's economic and military growth as an important source of instability for the security environment of the region (Council of the European Union 2012). Similarly, the *Livre Blanc* of 2013 presents the freedom of navigation, the territorial dispute in South China Sea and the security of the sea lanes of communications as elements of concern for the French government. Moreover, the book introduces the military modernisation of China together with its capacity to operate a cyberattack, as one of the main security issues (Ministère des Armées 2013). The importance played by the Asia-Pacific region has been emphasised by the number of publications and statements that the government of France has made since 2014. The presentation of the French security strategy in Asia-Pacific by the General Director of Strategic Affairs of the Ministry of Defense Philippe

Errera in 2014 (Ministère de la Défense 2014), followed by the publication of the '*Stratégie nationale de sûreté des espaces maritimes*' (National strategy for the security of maritime areas) in 2015 are clear evidence of France's willingness to be recognised as a maritime power and an important actor to shape regional dynamics (Premier Ministre 2015). From 2016, also as a consequence of China's refusal to respect the arbitration award of the Permanent Court of Arbitration, discursive practices used by the French government about China and its stand become stricter. The speech given by the Minister of Defense Jean-Yves Le Drian at the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2016 shows the posture that France will assume in the following years:

> If the law of the sea is not respected today in the China seas, it will be Threatened tomorrow in the Arctic, the Mediterranean or elsewhere. In order to continue to contain the risks of conflict, we must defend law and defend ourselves by means of law. This is a message that France will continue to repeat in international institutions. It is a message that France will continue to put into practice, by sailing her ships and flying her aircraft wherever international law allows and operational needs require. Several times a year, French Navy vessels sail the waters of this region, and this will continue. Since the beginning of this year, the French navy has already deployed three times through the South China Sea. We do this to defend our national interests and our security, to implement our defence partnerships and to contribute to regional and international peace and security (Ministère de la Défense 2016).

France's concern about China is evident in the revision of the national security strategy of 2013, published in 2017. By the analyses of this document, two main elements can be pointed out: first, it introduces the term Indo-Pacific in the French rhetoric specifying France's commitment to reinforce maritime security in the region; second, it describes China's policy in the South China Sea as 'assertive'. The new version of the strategy inserts China together with Russia, in a specific paragraph of Part B which is titled '*Durcissement et diffusion des menaces*' (translated as: Harder, more disseminated threats) (Ministère des Armées 2017).

Since 2018, President Emmanuel Macron and his *entourage* have actively promoted France's involvement in the Indo-Pacific security as strictly tied to its own security. The government have published three main documents since 2018 that explain the French strategy and interests are: '*Stratégie française en Asie-Océanie à l'horizon 2030. Vers un espace asiatique indopacifique inclusif*' (Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangère 2018), '*La Stratégie de Défense Française en*

Indopacifique' (Ministère des Armées 2019) and '*Partenariats de la France dans l'Indopacifique*' (Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangère 2021). The first two documents describe securitised issues, which are: maritime and air security, the safeguard of multipolarity against unipolarity, non-proliferation, climate and environmental security, respect of the rule of law and the safeguard of international law. The third document designates France's partners to achieve and promote the interests listed before. While France-China relations were raised to the level of 'global strategic partnership' in 2004, the document mentions just Australia, ASEAN, Japan and India.

Securitised issues in France's discursive practices are similar to Japan's: the protection of liberal value, the strategic importance of sea lanes of communications in the South China Sea, safeguard of maritime and air security in the Indo-Pacific, non-proliferation of mass destruction weapons and of nuclear weaponry. Security trends tend to converge also on a chronological point of view. Moreover, Japan is described as an important partner in achieving France's goals in the region. However, the analysis of discursive practices cannot be considered enough in order to understand how Abe's securitising moves have been influential. The next paragraph investigates the transformation of Japan-France relations under Abe's administration as a form of material practice which had the capacity to juxtapose the security of East Asia with the one of France, as a state of the Pacific and of the Indian Ocean, in the broader framework of the Indo-Pacific region.

Japan-France synergy under Abe: An alliance for the Indo-Pacific

The official establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and France dates back to 1858 when the Treaty of Amity and Commerce was signed by the two countries in Edo (Tokyo). The establishment of the relations between Japan and the Western countries was the product of the American gunboat diplomacy which forced Japan to open up after more than two hundred years of its policy of isolation called *sakoku* (literally, closed country). The result was the imposition of the 'unequal treaties' to Japan which found itself in a position of subordination to these countries. To cancel the effect of the treaties, Japan responded to Western colonialism with the modernisation of the country giving birth to the Meiji Restoration. It is in this context that Japan and France started to communicate and exchange their knowledge.

Since its beginning to nowadays, the relations between the two countries have changed greatly. If at the end of the nineteenth century Japan left Asia 'to enter Europe', from the 1930s the controversies related to the 'Manchurian Incident' and the refusal of the proposal of racial equality provoked Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations (Burkam 2008). With the exception of Germany

and Italy, and their alliance during the Second World War, Japan's distance with European countries, including France, remained strong for two reasons also in the post-war years. First, the memories of the actions of the war committed by the Japanese Army were still vivid; second, Japan's economic growth guided by a 'developmental state' (Johnson 1999), and the invasion of Japanese products in the European market thanks to a favourable exchange rate created the so called *bōeki masatsu* (commercial frictions) and an anti-Japanese sentiment (Nye 1992).

Cooperation started to increase in a wide range of areas between Japan, the European Community and its Member States only at the beginning of the 1990s with the end of the era of trade conflicts. The reconciliation was facilitated by the excuses of the Japanese government for its actions during the Second World War expressed by the Murayama Statement in 1995. In 1991, the Japan-EC Joint Declaration was signed in order to improve economic and political cooperation as liberal and democratic actors (European External Action Service 1991). On a bilateral level, France and Japan started to collaborate on different domains. To penetrate the Japanese market and help its companies with information and financial assistance, France launched a special programme called '*Le Japon c'est possible*' for the period of 1992-1997, while in November 1996 Prime Minister Hashimoto and President Chirac signed the 'Japan-France 20 Actions for the Year 2000' to deepen economic and political cooperation by regularising consultations between the two governments (Republique Française 1996). In 1997, the *Maison de la culture du Japon* was opened in Paris and the cultural event called 'Japan Year' took place. The 'France Year' took place in 1998 in Japan.

Japan's interest for the European region deepened with the start of the new millennium, as a consequence of the acceleration of the process of regional integration which gave birth to the European Union (Tōgō 2010). In 2000, Foreign Affairs Minister Kono delivered in Paris his speech called '*Seeking a Millennium Partnership: New Dimensions in Japan-Europe Cooperation*' proposing 'the decade of Japan-Europe cooperation' based on three pillars: realising shared values while respecting diversity, strengthening of Japan-Europe political cooperation to prevent future conflicts and to promote the disarmament and non-proliferation, and sharing the benefits of globalisation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2000). This discourse was followed by the Action Plan for EU-Japan Cooperation agreed in 2001 in which four major areas of cooperation were individuated: promoting peace and security, strengthening the economic and trade partnership, coping with global and societal challenges, and bringing together people and culture. (European Parliament 2001). Japan's commitment to strengthen its partnership with the European Union was achieved by the promotion of bilateral relations with the Member States. In 2005, after the Japan-France Summit held in March, the '*Declaration for a new Japan-France partnership For Peace, Stability and Pros-*

perity in the International Community' was launched to improve the cooperation between the two countries. The cooperation would intensify the high-level strategic dialogue in order to handle international security issues, like international terrorism, non-proliferation, North Korea and Africa, and international development to reduce poverty (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2005).

In the first ten years of the 2000s the relation between France and Japan improved mainly towards cultural, technological and economic cooperation, while from the 2010s the strategic dialogue and the partnership between the two countries upgraded to a new level. The French White Paper of 2008 signaled the new concern of France for Asia, as new tension could destabilise the region. For this reason, military and political cooperation begun to assume a major relevance in Japan-France relationship. The '*Declaration for a Japan-France partnership for Nuclear Energy and Energy Policy*' in 2011 and the establishment of the first Japan-France Foreign Ministers' Dialogue in 2012 are clear witnesses of this change.

The relations went even further under Prime Minister Abe, reaching a high peak in cooperation, especially in the regional context. It is during these years that in each country documents and discursive practices become similar. The point of view on the importance of the Asia-Pacific region and the concern for the Chinese growth start to converge. Unsurprisingly, in May 2013, during the summit between the foreign ministers of the two countries, Kishida outlined the common interests in the stability of the Asia-Pacific region referring to France's territories in the Pacific Ocean (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2013). In July of the same year, on the occasion of the visit of President Hollande to Japan, the relationship between the two countries was elevated to an 'exceptional' partnership with the reaffirmation of cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region. The Japan-France Foreign and Defense Ministers' Dialogue was launched and it was held for the first time in 2014. Abe's revision of the security apparatus of Japan and its defense posture in order to fulfill a 'proactive contribution to peace' made it possible to boost the synergy between the two countries. Moreover, as France's posture about Asia-Pacific and the security of SLOCs became closer to the Japanese view, the government of Japan probably considered improving its cooperation with the partner in military exercises and the defense production. In 2014, Japan took part in the French-led military exercise called '*Croix du Sud*' held in New Caledonia every two years. In the same year, bilateral consultations on cybersecurity-related issues started. Interoperability and coordination between Japan's Self Defense Forces and France's army were subsequently strengthened by the participation in multilateral exercises like *Jeanne D'Arc' Mission* and '*La Perouse*'. The stipulation of the transfer of defense equipment and technology agreement in 2016 and the conclusion of the acquisition

and cross servicing agreement in 2018 established a new legal framework that confirmed Japan's and France's willingness to build up a concrete cooperation in the field of security.

Finally, from 2016 maritime security, in particular related to the Chinese Seas, and its safeguard from Beijing's predatory behave match in both discursive practices, thereby Abe's 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy' initiative in 2016 was favourably welcomed by France, which was one of the first countries among European Union Member States to adopt a strategy and to declare its commitment in the region. Furthermore, the renovation of the new partnership in 2019 placed a significant emphasis on the securitisation of this strategic space, the enhancement of liberal values and maritime security resulting in the establishment of a Japan-France Comprehensive Maritime Dialogue. The partnership set three main pillars of cooperation: maritime security, climate change and the environment and biodiversity, and quality infrastructure (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2019). The dossier prepared on the occasion of *'Jeanne D'Arc' Mission* in 2020 by the French government made clear the strategic importance of the exercise to affirm its presence in the Indo-Pacific (Ministère des Armées 2020). Similarly, the transit of the French Navy in the South China Sea in 2021 was in line with the speech given the same year by the Ministry of Armies, Florence Parly. She expressed her fear of China's aggressivity and disrespect of international law (République Française 2021). In addition, France has been an active promoter of the European Union's involvement in the Indo-Pacific. After the invitation and the explanation of the 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy' given by the Foreign Affairs' Minister Motegi in a videoconference at the EU Foreign Affairs Council in January 2021, France, supported by the Netherlands and Germany, pushed the European Union to adopt a strategy for the cooperation in the region, which resulted in the 'EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific' approved by the European Council in April 2021 (Council of the European Union 2021). This document, together with the Strategic Partnership Agreement and the Economic Partnership Agreement entered into force on 1 February 2019, and constitutes the base for the common action between Japan and the European Union. The Union cited the document approved by the Council to reaffirm its commitment in the Indo-Pacific for a free and open sea during the trilateral exercise held in May 2021 among the European Naval Force, the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force and the Djibouti Force under ATALANTA (EU Naval Force 2021).

Conclusion

Looking at the elements and the analysis conducted above, some considerations can be drawn. From 2013, securitisation trends in Japanese and French documents start to be more similar than in previous years. The two major actors tar-

geted as security issues in Northeast Asia are North Korea and China. While the tensions related to North Korea's ballistic missiles and nuclear crisis, together with proliferation of mass-destruction weapons, were already mentioned as security threats in the White Paper of 2008, France's posture on maritime security and China's assertive policy became more rigid from 2013. Maritime security, and protection of the values and principles enunciated in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea are two important issues that the two countries targeted in relation to the Chinese Seas and the Chinese posture in it. As other countries, since Abe launched the FOIP in 2016, France has designed its own strategy to engage in the region. It has a high degree of similarity with the Japanese one and, unusually, the French government published for the first time a booklet on the same topic in the Japanese language (Ministère des Armées 2018). Moreover, France's participation into the QUAD, the platform created by Abe to promote security dialogue among India, Australia, the U.S and Japan to contain China, can be seen as further evidence of the effective impact that Japan's foreign policy under Abe had on security dynamics in North East Asia (Observer Research Foundation 2021).

As mentioned, securitisation of certain topics relies on a specific context which makes it more effective. On the one hand, China's foreign policy led by Xi Jinping has become more assertive in the region, making clear its vital interests (Zhang 2015). On the other hand, both Japan and France had several reasons to deepen their relations for the cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Both countries have strategical geo-position in the Indian and the Pacific Ocean, and they are important partners of the U.S. Japan's interest in France has been motivated by the necessity to search a new privileged partner in the European Union that could share its security interests after 'Brexit' (Tsuruoka 2018). On the other hand, France's return to *gaullo-mitterandisme* (de Gliniasty 2017), as the style guiding Macron's foreign policy has prioritised the imperative research and pursue of multilateralism against the hegemonic claims of a unipolar system shown by China. Finally, the revision of its defensive posture and the inclusion of liberal values in Japan's foreign policy have made the country a more attractive partner for France than it was before (Pajon 2018).

In conclusion, the analysis of Japan's foreign policy from 2012 to 2020 has shown how securitising moves implemented by the Japanese government, in particular under Abe's administration has had an important influence on France and to a lesser extent on the European Union. Especially the FOIP strategy, announced in 2016, and its contents spread and sprouted widely. Different actors, *inter alia* France, have decided to support the vision and the securitised issues, starting to play an active role in Northeast Asia. In the past few years, Japan and France have aligned their process of securitisation with each other. Whether the

North Korean threat was already a critical security issue, China's rise as both economic and military power and its disrespect of the UNCLOS in the Chinese Seas have been targeted as major security objectives to tackle. Japan's influence did not limit itself to France. France's position as both an Indo-Pacific nation and a member state of the European Union has produced a spill-over effect on the Union itself, which adopted its own strategy towards the region. However, as claimed by RSC theory, it can be assumed that the territorial proximity of France and Japan to the Indo-Pacific region has amplified the convergence in interests. The result is the improvement of the cooperation between the two countries especially in regard to maritime security and the promotion of liberal values.

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Russian Foot on the Central African Republic's Soil: An Example of a Tactical Alliance

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Abstract

The article evaluates cooperation between the Central African Republic and the Russian Federation from the perspective of forming a tactical alliance. The article conceptualises the term tactical alliance and the aims of both partners, and analyses how these aims were fulfilled under the umbrella of the tactical alliance. The authors evaluated four dimensions of this alliance: 1) military and security cooperation, 2) weapons delivery, 3) resources exploitation and 4) international support. The article comes to the conclusion that a tactical alliance was formed by the unofficial cooperation that started between the CAR's government and private companies backed by Moscow in 2017, while later (in 2019) the cooperation was officially established between the states and their representatives with its peak in December 2020. While the alliance may be seen as rational, the authors expect that this type of opportunistic alliance might not survive after the initial reasons for its formation disappear, especially provided that the partners are asymmetrical and geographically far from each other.

Keywords: Russian foreign policy, the Central African Republic, alliance, alliance building

Introduction

It might be undeniable that the world is becoming more unstable. Fourteen years have passed since the publication predicting the growing potential for conflict and instability in 2025 and these predictions seem to be valid (NIC 2008). Thus, it might be expected that uncertainty will rise with more potential seats of conflict. Some authors (Rapley 2006; Dobos 2021) warn that uncertainty and chaos should be a part of the new status quo affecting both traditional and newly emerging players. In this context, it is important to note that while stronger and more stable states also face difficulties, the states that are identified as failed are the most vulnerable to the volatility of the world as they often lack the internal resources to individually face the challenges (Grimm, Lemay-Hebert & Navy 2014: 205). However, the failed states are also part of the global system, even though they are usually described as subordinated entities with very limited powers to decide (Grimm, Lemay-Hebert & Navy 2014). The failed states, while not being the creators of the international order, may still have diverse tools to use globally accepted frames, in which they can seek various benefits based on the actual situation and their needs. One of these tools is seeking an alliance with a stronger state that would be able to guarantee or help the state's or the regime's survival.

The main purpose of alliances is to improve the security of its members, it is especially relevant in the case of an asymmetric alliance, where the weaker state strikes up an alliance with a stronger state that is able to provide security guarantees or deter other/internal/external actors from challenging it. While it makes sense for the weaker state to look for an ally that would be a safety guarantor for itself, it is also understandable that the stronger state should also have a motivation to ally with a weaker one. Morrow (1991) suggests that nations, particularly great powers, can use alliances to further their pursuit of changes in the foreign policy status quo and that the attractiveness of an alliance, regardless of whether it is between symmetrical or asymmetrical partners, is determined by one state's capacity to compare the benefits of the ally's ability to advance its interests to the costs of advancing the ally's interests. When the former exceeds the latter for both countries, they will be compelled to develop an alliance. Altfeld (1984) suggested that there is always a rational choice behind any alliance. The rationale behind it is the calculation of the costs and benefits of a potential alliance. According to Altfeld, military alliances lead to increased security and decreased autonomy. Weaker states who desire security guarantees from a stronger ally may be willing to offer concessions, such as deployment of military bases on its territories, natural resource extraction licenses or support in

the international arena, such as voting in the UN, among others, in return for an alliance.

Alliances can advance diverse but compatible interests (Siegle 2022). External or internal motivations for forming alliances, as well as strategic, tactical, natural and historical prerequisites, can all be considered. While certain alliances can be relatively natural as a result of a common enemy, geographic proximity or the proximity of political regimes, others may catch the international community by surprise as a result of their improbability and lack of a prior history of cooperation.

Tactical alliances are usually short-term cooperation with a concrete aim often based on personal ties, thus possibly the most straightforward kind of state cooperation. When a tactical alliance is formed, its primary goal is to counter an imminent threat or enemy that has the ability to undermine a state's most critical interests. Another reason for forming a tactical alliance is to get the maximum profit from economic cooperation in a short time. Because they allow states to handle a pressing issue, tactical alliances are often opportunistic in character, instrumental in nature and personalised in the terms of guarantees. Leaders typically justify their decisions on the basis of the current situation on the ground and the imperatives of realpolitik (Ghez 2011). One example of a tactical alliance is the growing cooperation between seemingly incompatible parties such as Russia and the Central African Republic (CAR). These two countries not only lack previous ties but are also geographically distant from each other.

For years, Russia has engaged in a series of multifaceted outreach projects (Borshchevskaya 2019) and has created a number of footholds in Africa, including in the Sahel region. The Russian presence in Africa has grown in recent years, and since 2015 Russia has signed more than 20 military cooperation agreements with African countries (Hedenskog 2019). In addition to pursuing natural resources, Russia has placed private military contractors and consultants in various African governments, including the Central African Republic. Following permission by the United Nations Security Council in 2017 (News 24 2017), which permitted Russia to supply the CAR government with light weaponry and ammunition, Russia's expansion into the war-torn and deeply impoverished Central African Republic (CAR) has become the subject of great media interest. The Russian supply of AK47s, sniper rifles and grenade launchers was delivered in the company of hundreds of 'civilian experts' from the country's defence ministry. These 'experts', according to several open-source investigations, including one conducted by the Russian opposition newspaper Novaya Gazeta, were actually mercenaries linked to the private military company Wagner, which is in turn linked to a Russian businessman with close ties to President Vladimir Putin (Severin 2019: 72).

Despite the fact that it has no prior colonial experience in Africa, Russia also challenges France's traditional presence in the region, with the goal of forming tactical alliances with regimes to whom it can provide some benefits, such as military assistance, in exchange for collaboration. Africa, thus, is a 'theatre' for Russia's geostrategic interests rather than a destination itself – a perspective reflected in the means that Russia employs (Siegle 2022).

The Central African Republic, on the other hand, which had been through a civil war with devastating consequences, was the one that approached Russia for assistance in its fight against insurgents. Russia has swiftly grown its influence in the Central African Republic (CAR) in recent years, leveraging military assistance to position itself as President Faustin-Archange Touadéra's closest supporter.

Prone to coups, rebellions and communal strife, the CAR has been engulfed in conflict for over twenty years (Bax 2021). In this context, the states allied on the basis of satisfying their immediate or short-term needs, and while Russia sought to expand its military and economic influence in Africa (WPR 2018), Touadera's regime was in need of military security to get hold of the capital city Bangui. In return, Touadéra was able to provide access to mineral resources of the CAR for Russian business interests (Bax 2021). For the time being, it is unclear how long this cooperation will survive; however, it is clear that it is a tactical alliance between a failed state in need of security assurances and a stronger state willing to provide military assistance in exchange for economic, political and military concessions. The purpose of this article is to attempt to evaluate and provide answers to the question: what are the short-term benefits of collaboration between Russia and the Central African Republic for both countries? The alliance seeking theory was utilised by the authors in order to understand the nature of this cooperative effort. In order to clearly identify the benefits and provide a solution to the research question, the authors conducted an extensive investigation of available reports and studies to identify the essential components of cooperation and to answer the research question. Also, it should be highlighted that when the authors mention one of the countries, they refer to the regimes of the state, not the entire nation, because this cooperation is tactical and takes place between the regimes of Vladimir Putin and Faustin-Archange Touadéra.

The article begins with a conceptualisation section pertaining to the tactical alliance and then moves on to discuss the strategical objectives of both countries. The last chapter examines whether the long-term strategical objectives of the discussed tactical partners may overlap in order to lay the groundwork for a long-term alliance to be established.

What is an alliance – theory and conceptualisation

Alliance seeking is the concept used in international relations to explain cooperation with long terms aims. For the purposes of this study, we use the term alliance in its broadest sense to refer to a formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more states, involving mutual expectations of policy coordination on security issues under certain conditions and to some extent (Barnet & Levy 1991: 371). Despite the fact that the tactical alliance is sometimes dismissed by alliance seeking theories, it appears to be one of the most frequently used forms of cooperation. In order to respond to the main research question, the authors decided to use the concept of a tactical alliance, which they believe is the most appropriate for explaining the grounds for cooperation amongst our chosen states. Furthermore, the development of this notion will enable us to see not just the final result of the cooperation, i.e. the short-term benefits, but also the process that the states go through in order to obtain those results. The empirical study, conducted by the authors, demonstrated how and why the alliance was formed, as well as the significant steps that were taken that resulted in benefits for both states as a result of the alliance.

Such cooperation is focused either on external threats (other states, non-state groups with outside origin or borders protection) or internal factors (threat of state failure, non-state groups with internal origin). Typically coalitions are formed either in the form of *bandwagoning* or *balancing*, and they can be either offensive, defensive or a combination of the two tactics. *Bandwagoning* is described as choosing the stronger partner to ally with while *balancing* usually means allying against the stronger ones (Piccoli 1999). Theories of balancing explain the conditions that motivate a state to balance against another state or a coalition of states (Levy 2004). However, Schweller (1994) highlighted that these two concepts do not oppose each other in terms of ensuring the highest security, but, instead, they are more complementary, and while *bandwagoning* is focused on maximising gains and obtaining values coveted, *balancing* is focused on minimising losses and protecting the values already possessed. These losses and gains are more visible with Czechowska's (2013) division of external alliance based on two principles – *stricto* (as an obligation) and *largo* (to achieve a goal). While successful balancing must be in the form of an obligation, successful bandwagoning can be used to achieve a goal.

On the other hand tactical alliances, as the definition suggests, are created to tackle the short-term tactical goal, an imminent threat or to gain immediate benefits in line with the state's vital interests (Ghez 2011: 6). The tactical alliances are pragmatic and negotiated to achieve concrete objectives even if the states share no previous history of cooperation or alliance (Abdel Aziz 2019). A tactical alliance is created based on shared interests and/or shared enemies. This means

that whenever the threat to one of the members disappears, changes or is redefined, the alliance in its primary way has no reason to be viable. This also means that a tactical alliance does not preclude conflict between the members either in the future or during the existence of the alliance. A good example of it was the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact between the USSR and the Nazi regime. On the other hand, a tactical alliance can be part of a wider and broader strategy, especially when one member of the coalition is incomparably stronger (Ghez 2011: 6).

To summarise, a tactical alliance is a coalition formed in order to counter a specific threat for both (if it is a coalition of two) parties. It is practical, usually short-term, and has clearly defined objectives. After achieving the goals which the alliance was formed for, there is a low likelihood that the alliance will survive, and in the worst-case scenario, the former allies may become antagonistic to one another. On the other hand, when the threat persists, the possibility of creating a long term strategic alliance is raised. In our case, both states have different but complementary goals to form an alliance. Russia's aim is to ensure success in three domains 1) resource exploitation, 2) military cooperation and arms export and 3) the CAR's backup or abstention in voting against Russia in the international arena. In return, Russia ensures the fragile statehood of the Central African Republic headed by F. Touadéra, while offering independence to France and the possibility of delivering resources to the global market. The statehood of the CAR is endangered by non-state groups, who are controlling the majority of the CAR's territory. As the following paragraphs show, the alliance is beneficial for both actors and it has the potential to become a strategic alliance with a very low possibility of conflict between two involved parties. This may happen only under the circumstances that the essential conditions endangering both parties interest persist. Otherwise, the alliance has a very low possibility of surviving.

The history of bilateral relationships

The USSR established relations with the Central African Republic in the 1960s after the country obtained independence from France. Relationships between the two countries were particularly favourable under the reign of the self-proclaimed emperor Bokassa, who was collaborating with the governments of the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the abolition of the bipolar order resulted in a stalemate in ties.

The first indication of incumbent President Touadéra's willingness to work with the Russian Federation as a partner can be traced back to 2017 when Russia played a prominent role in the UN Security Council's discussion and relaxation of the arms embargo (France 24 2020) on the CAR. Since 2017, many sources (Fasanoti 2022; Fabricius 2022; Parens 2022; Ramani 2021) have indicated that a private military corporation (the Wagner group) had been conducting oper-

ations in the country. The summit in Sochi, Russia, in October 2019, with 43 leaders from African countries and Russian President Vladimir Putin, however, marked a watershed moment in the development of relations between Russia and the Central African Republic. The president of the Central African Republic, Faustin-Archange Touadéra, was in attendance to represent his country. The existence of strong ties was demonstrated during the uprising in the Central African Republic prior to the presidential elections in December 2020, when the administration directly requested assistance from Russia and Rwanda (Roland 2020; BBC 2020a, 2021). Moreover, in order to foster better relations, the Central African Republic revoked its recognition of Kosovo in 2019 (Travers 2019; Sputnik 2019) and abstained from voting during the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, according to a press release (Cascais 2022).

The CAR perspective

The Central African Republic is one of the world's poorest countries and a prime example of a failed state. Its level of stability is declining since it is located in an unstable region and is controlled by a dozen fighting military-political forces. One of the key prerequisites for failure in the Central African Republic is the recent civil war. Despite gaining independence from France during Africa's Year in 1960, the CAR failed to establish a centralised administration capable of exercising power over the entire state's territory. In 2021 it was reported that the central government controls approximately one-third of the country's territory, with the remainder controlled by various rebel factions (BBC 2021). Furthermore, the country has been in a state of perpetual, low-intensity conflict since 2012. More than 600,000 refugees are estimated to have fled the country to neighbouring Cameroon, Chad and the DRC, representing more than 10% of the population (Vergnes 2020). However, these figures cannot be validated due to a lack of official statistics and the central government's inability to supply such data. Since 2014, the UN operation MINUSCA has been one of the largest UN missions, employing around 12,000 people (UN Peacekeeping 2020). Seleka (and former Seleka groups), Anti-Balaka, MLCJ, MPC and 3R are among the most well-known rebel factions that are or have participated in the destabilisation of the Central African state (IPIS 2018). However, the infra-fractional condition is likewise unstable, and certain coalitions are transient (IPIS 2018).

Regarding the concept of relative peace highlighted by President Touadéra in a few interviews and speeches, the CAR President ensures that peace and stability are at the heart of the Central African Republic's national interests, as seen by his UN speeches between 2017 and 2019 (Touadéra 2017, 2019). The President expressly requested assistance from the world community in training his security forces in order to restore stability to the country and reclaim control of

the entire area under the supervision of international forces (Touadéra 2017), similar phrases about his will to protect his citizens by all means he repeated in France's 24 interview in 2021 (France 24 2021).

Given that a sovereign state's capital is the cornerstone of its existence, its importance is so high that the struggle for it brings together a diverse range of opposition parties against the government. The same may be said for the revolutions that have occurred in the run-up to the presidential elections at the end of 2020 (The African Report 2021). Initially, the regime accused the previous president, Bozzize, of eroding national unity and plotting to destabilise the country with the help of France (Roger & Dougueli 2021). These feelings are based on previous French actions. The region remains strategically important for France, but with Russia's expanding presence, France's influence is being challenged. Having great clout over its former colony, France was able to organise a coup d'état in 1979, when the conditions for possible cooperation between Khadhafi's Libya and self-proclaimed emperor Bokassa arose. Furthermore, France has intervened in the country numerous times, the most recent being in 2012 (Sundberg 2019). In this context, it is necessary to mention that, unlike France, Russia is not perceived as a potential disrupting force but as a party interested in mutually beneficial cooperation, such as security insurance in return for economic benefit.

Another challenge to the state is posed by several organisations that dominate different regions of the country. Each of these groups seeks to build its own, independent from the central government administrative unit. The Republic of Logone, which declared unilateral secession in 2015, is the most notorious. Despite this, Louisa Lombard suggested that the region's secession was merely a ruse to garner international attention and discussions ahead of the presidential elections later that year (Aljazeera 2015). According to this viewpoint, the existence of groups is not restricted, and territorial ownership is dynamic. Such a problem, however, is viewed as a danger to national unity and territorial integrity. Furthermore, during his UN speech, Touadéra cited the arms embargo and a lack of well-equipped security forces as the key obstacles to protecting his own territory (Touadéra 2019).

When the CAR's administration sought Russian assistance during the turbulence preceding the presidential elections in December 2020, the world media was taken aback. While the western media speculated about why the CAR's president asked for Russian assistance, President Touadéra mentioned in one of his interviews that his country had enormous needs both in terms of security and equipment as well as when it came to the training of police officers, gendarmes and forest rangers (Olivier 2021a). He also mentioned that the CAR asked for assistance from all countries of goodwill and also from the EU but it was Russia who responded. In the same interview, the president emphasised that his

country needed peace more than anything else and the agreements with Russia were a means to ensure it and not allow the country to plunge into civil war once again. Thus, in just the three years since the signing of a military cooperation agreement between these two countries in March 2018 (Hedenskog 2018), Russia has become one of the major pillars of the Central African Republic's security, while simultaneously benefiting from resource extraction from the country. It is unclear if Russia chose to benefit from this relationship just for economic reasons or to gain political leverage; yet, its very existence challenges France's dominance in the minds and hearts of Africans (Meagher 2015).

Despite Russia's growing military and economic presence in the region, President Touadéra frequently portrays Russia as the 'helping hand' that ensures the state's security by sending weaponry, training soldiers and calming volatile regions with its own military detachment. In such an environment, Russia was positioned by the ruling elites as the external stability guarantee with the international community's approval.

The Russian perspective

The continent of Africa plays an interesting role in Russian foreign policy despite its geographical distance from Moscow. Russian diplomats were able to establish diplomatic ties with both South Africa and Ethiopia at the end of the nineteenth century (Besenyo 2019), avoiding the Scramble for Africa and competing with the British Empire in the strategically important Suez Canal region (Besenyo 2019). The Soviet Union focused its diplomatic efforts on Egypt, Northern Africa and Lusophone countries. Because Africa is not seen to be a critical direction of Russian foreign policy, the Russian foreign policy toward the continent will be characterised by a sinusoid of interest and withdrawal.

The Russian economy, on the other hand, is heavily reliant on the costs of natural resources and their price on the global market. Being one of the world's biggest exporters of natural resources, Russia's foreign policy considers Africa to be a zone where collaboration with African states may be mutually beneficial in the long run, given the Western world's reliance on natural resources in general. Russia is concerned that African countries may cut the cost of natural resources, which would result in economic troubles for the country. The reason why Russia is attempting to gain control over those resources while simultaneously providing mutually beneficial cooperation to the leaders of African states becomes more understandable when viewed from this perspective. Possible cooperation will gain Russia the ability to exert influence over the countries that have natural resources while maintaining control over the number of resources produced and their price on the market, allowing Russia to benefit both politically and economically (Fitumi & Abramova 2010).

Following its withdrawal from Africa in the 1990s, Russia was able to reclaim its former position in the continent at the start of the new millennium. The period where Russia was referred to by the African press as 'a country that turned back to the continent' (Besenyo 2019: 134) was followed by the period when embassies and consulates started to reopen between 2001 and 2005. However, even after returning to the continent, the Central African Republic did not rank well among the countries that comprised Russia's newly constituted African policy vector. According to the overviewing strategic paper (Fitumi & Abramova 2010), the cooperation between Russia and the Central African Republic was not even addressed – strategic countries were mostly petrol producing countries from North Africa (Egypt, Libya, Algeria), Guinea Gulf (Angola, Nigeria) and countries with previous strong political ties such as Guinea (Conakry). In this case, the cooperation and even alliance between Russia and the CAR have emerged as a completely new phenomenon.

After the relaxation of the arms embargo on the CAR, the UN Security Council approved a Russian training mission (Lister, Shukla & Ward 2019), though it did not specify nor approve the deployment of PMCs (Private Military contractors). In early 2018, Russia delivered not only weapons, but also, as they were called, 'instructors' to train local cadres to use weapons that Russia supplied to the CAR. The deliveries were carried out within the framework of the decision of the UN Security Council Resolution N 2339 (2017) on the CAR. As of August 2018, Russian specialists had trained six hundred military personnel of the Central African Armed Forces and the Presidential Guard. In March 2018, the Russian Embassy in the Central African Republic reported on the graduation ceremony of 200 Central African military personnel who had completed a two-month military training course under the guidance of Russian instructors in the Berengo camp, the former residence of Emperor Bokassa, Lobaye Prefecture (Zajcev, Maslov & Timofeeva 2018). Allegedly, Russia also trained CAR troops in Sudanese camps (Borshchevskaya 2020). According to an investigation by the French news magazine *L'Obs* (Bouessel & Sari 2018), the trainers in the CAR are employed by the Sewa Security Service, which is, in turn, the daughter company of a St. Petersburg firm (created in November 2017) called Lobaye Invest (the region just outside the CAR capital).

The CAR became a precedent to demonstrate how relatively easy and cheap Russia exercised its global power status in a remote country. Mercenaries from the Wagner group, who are called instructors by Russia, were deployed in the country along with Russian security advisers who were installed as the president's top security advisers (Olivier 2021b) with direct payment through official contracts for resources exploitation (Bax 2021; Ramani 2021). The ongoing consideration of the Russian official military base in the country (Daily Sabah 2020)

may be a sign that the Russian presence in the country is not just a military experiment but rather Russia found in the CAR a new window of opportunity within the globally accepted narrative of the pioneering fronts and the new scramble for Africa and decided to compete with France (Bach 2013). The FOI report mentions that since 2015 Russia's main interest in renewing its engagement in Africa has involved arms exports, imports of natural resources and the projection of power (Hedenskog 2018).

The global perception of Russia as a competing force to France in the Central African Republic is not limited to the military and security sector. For instance, reports highlight that Russia has strong interests in resource exploitation including tropical woods, gold, uranium and diamonds. In July 2018, the Africa Intelligence paper reported that Russia received the rights to develop the Ndassima (Matthis 2021) goldfield, one of the largest goldfields in the country, in exchange for ensuring security in the surrounding area. According to an African news service (Marten 2019a), in June 2018 Lobaye Invest received a three-year gold prospecting license and in July an additional one-year gold and diamond prospecting license by the CAR Ministry of Mines. The rumours about Russian involvement intensified after the first Summit Russia-Africa in November 2019 held in Sochi. The story behind it was framed as dominant Russia and submissive African states. What may be significant is that such framing serves the national interest of Russia, which is to be globally perceived as a power competing with another superpower (France) in its sphere of influence (Marten 2019b).

Discussion: what are the mutual benefits?

The following paragraphs evaluate the cooperation from the perspective of the tactical alliance, how it was formed and what benefits it brings to both parties. As we have seen from the cases, two states have enough prerequisites to form a tactical alliance that would be beneficial for both of them. As the authors mentioned, a tactical alliance is a coalition formed in order to achieve a specific security aim or to counter a specific threat for both parties. It is practical, usually short-term and has clearly defined objectives. The aim of this part is to define and evaluate the objectives of the cooperation and threats for both parties. We evaluate what the benefits are for the protagonists involved and what obstacles they are facing. The authors decided to divide those benefits into the following categories: 1) protection of the regime against imminent threats, 2) arms and weapon delivery and military training, 3) natural resources exploitation and 4) cooperation in the international arena. Each of these categories is later divided into the time period based on crucial events: 1) Agreements negotiated in Khartoum, 2) Summit in Sochi, 3) the turmoil before presidential elections.

Between 2015 and 2017 Russia signed over 20 military cooperation agreements with African states, the Central African Republic being among them. Moreover, in 2016 Valery Zakharov became the national security adviser for President Touadéra (Hedenskog 2018). Russian support largely assists President Touadéra's administration in asserting and maintaining domestic control. It enables it to continue outsourcing its security apparatus while also protecting him from another coup. Locally dubbed 'Russian instructors', Wagner men fought against rebels in Bambari, a town in which they had been documented training CAR troops in anti-rebel tactics (El-Badawy et al. 2022). In 2019, Moscow brokered a peace agreement between the government of the Central African Republic (CAR) and armed rebel groups (Stronski 2019). According to M. Olivier from The African Report, this happened in Khartoum and the issue was to broker a deal, otherwise, they are asked to fight with rebels. Such a deal could be created based on a shared division of resource exploitation, in short – the government, the rebels and the Wagner group would each gain access to some part of the resources. The Khartoum Agreement was thus signed on 5 February 2019 (Olivier 2021c). Another important changing point for the CAR and Russian relationship came in December 2020, when rebels formed an anti-government coalition and the former president F. Bozize was accused of supporting them. As a reaction to this, incumbent President Touadéra's government asked for help directly from Russia and Rwanda, who had the biggest deployment in the MINUSCA mission. The Russian security presence in the country ensured its critical role in the talks and allowed it to take over the mantle of security provider from France (Plichta 2019). Many other Francophone countries in the region implied that this Russian strategy had been successful as can be seen also in the recent (2021-2022) example of Mali (Thomson 2021). On the other hand, Russia's limited experience in the Central African Republic and the present narrative depicting it as France's rival, yet without a colonial legacy, is giving Russia a scope for manoeuvre. From this perspective, Russia has the potential to be perceived as a tactical partner not only in the Central African Republic but also in other countries in the region and to try to restore the influence and the reputation that the Soviet Union once had in Africa. Another advantage for President Touadéra is that it raises concerns among the other Western backers, which gives the CAR space for leverage. The CAR's more established partners have responded to Russia's interest by expanding their own support for the country. In an effort to counter Russian influence, they have increased the amount of development assistance offered to Bangui. Thus, this limited Russian military involvement gives President Touadéra the ability to have immediate, even if the short-term, benefit of retaining his power. Additionally, it drew the interest of the world towards its country and allowed Touadéra to manoeuvre.

When it comes to military aid and weapons delivery, the implications for both states are clear. For Russia, the delivery of small arms under a bilateral defense accord with official status to train the army is a small price to pay to gain mining rights in Africa amid President Vladimir Putin's push to revive Soviet-era influence on the continent (The Moscow Times 2021), whereas for the CAR's government it is an additional aid to combat those who are against it, in times when there is a UN resolution sanctioning the sale of weapons to the CAR for other international arms producers. Between 2014-19, the African continent – excluding Egypt – accounted for 16% of Russia's major arms exports, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (BBC 2020b). It is thought that more than 1,000 Wagner troops have been deployed to the Central African Republic (CAR). Moscow also dispatched military equipment, including rifles, rocket launchers and heavily armoured vehicles, to the capital Bangui in 2018 (El-Badawy et al. 2022). The notorious Wagner group has been accused of severe human rights violations (Reuters 2021) in the CAR, yet as long as the so-called military advisers provide support for the incumbent president, train the president's military servicemen and repress its rivals, the violations go without repercussions. Since December 2020, the Central African government has been relying more on official interstate cooperation and trying to hide the involvement of Private Military Contractors. The use of non-state actors to solve certain tasks during armed conflicts is a common practice, and Russia can hardly be called a pioneer in this area. However, unlike typical mercenaries, who are often seen as hired guns, PMCs operate as a more risk-averse option for ensuring the security of territory and protecting lucrative commercial relationships and contracts.

The arrival of the Wagner group which is registered in the CAR under the name of the company Sewa Securities, overlapped with the Russian Lobaye Invest company being awarded diamond and gold mining licenses. The company has an affiliation with the Kremlin-linked oligarch Evgeny Prigozhin, who is reportedly funding the Wagner group. Apparently, Russia's alliance with the CAR has an opportunistic character. Russia's economy lacks some resources which are abundantly found in the African states, including the CAR. An opponent of the current government says (Olivier 2019) that more than 100 permits in the gold and diamond sectors were granted to the Russians without consultation with the National Assembly. However, in one of his interviews for France 24 in 2021 President Touadéra mentioned that the resource mining sector was free for everyone to enter (France 24 2021). Resource extraction in return for limited military aid, which is, as Paul Stronski (BBC 2020), a senior fellow at the US-based Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, mentioned, self-financing through the work by guarding key resources, is the basis of the alliance not just between Russia and the CAR but it also appears to be

working tactics in Russian foreign policy regarding other African states. By holding mining licenses for natural resources, Russia not only has the ability to use those resources for its own purposes, but it also gets some leverage to control the prices of those resources on the global market (Fitumi & Abramova 2010). This mutually beneficial approach, when Russia is helping with the president's status quo protection while having control over mining fields and mining concessions was confirmed at the Summit in Sochi at the end of 2019. Given Europe's reliance on natural resources, this strategy, though not directly harmful, has the potential to undermine price stability. An increase in its influence in the Sahel region allows Russia to exert greater control over human migration routes. During periods of antagonism between Russia and Europe, this might also be utilised as possible leverage to generate humanitarian and/or political crises in Europe.

And last but not least, establishing short-term alliances with African countries, such as the Central African Republic in this case, allows the Kremlin to strengthen its position on the international stage. The African continent contains 55 countries, which create more than one-fourth of the UN members. Even though they do not compose a homogenous bloc, Russian involvement in certain of them might be an important part of their liberating and anti-post-colonial narratives. Despite other mentioned forms of cooperation, the case of the Central African Republic is the latest one and was directly connected with the exchange of the ambassador. According to M. Olivier, this change happened at the beginning of 2019, with the appointment of Vladimir Titorenko, who is able to keep a good relationship with individual representatives of the government (Olivier 2021b). This change of orientation in the Central African Republic's external policy towards Russia was recently demonstrated during the UN vote in the wake of the Ukraine invasion in March 2022. Many African countries, including the Central African Republic (CAR), refrained from voting against Russia, inadvertently supporting the Russian position and demonstrating how African preferences have shifted (Adeoye 2022). In the case of the Central African Republic, it might be directly observed also in their withdrawal of the recognition of Kosovo without any justification for derecognition (Travers 2019; Sputnik 2019).

Conclusion

To sum up, the CAR-Russian Federation relationship could be described as a tactical asymmetrical alliance that gained importance in a short period of time. Starting as a personal alliance between the president and representatives from the PMC in 2017, it has since evolved into a tactical collaboration between the two countries in a few key areas.

The authors of this article attempted to identify the major steps associated with the formation of a tactical alliance using the example of the Russia-Central African Republic collaboration. As a consequence of their investigation, the authors came to the conclusion that the identification of crucial reasons for collaboration would be the first step in bringing the states (even those with a short history of cooperation) closer. It is necessary to build informal cooperation with non-state entities, such as enterprises, as a next step before moving further. The third step is the formation of formal interstate relations, which is mostly accomplished through the participation of specific individuals. And the final step, when the core problem has been resolved, is either the breakup of the tactical alliance or the advancement of cooperation to a higher (strategic) level, which would eventually result in it becoming more institutionalised and less personal.

While dealing with rebels who endangered the Central African Republic's sovereignty was critical for the Central African Republic's regime, it was critical for Russia to swap limited military aid for resource mining concessions. With the passage of time, Russian-born military professionals and security consultants began to be appointed to key strategic posts inside the president's inner circle. The most well-known of them is Valery Zakharov. In 2018, the mining concessions were handed to the Lobaye group as the major protagonist with the goal of maintaining security.

Official Russian representatives' engagement started in early 2019, according to secondary sources, with the appointment of the new ambassador Titorenko. As a result, Touadéra participated actively in the Sochi Summit at the end of 2019. On the other hand, when the Central African Republic waived its recognition of Kosovo as an independent state, this international collaboration was exploited for Russian profit.

In the following years, the goal of transforming the relationship between two governments to an internationally accepted level became clear. The probable apex of those measures may be traced back to December 2020, when Touadéra's administration openly requested Russian assistance in the face of a rebel coalition attacking Bangui, the country's capital.

In this case, we can conclude that relations developed on the premise that Russia, seeking opportunities to expand its influence in Africa and obtain concessions in the exploitation of natural resources, took advantage of the proposal of the Central African Republic's president F. Touadéra, who was looking for a tactical ally to outsource its security concerns while maintaining his presidency. This sort of tactical alliance, on the other hand, incorporates elements of both bandwagoning and balancing techniques.

President Touadéra benefits from bandwagoning tactics to maximise the benefits for himself, while also balancing the French influence with the Russian

presence. With increased presence, the relationship evolved into an interstate asymmetrical alliance that supports mutually beneficial collaboration on both sides rather than immediately facing a direct threat.

The cooperation between Russia and the Central African Republic, in our opinion, is tactical and has limited potential to grow into a strategic alliance. Because the Central African Republic will always prioritise state survival and Russia will always prioritise potential dangers in its immediate neighbourhood, a stable partnership is difficult to materialise.

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Thematic section
The Russia-Ukraine War: Why the Conflict Was Not Prevented

Can 'Realists' and 'Hawks' Agree? Half-measures and Compromises on the Road to Invasion of Ukraine

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Abstract
The debate on the failure of the efforts to avert the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 is dominated by two narratives presented as mutually exclusive. On the one hand, 'hawks' chastise the West for failing to forcefully confront Russian adventurism earlier. On the other hand, 'realists' criticise the West's overreach in efforts to incorporate Ukraine into the Western structures. Both views implicitly contend that there was only one way to prevent the war. This paper argues that those positions are, in fact, not incompatible and failure to prevent war lies in the habitual mismatch between strategic goals and resources, implicitly recognised by both sides of the debate. Ambitious goals and meagre resources constituted a middle-of-the-road compromise, inadvertently increasing the risk of the war by encouraging Russia to take the opportunity to challenge the West's weakly backed ambitions. In an attempt to draw some tentative lessons, the paper concludes by exploring some hypotheses on why such mismatches between goals and resources occur and persist.

Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine, also described as a dramatic escalation of the war in Donbas ongoing ever since 2014, shocked much of the world, if not necessarily most international relations scholars[1]. Given the incredible and mounting human and economic costs of the conflict, as well its transformative potential for European, if not global, political order, it inevitably raises much discussion on how such a catastrophe could have been averted. Unhelpfully, the stakes of the failure often make the discussion an exercise in finger pointing.

Two notable and seemingly contradictory positions on causes and, consequently, the possibility of prevention of the war emerged. One, promoted by those who could be described as 'hawks', emphasises the imperialistic bent of the Russian leadership, which was determined to dominate its neighbours, if not outright re-establish the whole of Eastern Europe as its sphere of influence. Those subscribing to this view argue that the war is a consequence of failure to adequately punish previous Russian transgressions and deter its ambitions toward Ukraine. The other position, for simplicity ascribed in this text to 'realists', touts reasonability (if not necessarily legitimacy) or Russian concerns about the expansion of Western influence in its neighbourhood and accordingly argues that war could have been averted if the West did not suffer from hubris of attempting to expand into Russia's neighbourhood.

The viciousness of the clash between the two views is all the more futile given the recency of the event and paucity of available information. While it is hardly an option to wholly postpone the debate about the causes of the invasion and possibilities for averting it until historians sink their teeth into the current events, it is important to stress the inherent limits of attempting to draw lessons from current and at the time of writing still ongoing events.[2] With this caveat in mind, this paper attempts to contribute to the debate on the failure to avert the invasion of Ukraine.

Three further important caveats need to be noted before previewing the argument structure of the paper. The first is the normative dimension of the debate

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1   TRIP project snap survey of US IR scholars conducted between 16 December 2021 and 27 January 2022 showed that 56.1 percent scholars expected Russia to use military force against Ukrainian military forces or additional parts of the territory of Ukraine where it was not currently operating, with only 22.2 percent being of the opposite opinion (Entringer Garcia Blanes 2022).

2   Additionally, given the recency of the events, the paper to a large degree relies on non-peer reviewed literature, both regarding the latest information on invasion and reasoning of Russian side and on views of different camps on causes of war.

about possible war prevention. While the war has wrought fearsome costs and destruction in Ukraine, its long-term consequences are difficult to predict. The choice between compromising one's (vital) interests or fighting a costly war in an attempt to preserve them is a right of the Ukrainian people. While this article attempts to explore ways in which war could have been prevented, it does not try to ascribe normative value to those possibilities.

The second caveat concerns the complexity of causal antecedents of such a momentous event. It is important to recognise that there might have been many counterfactual scenarios in which war would not happen, and any attempt to discern all would be analytically both challenging and likely futile. In order to limit the scope and provide meaningful insight, the paper focuses rather narrowly on a particular aspect of the Western (grand)strategic approach to the integration of Ukraine into the West.[3] But this should not be conflated with a claim of exclusivity of discussed possibilities for avoiding the Russian invasion.

Finally, the third caveat concerns the possible judgmental nature of the posited argument regarding the Western political decision of the last decades. More often than not, scholarly work benefits from hindsight denied to those making the decisions. While the arguments posited in this paper can be read as a damning judgement of past failures, it should be kept in mind that those making the decisions cannot predict all of their outcomes (Garfinkle 2003).

With those caveats in mind, the primary goal of the paper is to show that while the debate between 'realists' and 'hawks' became quite vicious in the aftermath of the invasion, their arguments are, in fact, not as incompatible and irreconcilable as it may seem, as they share the same complaint about lack of investment of the West into containing Russia and supporting Ukraine. The key difference lies in optimism or lack thereof on the question of whether such investment into reaching stated goals was feasible and desirable prewar. Beyond this argument, the paper argues that failure to address this mismatch between the aims and resources likely bears significant responsibility for the failure to avert the war. Lastly, the paper offers several tentative hypotheses on why this mismatch was not addressed that can guide future research.

The first section discusses recent scholarly explanations of the causes of war or failure to prevent it, respectively, highlighting the (in)compatibility of those explanations and stressing their underlying assumptions. The second section introduces what is known or can be assumed so far about the invasion, drawing implications of those assumptions for the possibility of averting the war. The

3   It is obviously a major oversimplification to treat 'the West' as a single entity. Nonetheless, the West is used in this work on three grounds. First is the need for simplification given the scope of the posed issue and limited space. Second is the relatively common reference to 'the West' in the broader debate on the issue. The third is that pursuit of Western unity in policy towards Ukraine and Russia was a significant feature of the policy and negotiations before and indeed during the invasion.

third and last section illustrates the mismatch between ambition and action in the West's policy towards Ukraine and discusses tentative hypotheses on why this mismatch occurred and persisted. The conclusion attempts to draw some tentative lessons for current and future Western policies.

Realists and others

As was noted in the introduction, two distinct broad narratives about the possibility of averting the war dominate the discussion after the invasion onset. Both are worthy of closer inspection as both arguably offer important insights. Ironically, both sides also radiate a notable degree of feelings of validation of their long-running views (e.g. Walt 2022c).

The first could be broadly described as a realist narrative, which sees attempts to integrate Ukraine into Western structures as a step too far bound to invite the wrath of Russia, as great powers seek spheres of influence in their neighbourhood in pursuit of security. True to the realist roots of this line of thinking, the question of the legitimacy of the security concerns is not at the forefront of this narrative. The narrative focuses on the predictability of the Russian opposition and the lengths to which Russia is ready to go to prevent the slipping of Ukraine towards the West. Russia is seen as intervening in Ukraine out of genuine concern for its security, irrespective of what other states might think of the validity of those concerns.

Within the narrative, Western efforts to push the boundaries of integration into the Western structures ever further eastward to Russia's borders was strategic folly based on idealism and liberalism, on which the West and, in particular, the United States should not embark as it was bound to engulf the United States in conflict with Russia. The Russian invasion is one of the products of this liberal hubris and failure to heed realist warnings. As succinctly put by Stephen M. Walt:

> That Putin bears direct responsibility for the invasion is beyond question, and his actions deserve all the condemnation we can muster. But the liberal ideologues who dismissed Russia's repeated protests and warnings and continued to press a revisionist program in Europe with scant regard for the consequences are far from blameless. Their motives may have been wholly benevolent, but it is self-evident that the policies they embraced have produced the opposite of what they intended, expected, and promised. And they can hardly say today that they weren't warned on numerous occasions in the past. (Walt 2022b).

Policy prescriptions based on this view of the situation were largely consistent before and after the invasion. Russia pursues its security and can be

reasoned and compromised with. The prime suggested accommodation of the Russian interests to be made – consistently with the causal claims on causes of conflict – would be ruling out Ukrainian membership in NATO (e.g. Charap 2022). Those compromises would be detrimental to Ukraine, which is something not lost on those subscribing to this view.[4] But those compromises would be preferable to war and a breakdown in relations between the West and Russia (e. g. Charap 2021). The fact that those compromises would undercut the liberal project of NATO and EU expansion is indeed, from this perspective, a feature, not a bug. The whole basic line, once again consistent with realist arguments about a number of other issues, is that the ambitions should be limited to avoid hubris.

Notably, one important feature of the view is its inherently particularistic view, where the recommendations cannot be viewed as universally valid and best for all actors – and the realist narrative centres strongly on benefits and drawbacks for the United States, which obviously wins it little support in Eastern Europe in particular. This is a feature in which this narrative differs markedly from the other group.

The second group can be roughly described as 'hawks', who see current Russia as an imperialist state committed to the domination of their neighbours. Contrary to the realist view, they see security interests stated by Russia as illegitimate or even fraudulent. They see Russian ambitions regarding Ukraine as another step in fulfilling Russian imperialist ambition, which extends further to restore control not only over post-soviet countries but also former satellites in Central Europe. Many subscribing to this view also see the conflict as a confrontation between autocratic Russia and democratic neighbours, often claiming fear of the success of democratic Ukraine as one of the rationales for the conflict (e. g. Applebaum in Ketlerienė 2022).

Similarly to the realist account, the 'hawkish' account also stresses the continuation of Moscow's aggression as predictable, albeit for different reasons, and feels the same degree of validation of their warnings about the aggressive Russian imperialism. If realists criticise the Western ambition, which in their view amounts to hubris, lamenting the misguided policies of last decades, hawks are no more content with the Western approach to Russia in previous years, criticising the lack of effort and investment in fulfilling those rightful ambitions.

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4   As noted by Mearheimer in an interview: 'In an ideal world, it would be wonderful if the Ukrainians were free to choose their own political system and to choose their own foreign policy' (Mearsheimer in Chotiner 2022); or by Stephen M. Walt in an article: 'the war has demolished the belief that war was no longer "thinkable" in Europe and the related claim that enlarging NATO eastward would create an ever- -expanding "zone of peace." Don't get me wrong: It would have been wonderful had that dream come true, but it was never a likely possibility and all the more so given the hubristic way it was pursued' (Walt 2022b).

The particular feature of the Western policy approach with scorn by hawks is the lack of forceful response to what they see as a long line of conflicts demonstrating the aggressive nature of imperial Russia. To cite Vakhitov and Zaika, 'For almost three decades, Western leaders have approached successive acts of Russian imperial aggression as isolated incidents and have sought to downplay their significance while focusing on the economic advantages of continuing to do business with Moscow. This has only served to encourage the Kremlin. The Chechen wars of the early post-Soviet years were followed by the 2008 invasion of Georgia and the 2014 seizure of Crimea. The current war is the latest milestone in this grim sequence, but it will not be the last' (Vakhitov & Zaika 2022).

Notably, the gap between forceful rhetoric and subsequent lacklustre action is also noted among grievances. 'Throughout the past few decades, we have frequently heard similarly tough talk from Western leaders whenever they have found themselves confronted by the reality of Russian aggression. Unfortunately, the promised responses are never actually decisive. Instead of deterring the Kremlin, such posturing undermines the credibility of the West' (Khidasheli 2022). While those complaints regarding Western conduct towards Russia are general, the same can be said about the case of Ukraine in particular, which should have received more support in advance of the possible Russian invasion. As described by Anne Applebaum in an interview, 'We could do more. We should have done more already. In other words, I think preparing Ukraine for this kind of invasion is a project that should have started seven years ago, the time to start this preparation was in 2015. It wasn't done. The Obama administration didn't take it seriously enough, the Trump administration was not interested in defending Ukraine. And although there has been military aid going into Ukraine, I don't think it's anything like the scale that was needed' (Applebaum in Ketlerienė 2022).

Based on the brief introduction above, it is true that the two views are truly contradictory both in the realm of their causal theory behind the Russian invasion of Ukraine and their policy prescriptions. But they share important and largely unrecognised common ground in one particular analytical insight. Both sides bemoan the gap between Western ambitions and rhetoric on one side and actions on the other side. While realists consider the ambitions and rhetoric unrealistic and misguided and suggest recalibration, hawks call for actions and resources to match the rhetoric. Importantly, a major point of disagreement between the two views is whether averting the war would actually be desirable given the future costs it might entail. But as far as the narrow focus of this article is concerned, and as is discussed below, both policy prescriptions could have possibly averted the war if applied thoroughly. But neither of the policy prescriptions was followed, and the mismatch between ambition and rhetoric on one

side and actions and resources on the other side persisted. From this perspective, the irony of both sides feeling vindication of their arguments can be seen as basically correct, as the prescriptions of neither side were actually followed.

What is known and what can be assumed

Much is not known and might not be known for the foreseeable future until the dust settles and archives open. Yet, any effort to explore the possibilities for averting war necessitates some basic empirical investigation, however preliminary, to be based upon. In contrast to the previous section, exploring (implicitly) theoretical arguments both about Russian aims and motivations and Western response, here I outline what is known and what can be reasonably assumed about the Russian motivations and calculations leading to the aggression, attempting to draw implications for possible pathways that would prevent the war.

The focus of the section is informed both by the two theoretical positions discussed previously and by the broadly rationalist framework adopted by this paper. Rationalist focus can be perceived as fundamentally limiting given the prominent role many ascribe to ideological considerations in Russian leadership's hostility towards Ukraine and ultimately in the decision to launch the full invasion. Nonetheless, the paper proceeds with this frame of analysis on the basis of three arguments.

First, both theoretical perspectives discussed in the previous section more or less assume a degree of rationality in the Kremlin. Irrespective of their diverging assumptions about motivations and intentions, both arguments about the possibility of accommodation and the possibility of deterrence inevitably presume rational calculation on the part of Russia on whether or how to pursue its aims. Secondly, and relatedly, while ideological considerations almost certainly played a significant role in both motivating the invasion and causing misperceptions leading to its early failures (as is discussed below), their role does not preclude imperfectly but still rational calculation on whether to launch the invasion. Finally, a more ideational perspective on the causes of the invasion and possibilities for its aversion are already served by other contributions to this thematic section (cf. articles by Bendix, Myshlovska and Shevtsova in this issue).

Given the rationalist framework as well as both theoretical perspectives discussed above, the empirical discussion inevitably has to focus on two closely related questions regarding the invasion. The first is the question of aims and motivations – what Russia wanted and wants to achieve through the invasion. This question is crucial both to ascertain the value of the benefit in a presumed cost-benefit analysis done in the Kremlin and to gauge the possibility of accommodation of Russian interests. The second question is about Russia's calculations and expectations regarding the course of operation, its costs and its chances of

success. The second question is crucial for ascertaining the possibility of deterring the invasion.

Uncovering the motivations and aims that led Moscow to embark on the invasion is a considerably contentious issue, which was inevitably touched on in the previous section. While there is at this point no way to establish the motivation with any kind of certainty, some basic assumptions are both necessary and possible. Three challenges make this enterprise difficult. First, it is quite unlikely that any single motivation could explain the invasion alone, and it is difficult to assign relative weight to different motivations. Second, while there is no shortage of statements of Putin and other Russian officials on the subject, many are contradictory,[5] and none can be taken at face value, especially given the widely recognised level of propaganda employed by the Kremlin both internationally and towards the domestic audience. Third, the motivations and goals of the war can shift after its start in reaction to success or failure on the battlefield and changes in both domestic and international contexts. Even if assumed to be genuine, declarations on the purpose of war after its start cannot be relied upon in determining original motivations. Despite those challenges, it is useful to view a broad spectrum of plausible motivations, not least to demonstrate the difficulty of accommodating any number of them to avert the invasion.

A recent article by Götz and Staun (2022) puts forward Russian strategic culture as a framework enabling the Russian invasion can serve as a starting point. They argue that two main pillars of Russian strategic culture, namely deep-seated fear of invasion and desire for great power status entailing sphere of influence in their combination, created space for launching the large-scale invasion of Ukraine. The utility of this framework lies in its explicit recognition of the interlinked nature of different drivers of the invasion. While two perspectives introduced in the previous section emphasise either Russian imperialism in its neighbourhood or Russian insecurity as seemingly opposing theses about Russian motivations, Götz and Staun (2022) stress the importance of a combination of fear (insecurity) and desire for great power status and sphere of influence (imperialism).

While Russian strategic culture can be seen as universal, it is also important to recognise the special place of Ukraine in particular in Russian thinking. This is given both by its size and economic importance (Götz & Staun 2022: 486-7), making it the most important of the in-between countries between the Western alliances and Russia (Charap & Colton 2018) but also by their emotional and ideological relationship (Kazharski 2022). All these motivations point, albeit pos-

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5   The clearest example of this can be seen in Putin's varying justifications for the invasion, for example differing rhetoric of his speech on 24 February 2022 citing security concerns and grievances (Putin 2022) compared to the rather imperialistic rhetoric of his remarks on 6 June 2022 (Reuters 2022).

sibly to different degrees, to the Russian desire to keep and dominate Ukraine within its sphere of influence.

In this central goal, the goals toward Ukraine are deeply intertwined with the relationship with the West, as Ukraine was an (active) subject of years of increasingly escalated competition between Russia and the West (Charap & Colton 2018; Stanovaya 2022). Dominating Ukraine within its sphere of influence is clearly seen as incompatible with Ukraine's aspirations to become a member of both NATO and the EU, which was long and loudly opposed by Russia and often reiterated both publicly and privately (e.g. Charap & Colton 2018), including in Putin's speeches before the invasion inception. Indeed, it is important to recognise the degree to which the conflict is perceived by Putin as part of the confrontation with the West more broadly (Stanovaya 2022; Hushcha 2022). The motivation for the war was, therefore, most likely to a considerable degree about Western recognition of Russia's status and perceived concerns and grievances.

One possible motivation for the invasion was relatively underplayed in the debates while it might have had important implications for the possibility of averting the war. When the boons of possible Russian military operations against Baltic countries were contemplated in the years after the seizure of Crimea, it was noted that the failure of NATO to defend 'every inch' of the territory of Baltic members would unravel the Alliance as a whole (Chang 2017; Veebel 2018: 240; cf. Shifrinson 2017). This would be a major victory for Russia and possibly one of the rationales for the operation. While Ukraine is obviously not a member of NATO, and the situation is therefore different, it should be noted that Russian success without a strong response from NATO would likely have major ramifications for the unity of the Alliance as well as the credibility of NATO's verbal commitments. While the impact would not be comparable to failure to defend member states, the risks and costs would be far lower. Efforts to call the perceived bluff of the West and especially the United States should not be discounted as one of the possible motivations for the invasion.

Possibly less contentious assumptions can be made about calculations that led Moscow to assess the invasion as a viable course of action.[6] Those can be broadly described in three distinct categories: political assumptions about Ukraine, military assumptions about the balance of forces and international assumptions about the response to the invasion. Moscow's political assumption likely was that Ukrainians were politically divided and apathetic, with low trust in politicians, parties and most of the institutions, with trust in the office

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6   While primarily possible rational sources of those assumptions are discussed below, it should be recognised that those assumptions were likely also based on ideational factors, including Putin's personal beliefs and biases regarding Ukraine, as well as the nature of Russian regime (see for example Götz & Staun 2022: 492; Gomza 2022).

of president at only 27 % and poor approval ratings of Zelensky[7] (Raynolds & Walting 2022). Militarily, Moscow likely saw its military as significantly stronger than the Ukrainian force, whose performance and progress with modernisation received mixed reviews (Grant 2021; cf. Zagorodnyuk et al. 2021), whereas the Russian military had a positive recent track record from the seizure of Crimea, intervention in Donbas and expeditionary operations in Syria (Cancian 2022). Finally, it seems likely that Russia expected a disunited and distracted West, facing a freshly incumbent government in Germany and elections in France with transatlantic relations strained by the Trump era. The West was, therefore, likely presumed by Moscow to be unable to respond with sufficient speed to a quick operation (Cancian 2022), with a follow-up response being blunted by considerable preparations for future Western sanctions (Korsunskaya & Ostroukh 2022). Needless to say, almost all of those assumptions proved partially or wholly faulty so far (see for example Johnson 2022).

What does this discussion of Russian motivations and calculations tell us about the possibility of averting the war? The most important implication is that averting the war in the roughly half a year-long runup to the invasion would likely be very difficult. There was a multitude of plausible reasons for Russia to deem some degree of control over Ukraine as a vital interest. Both an accommodation of Russian demands and deterrence of Russian invasion were made more difficult by a combination of motivations and calculations.

Deterrence was made considerably more difficult by the apparent Russian assessment of (political) weakness of both Ukraine and the West. Notably, if the assumption that Russia did not expect to fight major operations against the Ukrainian military is correct, it means that reinforcing said military with more military hardware would likely have quite a limited impact on Russian decision-making. If Russian leadership did not expect Ukrainian soldiers to fight, their hardware would not matter. In a situation where Russia apparently expected the Ukrainian state to collapse, even the presence of Western troops in tripwire capacity would possibly not be enough to deter the invasion, as Russia could have assessed that those would not be harmed in relatively bloodless special operations and would not use force against Russian forces anyway, especially in the absence of organised Ukrainian armed resistance to invasion.

Notably, if the assumption about the Russian motivation of humbling NATO is correct, repeated Western verbal commitments to Ukraine and its territorial integrity and sovereignty might have actually, in some ways, encouraged the invasion if they were assessed as a bluff or otherwise implausible by Russia. For example, NATO Defence ministers issued a statement on 16 February 2022 (only

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7   The source specifically report that Zelensky approval rating was at -34 (Raynolds & Walting 2022) but does not provide a reference point for that number and original documents are not available to the author.

eight days before the invasion commenced) that 'We reaffirm our support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders' (NATO 2022). Should NATO prove incapable of preventing the expected fait accompli (as Russia most likely assessed), it would be a significant blow to NATO's reputation and credibility and the greater the prewar verbal commitment was, the greater the reputational cost Russian success would achieve.

Accommodation of the Russian demands would, in light of those motivations and calculations, be very difficult not to speak about political plausibility in the West and Ukraine. As the relations between the West and Russia soured, stakes arguably increased in view of both sides. The assumption of a quick, easy and successful operation likely made Russia bold about its demands. If the assumptions about Russian aims and expectations are correct, it would likely take a rather momentous concession to make Russia back down militarily, possibly amounting to acceding to maximalist demands made by Moscow at the end of 2021 (Tétrault-Farber & Balmforth 2021). Not only could Russia be concerned that the stars would not align again should the West or Ukraine fail to follow through with concessions, but major accommodation of Russian demands would fulfil the possible aim of humbling the United States and the West. Note also that while discussion of accommodation often focused on their possibility from a Ukrainian perspective (e.g. Charap 2021), to avert the war, major concessions would have to be made not only by Ukraine but importantly by NATO or the West (Stanovaya 2022).

Mismatch on the road to the invasion
This last section provides an illustration of the gap between ambitions and actions; however, not through extensive empirical investigation. The first section shows this to be a relatively uncontroversial claim, and it is not an ambition of this paper to provide a comprehensive discussion of either the general history of West-Russia relations since the end of the Cold War[8] or provide an analysis of specific foreign policies of participating Western countries.[9] Moreover, given the narrow focus of the contribution, the paper does not attempt to empirically investigate whether it was actually a different policy prescription of 'realists' and 'hawks' followed by different countries which produced the compromise. Rather, the goal is to illustrate the gap mostly by further developing a case of mismatch

8   There are number of sources which provide detailed empirical examination of the breakdown of relations between Russia and the West and development of policy of both towards Ukraine. See for example Sarotte (2021) or Charap and Colton (2017).
9   There is a wealth of literature both on EU-Russia relations (see for example Romanova & David 2021) and sources and developments of policies of individual countries towards Russia, including critical actors such as Germany (e.g. Frostberg 2016, Siddi 2020) or France (e.g. Cadier 2018).

between ambition and acts through key examples and discussing some possible hypotheses on why such gaps emerge.

The best illustrative case of the gap between ambition and action is the Bucharest declaration, which is often seen as the 'original sin' by both 'hawks' and 'realists'.[10] The declaration concluded the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008 and, in response to the aspirations of Georgia and Ukraine for a Membership Action Plan (MAP), stated that 'NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO' (NATO 2008) without granting a MAP. The hawks feel that not going ahead with integrating Ukraine into NATO was the mistake leading ultimately to the 2022 invasion, while the realists contend that the resulting compromise needlessly alarmed Russia in the absence of any actual intention to follow through.

While the emptiness of the promise of membership is often reiterated nowadays, the perception of the strength of the promise was more diverse at the time. As Arbuthnot wrote at the time, '. . . what was ultimately agreed at Bucharest was far more significant [than a MAP]; a declaration by Alliance leaders that both Georgia and Ukraine would eventually become members of NATO. Not even a MAP provides such a categorical assurance' (2008: 43). In retrospect, as Charap and Colton note that 'Never before had NATO promised membership to aspirant states. The beleaguered leaders were making a necessary compromise to avoid a diplomatic meltdown. But once the parley was over, it became clear that the decision was the worst of all worlds: while providing no increased security to Ukraine and Georgia, the Bucharest Declaration reinforced the view in Moscow that NATO was determined to incorporate them at any cost' (2017: 88).

The wording was a notable ad hoc compromise between the United States and Eastern European[11] proponents of the eastern expansion of NATO and Western European opponents of the expansion, most notably France and Germany.[12] What is more interesting about the compromise is the specific form it took, which took or arguably even surpassed the ambitions of proponents of granting a MAP and an actual policy to follow through with these ambitions of the opponents. This pattern should be familiar to those who study national strategic documents, which often display a similar disparity between ambitious aims and comparatively meagre resources and strategies (see, for example, Alexander 2015: 82; Johnson 2011: 396; Schake 2020; Bonds et al. 2019: 1-5).

10　For an extremely deterministic view of the Bucharest declaration, see Zaryckyj (2018).

11　Essentially all Eastern Europe NATO members with the exception of Hungary (Bounds & Hendrickson 2009: 23).

12　But it should not be forgotten that opposition was broader, including also at the very least Italy, Hungary and three Benelux countries (Bounds & Hendrickson 2009: 23).

While it might be argued that taking an empirical example from fourteen years before the invasion is not representative of the period of the runup to the invasion, it is worth remembering that NATO to the last moment stuck to reiterating the continued validity of the Memorandum. Problems with such compromise extend beyond its middle-of-the-road nature, which may fall short of the intended aims of the policy it produces. It also arguably increases the chance of misperception both among external partners and adversaries, threatens the credibility and invites charges of hypocrisy and possibly also invites challenges aimed at undermining said credibility.

Why this specific form of compromise between proponents and opponents of a particular policy seemingly often prevails can be hypothesised both generally and in relation to Western policy towards Ukraine. Maintaining the ambition and commitment without actually taking many steps to follow through allows both sides to claim success, especially if the commitment is vague. Proponents likely see commitment as the first step on which to build further advocacy for action. Opponents presumably oppose policy mainly on the grounds of costs action would imply and see commitment as rather harmless as long as they retain the possibility to block following through with the commitment in the future. Importantly, such compromise can work as long as it is not challenged. Indeed, the belief that it will not be challenged, manifesting in this case in apparent scepticism of a number of countries about the likelihood of invasion, makes such compromise more likely.

In organisations such as NATO and the EU, where decision-making relies on unanimity while the number of members increases and the range of their interests and threat perception widens, the results of negotiations are even more likely to end up in a difficult compromise. Additionally, the degree to which the unity of those organisations is seen as a value in itself may help produce such compromises, which may fail to deliver desired results but satisfy the pursuit of unity. Additionally, and pertinently to the development of Western position towards Ukraine and Russia, the same factors that make compromise likely also make a change of course on this compromise difficult. In the absence of a tectonic shift in politics within NATO and/or the EU, major course change (to either side) from the middle road between accommodation and (extended) deterrence of Russia in relation to Ukraine was almost unimaginable.

As discussed in the previous section, the virtual stalemate in NATO maintaining a middle course towards Ukraine would most likely have to be significantly broken in the runup to the invasion if it was to be averted, which would amount to a foreign policy shift of momentous proportion within a number of Alliance member states. And without the shock of invasion actually happening,

such shifts would be difficult to imagine.[13] Gould-Davies noted before the invasion that the United States' administration had to choose whether to appease or deter Russia in Ukraine (2021). Without compromising vaunted Western unity, going completely in one of the directions was nigh impossible.

Conclusion

The central theme of this thematic section was why the Russian invasion of Ukraine was not averted. This article argues that as long as we focus on the period in the runup to the 2022 invasion, war was neigh impossible to avert. Averting it would most likely require a radical shift of the Western position from a mismatch in ambition and action in the direction of either strong deterrence or wide-ranging accommodation of Russia. Any less would not avert the war, as Russian leadership felt it had a very strong position and was optimistic about the outcome of the invasion. Such a momentous shift was impossible without the impulse that the shock of invasion eventually delivered. Even with the invasion taking place and overall policy positions within the Western alliances shifted strongly in the confrontational direction, it remains to be seen how durable this shift will be and, most importantly, how effective the policies it produces will be.

At the same time, despite the incredible and mounting human and material costs of war to Ukraine and its people and increasingly also to the world more broadly, it is important to recognise that it is too soon to pass judgment on whether the war was the worst possible outcome for Ukraine or the West. It is quite possible that accommodation would lead to further Russian demands, the breakup of NATO and major instability in Eastern Europe. In the same vein, it is possible that even a strong deterrent posture would fail and embroil NATO in direct armed conflict with Russia, potentially leading to nuclear escalation. So far, while failing to avert the war, Western policymakers have managed to avoid both of those catastrophic results. Indeed, even limited actions far below the stated ambitions of bringing Ukraine into NATO almost certainly not only helped Ukraine prepare itself for the invasion but also vastly increased the chance of significant Western support when the invasion actually took place.

This contribution barely scratches the surface of various forces which produced the discrepancy between the ambitions and action in relation to Ukraine and Russia. But the sole fact that this discrepancy is among few points of agreement among two very different scholarly groups should suggest that its investigation is worthy of further effort. The questions of whether there actually was such a discrepancy, what national positions or international processes produced it if it did exist and what impacts such discrepancies have will surely develop the topic far beyond the arguments laid out in this paper.

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13   On inertia and habit in case of the United States foreign policy, see for example Porter (2018).

Yet, one particular question and possible lesson stand out even from limited examination in this paper. As NATO and the EU continue to grow in size while their decision-making (on foreign policy in the case of the EU) remains consensus-based, it will likely become more and more difficult to pursue clear-cut strategies backed with resources. Consequently, the question of when is producing a unified position worth the compromises necessary to produce it will only gain in saliency. While, rather obviously, a unified position creates a larger power block, which should make the policy (or threat) more effective, especially in the area of sanctions. Beyond that, unity in one area may have a positive effect in other areas. But at the same time, the discussion above suggests how the compromise necessary to reach such a unified position may make it flawed or aimless.

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Thematic section
The Russia-Ukraine War: Why the Conflict Was Not Prevented

Conflict Dynamics as a Narrative Process: The Evolution of Competing Conflict Narratives between Russia and Ukraine and the Narratives of the International Human Rights Bodies between 2014 and 2022

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Abstract
Drawing on the studies on narrative processes underlying conflict escalation, this article examines the constitution and evolution of conflicting narratives between Russia and Ukraine as expressed in their foreign policy discourse and key political pronouncements between 2014 and 2022. Furthermore, it compares Russia's and Ukraine's official narratives with those developed by the international human rights community using the example of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) created by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in March 2014. This comparative analysis aims to understand the differences between discursive elements constituting narratives of the parties in conflict and of an international body aiming to achieve accountability for human rights

violations as a basis for reconciliation, which could serve as entries for peacebuilding. Finally, the theoretical framework of conflict escalation as a narrative process proposed by Sara Cobb is used to understand the dynamics of conflict escalation from 2014 to 2022. The mapping and analysis of narratives undertaken in the article show the key issue of contention between Russia and Ukraine during the studied period was the interpretation of the legitimacy of the use of force. The key consequence of the discursive attribution of conflict escalation and violence became the evolving political legitimisation of the use of force fuelling conflict escalation and protraction.

Introduction

While acknowledging that intractable conflicts 'which may last decades or even centuries, involve disputes over real issues, including territory, natural resources, power, self-determination, statehood and religious dogma', Bar-Tal (2013: 1) holds that they are 'accompanied by intense socio-psychological forces which make them especially difficult to resolve'. Similarly, Ramsbotham (2010: 7) sees violent conflicts as 'conflicts of belief' that involve '[c]onflicting perceptions, embattled beliefs, hardened attitudes, opposed truths, segmented realities, contrasting mental worlds, antithetic ideological axioms, incompatible ideological beliefs, alternative mental representations, differing views about reality, divergent discursive representations, different discourse worlds [and others]'.

In the last decade, there has been a growing body of research across several fields such as social psychology (Bar-Tal 2007, 2013, 2020), conflict studies and international relations (Jackson 2009; Ramsbotham 2010; Cobb 2013; Jackson & Dexter 2014; Kaufman 2015), critical terrorism studies (Wilhelmsen 2017) and others focusing on narratives and other discursive aspects underlying mobilisation and collective identity construction in conflict escalation, protraction and transformation. Drawing on the studies on narrative processes underlying conflict escalation, this article examines the constitution and evolution of conflicting narratives between Russia and Ukraine as expressed in their foreign policy discourse and key political pronouncements between 2014 and 2022. Furthermore, it compares Russia's and Ukraine's official narratives with those developed by the international human rights community using the example of the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) created by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in March 2014. This comparative analysis aims to understand the differences between discursive ele-

ments constituting narratives of the parties in conflict and of an international body aiming to achieve accountability for human rights violations as a basis for reconciliation, which could serve as entries for peacebuilding. Finally, the article asks the question of what the analysis of narrative structure evolution and narrative processes reveals about the nature of conflicts and conflict transformation during the studied period.

Scholars studying the role of narrative patterns in conflict escalation highlight a normative aspect in the study of the way in which conflict discourses are constructed and reproduced. As argued by Jackson (2009: 182), '[a]t the very least, revealing the mechanisms by which agents and structures construct and reproduce conflict discourses provides important clues for conflict resolution practitioners about how to counteract, deconstruct and ultimately transform such discourses and patterns of behavior'. Similarly, Cobb (2013: 99) holds that the analysis of narrative patterns of conflict escalation could play a role in conflict transformation: 'This matters because, if we could refocus our attention on narrative patterns and not find ourselves, as analysts, mired in the game theoretic discourse of "needs" and "interests" or "rights," we might be able to track the process of conflict escalation as a function of narrative and contribute to the transformation of the conflict narrative, thus interrupting the escalatory process and generating new, less dangerous narrative patterns.'

The first part of the article provides an overview of narrative theories of conflict escalation, the corpus of data selected for analysis and the methods of thematic mapping and narrative analysis used for data analysis. The analysis section is structured chronologically around several key episodes of contention between Ukraine and Russia such as the change of government in February 2014, the annexation of Crimea, the protests and the violent conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Different sections of the analysis section study the evolution of key narrative structures and narrative processes between 2014 and 2022. In the last part, the theoretical framework of conflict escalation as a narrative process proposed by Cobb (2013) is used to discuss the evolution of key narrative processes from 2014 will 2022.

Narratives and conflict dynamics

In the last years, there has been a growing interest in narrative research applied in a number of areas including foreign policy (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin & Roselle 2014; Faizullaev & Cornut 2019) and conflict transformation (Bar-Tal 2007, 2013, 2020; Jackson 2009; Ramsbotham 2010; Cobb 2013; Jackson & Dexter 2014). Scholars have highlighted the identity and practice-constituting role of narratives or stories for individuals, groups or organisations (Cobb 2013; Miskimmon, O'Loughlin & Roselle 2014; Faizullaev & Cornut 2019; Bar Tal 2020).

According to Cobb (2013: 32-33), '[n]arratives are material. They are not only mnemonic in nature, reflecting the world as experienced, but they are constitutive of identity, relationships, and institutions, as well as of the practices associated with these.' The definitions of narratives encompass their particular structures and roles. Bar-Tal et al (2014: 663) define a narrative as 'a story about an event or events that has a plot with a clear starting point and endpoint, providing sequential and causal coherence about the world and/or a group's experience'.

A separate field of study across several disciplines has concerned the role of narratives during violent conflicts. As noted by Bar-Tal (2020), narratives provide justification, explanation and rationalisation for the outbreak of conflicts and feed their continuation. According to Bar-Tal (2013), societal beliefs formed during violent conflict include several key themes. They justify the outbreak of the conflict and the course of its development, present one's own goals as just and justified, present a positive image of the in-group and delegitimise the opponent, present one's own society as the victim of the opponent and encourage patriotism to promote attachment and solidarity with the in-group, promote the need for unity in the face of the threat and the vision of peace as the ultimate desire of society. If conflicts remain unresolved, with time social beliefs formed during conflicts shape the very nature of social identity and became expressed in 'language, societal ceremonies, symbols, myths, commemorations, holidays, canonic texts, and so on' (Bar-Tal 2007: 1443).

In taking stock of constructivist research on conflict escalation and resolution, Jackson (2009: 181) identifies key elements in conflict discourses and social construction of conflict that underpin legitimisation of political violence including 'the construction of exclusionary and oppositional identities; the invention, reinvention or manipulation of grievance and a sense of victimhood; the construction of exaggeration of a pervading sense of threat and danger to the nation and community; the stereotyping and dehumanization of the enemy "other"; and the legitimization of organized pre-emptive and defensive political violence'. In addition to the reconstruction of identities that make conflict possible, another key condition in conflict escalation is the role of elites mobilising identities and narratives for war (Jackson 2009; Jackson & Dexter 2014).

Cobb (2013: 88-99) suggests considering conflict escalation as a narrative process and notes five narrative processes during conflict escalation. They include the reduction of narrative complexity and increase in narrative closure leading to identity closure, ignorance or denial of claims to legitimacy to the Other made in response to delegitimisation, externalisation of responsibility, inversion of the meaning of the Others' narrative in an effort to cancel it altogether and silence as a response to denied legitimacy, subjectivity and existence that can lead

to violence. Furthermore, Cobb (2013: 96) defines key narrative processes that lead to the legitimisation of the use of force against the Other: 'The construction of the Other as having evil intentions leaves the speaker of that story will [sic] little option except to retrain or kill the Other. "Evil intent" as a construction has three features: first, it presumes that Others want to kill or harm the speaker or their group; second, it presumes that that the evil or bad intention is persistent, independent of circumstances or context; and third, it presumes that the Other either will not listen (i.e., speech and talk are not possible), or that they will pretend to listen as part of their strategy to harm.'

Several studies focused on the Crimea standoff and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine have examined the role of narratives in foreign policy. In the case of the Crimea annexation, Faizullaev and Cornut (2019) examine divergences between narratives and practices by the UN, Ukraine, Russia and some Western countries (the USA, the UK and France). Furthermore, Miskimmon (2017), drawing on his earlier work on 'strategic narratives' (Miskimmon, O'Loughlin & Roselle 2014), studies the strategic narratives of the EU and Russia on the conflict in Ukraine by focusing on identity, system and issue narratives. There are also other studies of narratives of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine (Fisher 2019). The article adds to this research by using the lens of narrative processes and structures underlying conflict escalation and de-escalation reviewed above and by tracing the development of narratives over a longer period of time.

Data and methods

The corpus of data analysed in this article includes the key political statements by political leadership, statements by diplomats and other official policy instruments, international normative documents (such as resolutions) and reports by the HRMMU and OHCHR. For Russia, the article analyses key political statements that became constitutive of Russian actions (Kremlin.ru 2014a, 2014b, 2021, 2022a, 2022b), statements by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Russian diplomats. Furthermore, it examines the investigations of human rights violations that were produced by Russia in parallel to the investigations by the international human rights bodies such as 'The Tragedy of Southeastern Ukraine. The White Book of Crimes' by the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation (Investigative 2015) and the White Books 'On the Violations of Human Rights and the Rule of Law Principle in Ukraine' (Ministry 2014a, 2014b) published by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The first White Book covered the period from November 2013 till March 2014 and appeared in April 2014. The second one covered the period from April till mid-June 2014 and was published in June 2014.

For Ukraine, the article examines the pronouncement of Ukrainian diplomats, the texts of Ukraine-promoted resolutions adopted by international or-

ganisations and statements of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine. The evolution and entrenchment of the official narratives before the 2022 escalation is studied using the statement called '10 Facts You Should Know about Russian Military Aggression Against Ukraine' developed by the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in December 2019 (Ministry 2019) and the three constitutive texts (Kremlin.ru 2021, 2022a, 2022b) by Russian President Vladimir Putin legitimising the Russian attack against Ukraine. Furthermore, I analyse the reports produced by the HRMMU and OHCHR that provided recommendations to the Government of Ukraine, de facto Crimea authorities and the Russian Federation. Each HRMMU report included a separate section on the violations of human rights in Crimea and on the investigations related to human rights violations during the Maidan protests, the 2 May 2014 violence in Odesa and the Rymarska case (a shooting between pro-federalism and pro-unity supporters on Rymarska street in Kharkiv on 14 March 2014) and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

The first report produced by the OHCHR after the initial visits to Ukraine in March 2014 and on the basis of the materials gathered by the HRMMU highlighted the importance of objective information on the situation in Ukraine: 'Without an independent, objective and impartial establishment of the facts and circumstances surrounding alleged human rights violations, there is a serious risk of competing narratives being manipulated for political ends, leading to divisiveness and incitement to hatred' (OHCHR 2014a: 5) and 'Impartial reporting on the human rights situation can help not only to trigger accountability for human rights violations, but it also aims at the prevention of manipulation of information, which serves to create a climate of fear and insecurity and may fuel violence. This is especially important with regard to eastern Ukraine' (OHCHR 2014a: 10). Furthermore, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights noted the centrality of its work for reconciliation: 'There is need for accountability for the crimes committed. Indeed, no matter who the perpetrators or the victims are, every effort must be made to ensure that anyone who has committed serious violations of international law is brought to justice. That is essential in order to overcome divisions and pave the way for reconciliation' (United Nations General Assembly 2014: 5).

In terms of data analysis approaches, I use thematic analysis and narrative analysis. According to Roller and Lavrakas (2015: 299), '. . . the focus in narrative research is not only on the content of a story . . . but also *how* the story is told and *why* it is told in particular manner [emphasis in original]'. Thus, according to them, narrative analysis needs to focus both on the sequential and consequential elements of the story. Riessman (quoted in Roller and Lavrakas 2015: 299), highlights the selective nature of narratives as the events are 'selected, organized, connected and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience'. Gibbs

(2018: 83) suggests several practical steps in undertaking narrative analysis such as the identification of events, experiences (images, feelings, reactions, meanings), accounts, explanations, excuses and narrative. The latter means 'the linguistic and rhetorical form of telling the events, including how the narrator and audience (the researcher) interact, temporal sequencing, characters, emplotment and imagery'.

The analysis of narrative processes undertaken in the article involves three key steps. In the first place, the mapping and categorisation of the key elements of divergence between Ukraine's and Russia's narratives is undertaken. Then the stance of the international human rights community on key issues of divergence is examined. In the second place, the question of what narratives are 'doing' and narrative structures developed by Russia and Ukraine are studied. The article undertakes the analysis of the sequential (emplotment) and consequential elements of the narratives. Finally, following Cobb (2013), the evolution of narratives is studied by analysing the narrative elements that persisted and changed between 2014 and 2022, before another period of conflict escalation with the Russian attack against Ukraine.

Diverging narratives on the annexation of Crimea

After undertaking a thematic mapping and analysis of official pronouncements and various foreign policy instruments produced by Russia and Ukraine in 2014-2015, several key issues of contention have been identified. They include the violations of law and of human rights during the Maidan protests in 2013-2014, the legality of the change of government in February 2014, the creation of paramilitary organisations, the legality of the annexation of Crimea, the legality of the use of force by Russia, the nature of protests following the change of government in February 2014 in Eastern Ukraine, the legality of the 'anti-terrorist operation' and the role of Russia in protests and the evolving conflict (summarised in Tables 1 and 2 below). Drawing on research on narrative processes in conflict escalation (Jackson 2009; Cobb 2013; Bar-Tal 2013), several key mechanisms and narrative structures used in the construction of conflicting discourses have been identified. They include framing of legality of the use of force and violence attribution, threat framing, delegitimisation of the other and the use of narrative emplotment to project consistency of past behaviour and desired future. In this part of the article, I analyse the episode of the annexation of Crimea and in the next section the protests and the eruption of violent conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

The first step undertaken by the presidium of the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (ARC) and the Russian authorities on the way to annex Crimea was the announcement about the illegitimacy of the new Ukrainian authorities in order to legitimise their own claims. During the period from

21 February to 4 March 2014, Russian officials commented on the violation by the opposition of the 21 February agreement between the Yanukovych government and the opposition (Lavrov 2014) and made public the letter solicited from Viktor Yanukovych that declared the change of government in Ukraine as a 'coup d'état'. The presidium of the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC issued a statement on 27 February 2014 on the 'unconstitutional coup d'état' in Kyiv only after the armed persons in uniforms without insignia captured the buildings of the Council of Ministers and the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC during the night of 26 to 27 February and announced that the Verkhovna Rada of the ARC 'assumes full responsibility for the fate of the Crimea' and aims to organise a nationwide referendum on the status and powers of the autonomy (Krymskaya pravda 2014).

Another key narrative process used in official Russian discourses was threat construction using the means of violence attribution to legitimise the use of force by Russia and by the local self-defence forces. In a statement at the United Nations Human Rights Council on 3 March 2014, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov legitimised the decision on the use of the Russian Armed Forces in Ukraine by the need to protect Russia's 'nationals', 'compatriots' and the staff of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Ukraine and the request by 'the legally elected authorities' of Crimea to the President of Russia. Lavrov described the actions of the Yanukovych government as 'absolutely legitimate' and put the responsibility for 'aggressive forceful actions' during the Maidan protests on the anti-government protesters supported by the West. Furthermore, he detailed violations of law committed by the 'armed national radicals'. According to Lavrov, '. . . threats of violent action on behalf of ultranationalists, who endanger the life and legal interests of Russians and the entire Russian-speaking population' legitimised the local self-defence forces in Crimea '. . . created by the people, who had to prevent the attempts at forced occupation of administrative buildings in Crimea and the entry of weapons and ammunition into the peninsula' (Lavrov 2014).

The press conference by Russian President Vladimir Putin on 4 March 2014 and the address to the Federal Council on Crimea on 18 March 2014 became the constitutive speech acts by the Kremlin that defined the meaning of the ongoing events (Kremlin.ru 2014a, 2014b). Putin delegitimised the new Ukrainian government calling the change of government 'an anti-constitutional takeover, an armed seizure of power' supported by the West. This was achieved with the use of several narrative structures. First, violence and 'illegal, unconstitutional' actions during the 2013-2014 Maidan protests were fully attributed to the pro-Maidan militias, and the use of force by the Yanukovych government was framed as being fully within the limits of legality. The Berkut special forces were framed as victims of pro-Maidan paramilitaries 'who have not broken any laws and acted in accordance with their orders'. Furthermore, Putin delegitimised Ukraine as

a viable state and nation. He described Ukraine as a persistently unviable state characterised by corruption, accumulation of wealth, social stratification and a government irresponsiveness to popular demands and expectations. He contrasted Ukraine with the self-image constructed as prioritising legality and constitutional order and more responsive to the popular demands. The use of the Russian armed forces in Ukraine was legitimised by 'a direct appeal' from the 'legitimate' President Yanukovych and 'a humanitarian mission' 'to protect the people with whom we have close historical, cultural, and economic ties' from 'uncontrolled crime' and 'the rampage of reactionary forces, nationalist and anti-Semitic forces' (Kremlin.ru 2014a).

Furthermore, as in other conflicts from Georgia to Syria in which Russia got involved, Putin constructed the threatening image of the West looming behind conflicts. He highlighted the doubtful international legitimacy of the US actions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya. Furthermore, he legitimised the annexation of Crimea by the right of nations to self-determination fixed in international law, the precedent of Kosovo and the right of people to define their own future. While accusing the new Ukrainian government of the violation of the 21 February agreement between Yanukovych and the opposition that stipulated demobilisation of all paramilitary organisations, Putin only problematised pro-Maidan paramilitary organisations and legitimised Crimean 'self-defence' (Kremlin.ru 2014a).

Putin's address on 18 March 2014 following the 'referendum' in Crimea became the key statement providing the reasons legitimising the annexation of Crimea that elaborated further key arguments made during the 4 March press conference. In comparison with 4 March, the 18 March address provided a more elaborate legitimisation of annexation combining the historical and emotional, international law, historical precedents and popular legitimacy arguments. As earlier, key discursive mechanisms in reconstruction of the 'self' and the threatening 'other' included the delegitimisation of the new government in Ukraine as a 'coup d'état' and the legitimisation of the annexation as a humanitarian mission to protect the local population from threats.

In terms of threat framing, the speech defined the US-led West as the threatening Other and a destabilising factor in the international system. For Putin, the post-Cold War bipolar world was characterised by the degradation of international institutes and the preference by 'our Western partners led by the United States of America' not for international law but by the rule of force. Putin depicted the West as a threatening Other by connecting past episodes of the use of force framed as illegitimate into a coherent narrative aiming to suggest constancy of behaviour. He described the use of force and interventions by the Western states in 1999 in the former Yugoslavia followed by Afghanistan, Iraq

and Libya and 'managed colour revolutions' that brought 'chaos, outbreaks of violence, a series of coups' instead of democracy. Then Putin's narrative linked episodes that aimed to demonstrate that the West acted throughout history treacherously manifested in the expansion of NATO to the east, the deployment of military infrastructure at Russian borders and threats with sanctions that constituted the centuries-long policy of containment of Russia.

As in the 4 March speech, the key element in the 18 March speech was the delegitimisation of the Ukrainian government to legitimise the annexation. It was done by attributing violence only to the pro-Maidan militias supporting the government change and presenting the government as a pure puppet of the hostile West. The change of government was described as a coup d'état with the use of terror, murder and pogroms carried out primarily by the 'nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes and anti-Semites' and 'the Ukrainian ideological heirs of Bandera, Hitler's henchman during World War II' and referred to the new government as 'the new so-called "authorities"', '"politicians"' [both authorities and politicians put in inverted commas to deny them legitimacy] managed by 'foreign sponsors' and 'curators'.

Furthermore, the speech delegitimised not only the post-February 2014 government but the Ukrainian state as such presenting it as discriminatory versus national minorities and a permanently unstable state while presenting the righteous self-image. Ukraine was projected as discriminating against national minorities, as a state that attempted to 'deprive Russians of historical memory, and sometimes of their native language, to make them the object of forced assimilation', the entire period of independence was framed as 'constant political and state permanent crisis', a state characterised by corruption, ineffective state management and poverty with self-serving political elites ignoring popular needs and demands. The speech act projected the righteous image of Russia as a state that over centuries had preserved cultural specificities of all ethnoses populating it, the only state capable of providing 'strong, stable sovereignty' to Crimea and a peace-loving and friendly country '. . . sincerely striving for dialogue with our colleagues in the West' that consistently strived to do 'everything necessary to build civilized good-neighborly relations' (Kremlin.ru 2014b).

In comparison with 4 March, Putin made much more ample use of historical and emotional arguments as means of legitimisation and the use of what can be referred to as popular legitimacy. He reconstructed the notion of homeland by referring to the south of Ukraine and Crimea as 'historical territories of Russia' and projecting Crimea and Sevastopol as key symbolic locations for Russian history and the symbols of 'Russian military glory' and in popular consciousness remained 'an inseparable part of Russia'. Furthermore, Putin claimed that Crimea and Southern and Eastern Ukraine were incorporated into Soviet Ukraine with

violations and without consultations with the people and this constituted an 'historical injustice'. After defining Crimea and Southern and Eastern Ukraine as part of 'historical Russian territories', Putin framed the annexation of Crimea as 'the desire of the Russian world, historical Russia to restore unity' (Kremlin. ru 2014b).

Furthermore, the speech claimed that the referendum was 'in full compliance with democratic procedures and international legal norms', 'peaceful, free expression of will', strive for freedom and independence comparing them to the US Declaration of Independence and post-1989 reunification of Germany. Furthermore, it represented the right to self-determination with historical precedents of Ukraine declaring independence in 1991 and Kosovo. Finally, 'the will of the people' as expressed in the referendum was presented as a supreme principle, Putin also claimed popular legitimacy coming from constantly held popular beliefs that 'Crimea is a native Russian land [iskonno russkaya zemlya], and Sevastopol is a Russian city' and 'the will of millions of people, all-national unity and support of the leading political and social forces' (Kremlin.ru 2014b). This type of legitimacy expressed in overwhelming support of the population was directly borrowed from the communist period.

The analysis of post-16 March statements and publications by Russia shows the consolidation of key narrative elements such as the consideration of the 'referendum' '. . . an expression of the free will of Crimeans' fulfilling the right to self-determination conducted without outside interference (United Nations 2014a), focus only on the violations of law committed by the pro-Maidan radical groups and legitimisation of the actions of the Yanukovych government during the protests, consideration of the change of government at the end of February 2014 as a 'coup d'état' supported by the West and the legitimisation of the post-February anti-government self-defence forces.

The White Books 'On the Violations of Human Rights and the Rule of Law Principle in Ukraine' (Ministry 2014a, 2014b) and 'The Tragedy of Southeastern Ukraine. The White Book of Crimes' (2015) and regular presentations on the human rights situation in Ukraine organised by the Russian mission at the UN focused only on human rights violations committed by the pro-Maidan groups and post-February 2014 Ukrainian authorities. They fully attributed violence during the Maidan protests to the radical pro-Maidan protesters and used the enumeration of human rights violations in Ukraine to advance political claims that the 'seizure of power with the use of force and anti-constitutional coup d'état' took place in Ukraine (Ministry 2014a: 3). Other phrases used to claim the illegitimacy of the Ukrainian government included the 'de-facto' and 'self-declared' 'Kyiv authorities' (Ministry 2014b: 3) 'de-facto authorities in Kyiv who overthrew a legally elected and acting president V. Yanukovych as a result of a coup d'état and

a seizure of power with the use of force' (Ministry 2014b: 9). The White Books implicated the EU and USA in supporting 'the violent overthrow of the regime' in Ukraine. The first book claimed that the 'Euromaidan was orchestrated by the US State Department through the NGOs and private funds controlled by it' and Western states legitimised the new illegitimate government which came to power as a result of a coup d'état in February 2014 (Ministry 2014a: 29, 31). By supporting the Euromaidan, the book claimed, 'the EU supported and accepted the illegitimate rise to power of opposition in Kyiv and directly contributed to the destruction of the constitutional order in Ukraine' (Ministry 2014a: 31).

The key efforts of Ukrainian diplomacy were directed at the adoption of statements at the international level reaffirming Ukraine's territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders and defining the actions of Russia in Crimea as illegitimate. After Russia blocked a UN Security Council resolution on Crimea, the UN General Assembly resolution 68/262 on the Territorial Integrity of Ukraine adopted on 27 March 2014 (United Nations 2014b) stated that the 16 March 2014 referendum in Crimea had 'no validity': 'the referendum held in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol on 16 March 2014, having no validity, cannot form the basis for any alteration of the status of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea or of the city of Sevastopol.' This resolution became the basis for other resolutions proposed by Ukraine and often referenced in various statements by Ukrainian diplomats. The Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2019) stated that the Ukrainian territorial integrity was reaffirmed in a series of UN documents as well as by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and other international organisations.

In their interventions at the international bodies, Ukrainian diplomats referred to the referendum as '[t]he so called "Crimea referendum" . . . a political farce orchestrated by the Russian Federation' not recognised by Ukraine nor the international community (Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2014d). Russian actions in Crimea were described as '. . . the overt military invasion of the Russian Federation in a breach of the UN Charter and the applicable international law' (Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2014a) and underlying the illegal entry of the Russian armed forces on the territory of Ukraine: '. . . a large grouping of the Russian armed forces which illegally entered the territory of Ukraine under far-fetched pretext of protecting the Russian-speaking community' (Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2014b).

On the contentious issue of the Maidan protests and government change, the Ukrainian diplomacy referred to the Maidan protests as '[p]eaceful protests in Ukraine' that turned violent due to the 'brutal use of force by the previous authorities' (Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2014c) and claimed that the post-

February 2014 Ukrainian government was 'fully legitimate' and committed to 'bringing all perpetrators to justice' for crimes committed during the protests (Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2014c) and referred to it as '[t]he new "government of technocrats" – not the "government of winners" . . . endorsed by more than constitutional majority of members of Parliament . . .' (Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2014b).

During the UN Human Rights Council debates, Ukraine and Russia exchanged mutual accusations of violations of human rights. In its interventions, Ukraine referred to the facts of violation of human rights by Russia in Crimea gathered by international bodies (for example, Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2014h). At the same time, Ukraine used reports by the international organisations to support its own claims about the lack of evidence on violations of human rights in Ukraine. For example, during the Interactive Dialogue with the Independent Expert on Minority Issues on 19 March 2014, Ukraine stated that 'As it was repeatedly witnessed by international experts, including the UN system, there is no credible evidence of Russian minority rights violations in Ukraine', while the rights of the Ukrainian, Crimean Tatar and other groups in Crimea 'are violated under the Russian occupation' (Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2014e). Furthermore, Ukraine claimed its readiness to investigate crimes and violations of human rights committed in Ukraine since November 2013 and 'bring all responsible to accountability' (Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2014f).

While Western states accepted the new Ukrainian government as legitimate, the OHCHR did not make a statement about the legality of the ousting of President Yanukovych in February 2014 and the change of government. The first OHCHR report on 15 April 2014 only stated the facts without pronouncing itself about the legality: 'After President Yanukovych's departure from Kyiv, on 22 February, the Parliament decided that he had "withdrawn from performing constitutional authorities"' (OHCHR 2014a: 6). The second OHCHR report called the 16 March '"referendum"' [in inverted commas in original] 'unlawful' following the General Assembly resolution 68/262 (OHCHR 2014b: 4).

The HRMMU reports focused on both indiscriminate and disproportionate violence committed by law-enforcement bodies during the Maidan protests and violations of law and human rights committed by the pro-Maidan paramilitary groups and called for the investigation of violence committed by the Right Sector. The 15 April report held: 'While there has been no confirmed evidence of attacks by the "Right Sector", including any physical harassment, against minorities, there were numerous reports of their violent acts against political opponents, representatives of the former ruling party and their elected officials. The role of the group during the Maidan protests was prominent; they were often in the first line of defence or allegedly leading the attacks against the law enforce-

ment units. Their alleged involvement in violence and killings of some of the law enforcement members should be also investigated. However, according to all accounts heard by the OHCHR delegation, the fear against the "Right Sector" is disproportionate . . .' (OHCHR 2014a: 19). The 15 April report also detailed ' ... a significant raise of propaganda on the television of the Russian Federation', for example portraying Ukraine as a 'country overrun by violent fascists' and 'disguising information about Kyiv events, claimed that the Russians in Ukraine are seriously threatened and put in physical danger, thus justifying Crimea's "return" to the Russian Federation' (OHCHR 2014a: 17).

The 15 April 2014 report expressed concerns about '. . . the advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred by some political parties, groups and individuals', 'nationalistic rhetoric' witnessed during the Maidan protests, lustration laws and the violations of the rights of the Russian minority in Eastern Ukraine (OHCHR 2014a: 4). It held that 'Ukraine is largely a bilingual society, as was confirmed by stakeholders met by the delegation throughout Ukraine. Consequently, nationalistic rhetoric and hate speech may turn the ethno-linguistic diversity into a divide and may have the potential for human rights violations' (OHCHR 2014a: 15). The report also critically assessed the representation of national minorities at the national level after the change of government in February 2014 (OHCHR 2014a: 15). However, the report claimed that the '. . . attacks against the ethnic Russian community . . . were neither systematic nor widespread' (OHCHR 2014a: 4). Finally, the OHCHR noted the illegality of all paramilitary forces, such as the Crimean self-defence, and called for their disbandment (OHCHR 2014a: 23).

Table 1 summarises the positions of Russia, Ukraine and the international human rights community on the key issues of contention.

Diverging narratives on the anti-government protests and armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine

In relation to the evolving protests in Southern and Eastern Ukraine following the change of government in February 2014 and the emergence of violent conflict, the key conflicting issues between Ukraine and Russia included the nature of protests following the change of government in February 2014 in Eastern Ukraine, the legality of paramilitary mobilisations and the 'anti-terrorist operation' and the role of Russia in protests and the evolving conflict. The table below summarises the positions of Russia, Ukraine and the international human rights community on the key issues of contention.

The Russian narratives in relation to the anti-government protests and the beginning of the violent conflict in Eastern Ukraine included several key narrative structures: the statement about the legitimacy of demands by the anti-government protesters and the initially peaceful nature of protests, the legiti-

Table 1. Summary of positions by Russia, Ukraine and the international human rights community on key issues of contention

	Russia	Ukraine	International human rights community
Violence during the Maidan protests	Consideration of the use of force by the Yanukovych government as legitimate and violence attributed to the pro-Maidan paramilitary groups	Consideration of protests as peaceful and the attribution of responsibility for violence escalation to the Yanukovych government only	Violence committed both by the Yanukovych government and protesters; accountability for all violations of human rights
Change of government in February 2014	Coup d'état and illegal new government	Legal new government	No statement
Legality of the use of force by Russia	Legitimised by a 'humanitarian mission' and the request by the 'legitimate' authorities	Illegal and framed as 'Russian invasion'	No statement
Annexation of Crimea	A set of discursive means to legitimise the annexation of Crimea	Illegal confirmed by the UN General Assembly resolution 68/262	Illegal confirmed by the UN General Assembly resolution 68/262

Table 2. Summary of positions by Russia, Ukraine and the international human rights community on key issues of contention

	Russia	Ukraine	International human rights community
Nature of anti-government protests and paramilitary mobilisations	Legitimate protest against 'illegitimate' government; legitimisation of self-defence units created by protesters	Referring to protesters and then armed groups as 'terrorists', 'separatists', 'illegal armed groups' assuming their illegitimacy; paramilitary groups created in violation of law	Use of neutral terms to refer to protesters and armed groups; considering all paramilitary groups created in violation of law and calling for their disbandment
Legitimacy of the 'anti-terrorist operation'	The operation framed as 'criminal' and illegitimate; framed as 'karatelnaya operatsiya' [punitive action]	The operation framed as 'rightful and legitimate'	The question of legitimacy not raised; focus on the need to comply with the international humanitarian law
Role of Russia in protests and the evolving conflict	Denial of the presence of Russian troops in Ukraine and Russian 'military intervention'	Protests and armed rebellion framed as armed and supported from Russia	Acknowledgement of the presence of protesters from Russia and of the movement of arms and fighters across the Ukrainian-Russian border

misation of the creation of paramilitary and self-defence forces by them and the criminal nature and illegitimacy of the 'anti-terrorist operation' launched by the Ukrainian authorities in Eastern Ukraine. Another key element in Russian narratives was the denial of interpretation of Russian actions as 'military intervention'.

While Russian official narratives framed the Pravyi sektor as militants [boieviki], the other side paramilitary organisations were described as fighters [boitsy] of the People's Militia of Donbas and 'peaceful protestors' who supported the idea of federalisation in Donetsk (Ministry 2014a: 19). Other terms used were 'protesters in the east of Ukraine' (Ministry 2014b: 9), 'fighters of the People's militia [narodnoie opolcheniie] of Donbass' (Ministry 2014b: 10), 'supporters of federalization of Ukraine' (Ministry 2014b: 11) and 'manifestations of peaceful civilians' (Ministry 2014b: 14).

The emplotment of events constructed in official Russian narratives (using Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation 2014) included an 'unconstitutional armed coup d'état' supported by Western states as a result of which 'nationalist radical elements' came to power that constituted a threat to 'russkoye naseleniye' [Russian population] of Crimea and eastern regions. The narrative focused only on the human rights violations and violence committed by the 'boyeviki-natsionalisty' [militants-nationalists] supporting Maidan. While framing pro-Maidan paramilitaries as a threat, Russia legitimised the paramilitary mobilisations by the anti-Maidan protesters. It stated that 'Under these conditions, Russia will support the people's self-defence units that have risen to protect the population from extremists'. At the same time, Russia denied the interpretation of its actions as 'military intervention': '. . . Russia did not undertake any 'military intervention' in the Crimea or in other regions of Ukraine, as the Kyiv authorities and their patrons would like to present' (Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation 2014). Finally, Russia continued to frame Ukraine as a deficient state and advanced its demands to in order for it to return to 'the condition of a normal, stable state' including the provision of cultural and linguistic rights of the multinational people of Ukraine, federalisation and the adoption of a federal constitution, a neutral military-political status, the state status of Russian and the recognition of the 'free' choice of Crimea in accordance with the 16 March 'referendum' (Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation 2014).

For Russia, the key reason of conflict escalation was the use of force and repressions by the new Ukrainian government against protesters and the use of 'pro-Maidan militants' 'to intimidate opponents of the Maidan' (Investigative 2015: 8). Furthermore, Russia blamed the initiation of conflict in Eastern Ukraine fully on the Ukrainian authorities referring to the conflict as a 'terrible fratricidal war unleashed by the nationalist regime in Ukraine' (Investigative 2015: 6). The

White Book referred to the 'anti-terrorist operation' as an '[a]nti-terrorist, in fact punitive [karatelnaia] operation' (Ministry 2014b: 3). The monitoring of human rights violations in the Second White Book was used to claim that 'The facts cited in the White Paper testify to the criminal nature of the "anti-terrorist operation", as a result of which civilian objects are treacherously shelled, Ukrainian civilians, including women, old people and children, are killed' (Ministry 2014b: 79). Furthermore, Russia framed the 'anti-terrorist operation' as 'the deliberate extermination of the Russian-speaking population in entire regions' thus assuming deliberate targeting civilians and the Russian-speaking population (Investigative 2015: 5).

On 29 August 2014, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement (in Investigative 2015: 31) that blamed Western states and international organisations for the failure to condemn the violations of the international humanitarian law in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and asked why they 'continue only to admonish the Kiev government to use the "proportionate" warfare instead of denouncing these criminal acts'. It framed the actions of 'militias in the Lugansk and Donetsk regions' as defensive: 'When Kiev declares that negotiations will only begin after the capitulation of those it calls "separatists", the militias are left with no choice but to defend their homes and families' (in Investigative 2015: 31).

Addresses by Russia at the UN human rights bodies and other instruments of foreign policy (Ministry 2014a, 2014b; Investigative 2015) selectively focused on the violations of the international humanitarian law and of human rights committed by 'Ukrainian military [siloviki] and mercenaries [nayemnicheskiye bataliony] that, according to Russia remained uninvestigated and regretted that '. . . our Western colleagues, for political reasons, prefer to remain silent about violations of human rights and international law by the Ukrainian authorities and security forces' (Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation 2015). Finally, Russia claimed that there was no alternative to a peaceful conflict resolution and called upon Ukraine to 'start a real political dialogue with the representatives of Donetsk and Lugansk on all aspects of the resolution of the Ukrainian crisis' (Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation 2015).

The official statements by Ukraine used the following terms to refer to the protesters and armed groups in Eastern Ukraine that assumed their illegitimacy: 'terrorists' (Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2014f; Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2014i), 'heavily armed separatists and criminals' (Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2014g), 'illegal armed groups supported by Russia' (Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2014i) and 'terrorist armed groups operating in eastern Ukraine' (Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2014j). For Ukraine, the root causes of the crisis were linked to the role of Russia – '. . . occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and conflict in Donbas still fuelled, despite the Agreements reached

in Minsk, by the neighboring state' (Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2015a). Also most of the violations of human rights in Ukraine '. . . resulted from Russian aggression . . . starting from the illegal occupation of Crimea and followed by backing, arming, training and commanding illegal armed groups in certain parts of Donbas' (Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2015b). Another key element was the statement that the protesters and armed groups were directed and armed by Russia (Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2014d). Russia was blamed for 'aggressive subversive and destabilization activities in the Eastern regions . . . including direct support of terrorists with arms, training and supply of militants' (Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2014f); 'heavily armed separatists and criminals, extensively supported and coordinated across the Eastern border . . .' (Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2014g). Later on, Ukraine deplored the entry of 'the regular troops of the Russian Federation' to support 'terrorists' on 24 August 2014 that was described as a 'Russian invasion' (Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2014i).

The framing of legitimacy of the 'anti-terrorist operation' became the most important conflicting issue between Ukraine and Russia. Ukraine framed the operation as 'rightful and legitimate' the purpose of which was '. . . securing sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and restoring law and order in the face of interference into Ukraine's internal affairs across the Eastern border. The anti-terrorist operation is conducted in a proportionate and measured approach as it was recently assessed by the G7 leaders' (Permanent Mission of Ukraine 2014f).

The HRMMU reports used neural terms such as 'anti-government protestors' (OHCHR 2014a: 16), 'well-organized armed persons in eastern Ukraine, particularly in the Donetsk region, which in some towns are forming so-called "self-defence" units' (OHCHR 2014b: 21), and 'armed and unarmed opponents of the Government' (OHCHR 2014b: 26). Furthermore, it stated a variety of demands made by the protesters without assessing their legitimacy: protests reflect 'a variety of demands, some supporting the unity of Ukraine, some opposing the Government of Ukraine, and some seeking decentralisation or federalism, with others looking at separatism' (OHCHR 2014b: 11).

The HRMMU did not raise the question of legitimacy of the 'anti-terrorist operation', it only consistently highlighted that it had to be to comply with the international humanitarian law: 'The Ukrainian security operation, referred to as an "anti-terrorist operation" (ATO), aimed at regaining control of the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk held by these armed groups, involves the army, the military police (National Guard), the National Security Service (SBU) and volunteers' battalions. In any law enforcement operation security forces must act proportionally to the threat and must at all times respect the right to life. In addition, in the conduct of hostilities all those involved in the hostilities must

comply with principles of distinction, proportionality and precautions. This is particularly important in an environment in which armed groups and civilians are inter-mingled' (OHCHR 2014d: 3).

The HRMMU consistently called for the investigation of all violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed by all sides in the conflict and the disarmament of all paramilitary groups and integration of volunteer battalions under the command of official ministries (OHCHR 2014b, 2014c, 2014d, 2014e, 2014f, 2014g; OHCHR 2015). The HRMMU reports registered the existing perceptions about the presence of protesters from Russia: 'Some protesters allegedly come from the Russian Federation, according to information received from local authorities and confirmed by the central authorities' (OHCHR 2014a: 16) and 'There are also numerous allegations that some participants in the protests and in the clashes of the politically opposing groups, which have already taken at least four lives, are not from the region and that some have come from the Russian Federation' (OHCHR 2014a: 4). The second report called the takeovers of public and administrative buildings in Eastern Ukraine and the proclamation of 'self-declared regions' illegal: '[t]hese illegal take-overs of administration buildings (such as the Donetsk Regional State Administration and the Regional Department of the Security Service of Ukraine in Luhansk) by both armed and unarmed persons were done so with political demands for regionalisation, and at times reportedly separatism' (OHCHR 2014b: 21). It called for the disarmament of all armed groups and for 'Those found to be arming and inciting armed groups and transforming them into paramilitary forces must be held accountable under national and international law' (OHCHR 2014b: 32). The August 2014 report found evidence that the Ukrainian armed forces were responsible for at least some targeting of civilians and civilian infrastructure: 'Targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure as well as indiscriminate attacks are violations of international humanitarian law and more must be done to protect them. Responsibility for at least some of the resulting casualties and damage lies with Ukrainian armed forces through reported indiscriminate shelling' (OHCHR 2014e: 3). Finally, the HRMMU reports consistently represented the impact of hostilities on civilians and advocated for the implementation of the Minsk Agreements as a basis for sustainable peace.

Evolution of conflicting narratives before 2022

In this section, I examine the evolution of key narrative processes and structures identified in the above analysis and use the theoretical framework of conflict escalation as a narrative process proposed by Cobb (2013) to discuss the evolution of conflict narratives from 2014 till 2022. The comparative analysis shows that the key elements and emplotment structures in conflicting narratives remained

unchanged and some elements such as threat perception and delegitimisation of the Other became radicalised.

The analysis of the three constitutive texts (Kremlin.ru 2021, 2022a, 2022b) by Russian President Vladimir Putin shows that in comparison with the earlier period for Putin the West became framed as a key threat to Russia with the adoption of new defence strategies that defined Russia as a security threat and the armament and training of the Ukrainian armed forces by NATO. In the 2021-2022 speech acts, Ukraine lost even more subjectivity, was presented as a mere puppet of the West used by it to weaken and contain Russia. The key concern for Putin was that Ukraine was increasingly adopting hostility to Russia as an organising idea of its statehood (discussed in detail in the July 2021 article). The crucial phrase in Putin's framing was the presentation of Ukraine as being taken hostage and armed by NATO against Russia: 'Any further expansion of the North Atlantic alliance's infrastructure or the ongoing efforts to gain a military foothold of the Ukrainian territory are unacceptable for us. Of course, the question is not about NATO itself. It merely serves as a tool of US foreign policy. The problem is that in territories adjacent to Russia, which I have to note is our historical land, a hostile "anti-Russia" is taking shape. Fully controlled from the outside, it is doing everything to attract NATO armed forces and obtain cutting-edge weapons' (Kremlin.ru 2022b).

In the 24 February 2022 statement announcing the 'special military operation', Putin claimed that the West rejected addressing Russian 'interests and absolutely legitimate demands' for an agreement on 'the principles of equal and indivisible security in Europe' and NATO's non-expansion. The US-led West was assigned hegemonic aspirations to global dominance, intention to impose its 'pseudo' values and to contain and weaken Russia. Similar to 2014, instances of the past violation of international law with interventions in Belgrade, Iraq, Libya and Syria were framed into a coherent narrative of constant deviant behaviour and policies based on the use of 'rough, direct force'. Putin assumed an imminent attack by the US against Russia comparing it to the 22 June 1941 attack by Nazi Germany (Kremlin.ru 2022b). He framed the attack on Ukraine as 'self-defence' referring to Article 51 of part 7 of the UN Charter and claiming that Russia was left no other choice (Kremlin.ru 2022b).

The July 2021 article and February 2022 statements by Putin repeated key narrative structures developed in 2014-2015. The change of government described as a coup d'état in 2014 with Western support that was used to claim the illegitimacy of the current government in 2022 framed as an 'anti-Ukrainian junta', a government captured by neo-Nazis and 'Kyiv regime', the Ukrainian state delegitimised as a state that never developed 'stable statehood', characterised by poverty, out-migration, deindustrialisation and a colony with a marionette regime

(Kremlin.ru 2022a). The annexation of Crimea was framed as a 'free choice of Crimeans and Sevastopol of reunion with Russia' and providing the possibility to peoples of Ukraine to freely decide their future (Kremlin.ru 2022b). On Crimea, Putin repeated his key 2014 statements: that the peninsula was transferred to the Ukrainian SSR in 1954 'in gross violation of legal norms that were in force at the time' (Kremlin.ru 2021).

Similar to 2014, historical memories and narratives were used to present the annexation of Crimea as 'reunification', to delegitimise Ukraine as a viable state and nation, and to describe the ideas of the Ukrainian political community defined in opposition to Russia as the aggressive, unreconcilable and treacherous Other. Another set of messages expressed Russian grievances concerning the rewriting of history in Ukraine. Putin held that 'In essence, Ukraine's ruling circles decided to justify their country's independence through the denial of its past, however, except for border issues. They began to mythologize and rewrite history, edit out everything that united us, and refer to the period when Ukraine was part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union as an occupation. The common tragedy of collectivization and famine of the early 1930s was portrayed as the genocide of the Ukrainian people' (Kremlin.ru 2021). For Putin, the rejection of common history and the definition of Ukrainian statehood and nationhood in opposition to Russia was considered as 'neo-Nazism': '. . . Ukrainian society was faced with the rise of far-right nationalism, which rapidly developed into aggressive Russophobia and neo-Nazism' (Kremlin.ru 2022a).

Putin claimed that the ideologies of radical nationalist groups defined state policies in the post-2014 period such as the legislation concerning the use of the Russian language, on 'purification of power' and the 'indigenous people' that excluded the Russian minority from this status (Kremlin.ru 2021).

He concluded that 'It would not be an exaggeration to say that the path of forced assimilation, the formation of an ethnically pure Ukrainian state, aggressive towards Russia, is comparable in its consequences to the use of weapons of mass destruction against us.'

Furthermore, Putin repeated the key framing about the conflict in Eastern Ukraine being the illegitimate use of force by the Ukrainian authorities against people who 'did not agree with the West-supported coup in Ukraine in 2014 and opposed the transition towards the Neanderthal and aggressive nationalism and neo-Nazism which have been elevated in Ukraine to the rank of national policy. They are fighting for their elementary right to live on their own land, to speak their own language, and to preserve their culture and traditions' (Kremlin.ru 2022a). He held that 'The people of Crimea and residents of Sevastopol made their historic choice. And people in the southeast peacefully tried to defend their stance. Yet, all of them, including children, were labelled as separatists

and terrorists. They were threatened with ethnic cleansing and the use of military force. And the residents of Donetsk and Lugansk took up arms to defend their home, their language and their lives' (Kremlin.ru 2021). Russia projected itself as supporting a peaceful resolution of the conflict: 'Russia has done everything to stop fratricide. The Minsk agreements aimed at a peaceful settlement of the conflict in Donbas have been concluded.' And accused the Ukrainian government of unwillingness to implement the Minsk agreement and instrumentalising the image of a 'victim of external aggression' (Kremlin.ru 2021). While Russia claimed that it was defending the right to self-determination and the rights of peoples in Ukraine to freely decide their future, it legitimised its own use of force in 'in 2000–2005 we used our military to push back against terrorists in the Caucasus and stood up for the integrity of our state' (Kremlin.ru 2021).

In comparison with the earlier narratives developed in 2014-2015 studied above, before the 2022 escalation Ukraine retained the same narrative about the illegality of the annexation of Crimea by Russia as confirmed by multiple resolutions of international organisations. The refined narrative was that the annexation of Crimea and 'an attempt to destabilize the situation in the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine in order to form a quasi-state "Novorossiya"' were part of the same long-term plan by Russia to destroy Ukraine as an independent state and the 'victory of the revolution of dignity' was used by Russia only as a pretext. Furthermore, the ousting of Viktor Yanukovych was irrelevant as the official date of the Russian 'armed aggression' was 20 February 2014. The use of military force by Ukraine was presented as merely defensive: 'Courageous Ukrainian servicemen of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, National Guard and other military formations stopped the active phase of the Russian military invasion against Ukraine'. Russia was attributed full responsibility for all the dead and wounded in the conflict, for displacement and economic destruction and for regular violation of the Minsk Agreements. The narrative presented the 'Russian military aggression in Ukraine' as part of 'Russia's standard practice' that included earlier instances of violation of 'territorial integrity of Moldova and Georgia' as well as other violations and 'stepping up pressure on [the] Kremlin' was presented as the only way to stop Russian aggression. Finally, 'a democratic and prosperous Ukraine' was opposed to 'authoritarian' Russia (Ministry 2019).

The 2016 OHCHR report on 'Accountability for killings in Ukraine from January 2014 to May 2016' and the most recent report on the violation of human rights of 28 March 2022 noted limited progress in proceedings related to violent deaths during the Maidan protests, 2 May violence in Odesa and a lack of accountability for violations in the context of armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine. The 2016 report (OHCHR 2016: 11) noted that 'None of the armed groups or the Government of Ukraine has taken responsibility for any civilian deaths caused

by the conduct of hostilities'. Furthermore, the report quoted the statement by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions who held that 'each side is dedicating its time to documenting in laudable detail the violations of the other side with a view to continuing their confrontation in national or international courtrooms' instead of accepting its own side's responsibility and ensuring accountability (ibid.). The 28 March report regretted that the Constitutional Court in Ukraine refused to review the constitutionality of 'The Law on prevention of prosecution and punishment of individuals in respect of events, which have taken place during peaceful assemblies and recognising the repeal of certain laws of Ukraine' of 21 February 2014 as 'Annulling the law would have opened the way to prosecute individuals who shot and killed 13 law enforcement officers on 18 and 20 February 2014, and would thus contribute to establishing the truth in relation to the Maidan protests' (OHCHR 2022: 12).

Using the theoretical framework of conflict escalation as a narrative process proposed by Cobb (2013) to discuss the evolution of conflict narratives from 2014 will 2022, on the first narrative process of simplification of narratives underpinning identity closure, short denominators representing opposed interpretations became used by Russia and Ukraine referring to the Maidan protests and the change of government as 'a coup d'état' or the 'Revolution of Dignity', 'reunification' or 'annexation' to the Crimea case and 'ethnic cleansing and the illegitimate use of force by Ukraine' or the 'military aggression of Russia' to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. On the second narrative process of relational delegitimisation, Russia framed Ukraine as a mere puppet of the West used by it to weaken and contain Russia and used historical arguments to present Ukraine as lacking stable statehood and nationhood. Furthermore, Russia delegitimised the West and presented it as a threat by using the narrative emplotment that connected past violation of international law with interventions in the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Libya and Syria framed into a coherent narrative of constant deviant behaviour and policies based on the use of 'rough, direct force'. Ukraine presented the 'Russian military aggression in Ukraine' as part of 'Russia's standard practice' that included earlier instances of violation of 'territorial integrity of Moldova and Georgia' as well as other violations and 'stepping up pressure on [the] Kremlin' was presented as the only way to stop 'Russian aggression'.

On the third narrative process of externalisation of responsibility, Russia attributed all responsibility for conflict protraction and escalation on the West and NATO (cf. article by Bahenský in this issue and his analysis of the arguments of Western realists) for refusing to respond to 'legitimate' Russian demands for an inclusive European security architecture and putting full responsibility for conflict in Eastern Ukraine and violation of the Minsk Agreements on Ukraine.

Ukraine attributed full responsibility for all the dead and wounded in the conflict, for displacement and economic destruction and for regular violation of the Minsk Agreements to Russia. On the fourth narrative process of reversion of meaning, while Russia saw itself as committed to a peaceful resolution of conflict through the implementation of the Minsk Agreements, it was indignant that it was projected as an 'aggressor state'. There was no silence stage in response to denied legitimacy, defined by Cobb (2013) as the fifth narrative process, as Russia passed to the legitimisation of the use of force against the delegitimised 'Other'.

Discussion and conclusions

Drawing on the studies on narrative processes underlying conflict dynamics, this article examines the constitution and evolution of conflicting narratives between Russia and Ukraine as expressed in their foreign policy discourse and key political pronouncements between 2014 and 2022. Furthermore, it compares Russia's and Ukraine's official narratives with those developed by the international human rights community using the example of the HRMMU that aimed to achieve accountability for human rights violations as a basis for reconciliation. The mapping and analysis of narratives undertaken in the article show the key issue of contention between Russia and Ukraine during the studied period was the interpretation of the legitimacy of the use of force. The key consequence of the discursive attribution of conflict escalation and violence became the evolving political legitimisation of the use of force fuelling conflict escalation and protraction.

For Russia, the use of force by the pro-Maidan militias and the 'anti-terrorist operation' launched by the Ukrainian authorities in April 2014 were framed as illegitimate acts. At the same time, Russia legitimised the use of force by the Yanukovych government, its own decision to use force in Crimea as 'a humanitarian mission' and the anti-Maidan self-defence and armed groups by the right to 'self-defence'. In Ukrainian official narratives, the use of force by the Yanukovych government was framed as illegitimate as well as the use of force by Russia during the Crimea annexation, the Russian support for the self-defence and armed groups in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine and Russian military intervention in Eastern Ukraine. During the Maidan protests, the opposition legitimised pro-Maidan militias as 'elf-defence' and then the new Ukrainian authorities legitimised the 'anti-terrorist operation' as a 'rightful and legitimate' restoration of sovereignty and territorial integrity, law and order.

Furthermore, the article analysed the sequential elements in the Russian and Ukrainian narratives and their consequences. The analysis of the evolution of narratives between 2014 and 2022 shows the persistence of key narrative elements and radicalisation of some elements witnessing about conflict escalation

dynamics and a lack of progress in conflict resolution. In Russian narratives, the sequence of events included the 'unconstitutional armed coup d'état' supported by Western states as a result of which an 'illegitimate' government came to power with the help of radical and extremist paramilitary groups. Russia used this framing to legitimise the annexation of Crimea. The root cause of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine was the decision by the new Ukrainian authorities to launch an illegitimate operation and use repressions against those who disagreed with the change of government and militias were left with no choice but to defend their homes and families. Russia considered that the conflict had to be resolved in a negotiated way and denied its role in the conflict in providing support to the armed group and intervening militarily. In the Ukrainian narrative, the sequential elements included the legal change of government at the end of February 2014, the illegal annexation of Crimea and a military invasion by Russia followed by Russia's support for the 'illegal armed groups' and an overt Russian military intervention in Eastern Ukraine. In such framings of the root causes of the conflict, both Russia and Ukraine put full responsibility for conflict escalation on the other and for victims and destruction.

The analysis of the evolution of narratives in the last section of the article using Cobb's (2013) framework show radicalisation of discursive elements and threat perception as conflict evolved. Russia framed the US-led West as an threat with the change of Western defence doctrines and arming of Ukraine and enhanced the use of history and memory arguments to delegitimise Ukraine as a state and a nation. Ukraine reframed the conflict as the centuries-long intention of Russia to destroy Ukraine as a state and a nation.

The analysis of HRMMU narratives show how narratives of entities aiming to achieve reconciliation and conflict resolution differ from those of the conflict parties. On the key issues of contention between Ukraine and Russia, the HRMMU did not pronounce itself on the legality of the government change in Ukraine and adopted the international interpretation of annexation of Crimea as violating international law. At the same time, the HRMMU raised law and human rights violations by all sides. The HRMMU reports focused on both indiscriminate and disproportionate violence committed by law-enforcement bodies during the Maidan protests and violence committed by the pro-Maidan paramilitary groups and called for the investigation of violence against law enforcement committed by radical pro-Maidan groups. The HRMMU called for the disbandment and disarmament of all paramilitary forces, monitored violence and violation of human rights committed by all sides and called for investigation, accountability and redress for victims for all cases of violence as means of reconciliation.

Fundamentally, conflict escalation and de-escalation is an agency-driven process. These are the decisions and choices of political actors that shape con-

flict dynamics. All political actors bear responsibility for the lack of progress in conflict resolution before 2022, and the Russian leadership bears responsibility for the decision to use military force against a neighbouring sovereign state, illegal in accordance with international law, notwithstanding how it frames its actions.

The analysis undertaken in the article suggests that discursive structures underpinning conflicting positions need to receive more attention in conflict analysis and conflict transformation beyond the focus on ceasefire and peace agreements. Sealing and entrenchment of narratives underlie the deadlock in peacebuilding processes. The article has undertaken the analysis of official narratives that become dominant narratives in conflict-affected societies (Bar-Tal 2013). The next steps in research need to look how dominant narratives correlate with individual and group narratives and the struggle of groups challenging the dominant narratives of the conflict.

<p style="text-align:center">∿</p>

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Thematic section
The Russia-Ukraine War: Why the Conflict Was Not Prevented

Constructive Role Ambiguity and How Russia Couldn't 'Get Away' with Its 2022 Ukrainian Invasion

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Abstract
Since 2008, the Russian government conducted two invasions of sovereign territory in Eastern Europe prior to the current crisis in Ukraine. In 2008 Russian troops invaded Georgia, dramatically beginning a process of slowly dismantling the sovereignty of a self-identified European state. In 2014 Russia annexed Crimea and de facto established two pro-Russian independent oblasts inside Ukrainian territory. Throughout this process, and despite outrage, Western nations continued to interact favourably with Russia, allowing sanctions to lapse. However, the invasion of Ukraine in 2022 changed this standard interaction dramatically. But why was Russia unable to get away with this invasion? Using role theory, I shall show how the construction of the Russian '[co]compatriot defender' role conception has been used to strategically mask contradictory foreign policy behaviour. By analysing UN Security Council speeches, I will show how the operationalisation of constructed role ambiguity was used to 'shield' this role from contradictions between Russia's behaviour and western nations' expectations. Constructed ambiguity was deployed with regards to passportisation and the liberal norms of R2P and humanitarian intervention, thus preventing role conflict between Russia and Western nations. However, since 2022 Western nations have ceased to buy into this role ambiguity.

First published online on 30 September 2022, issue published on 30 September 2022

Introduction

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine did not happen in isolation. Russia invaded the South Ossetian and Abkhazian regions of Georgia in 2008, and the Crimean, Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine in 2014. Despite the similarity in the fundamental aspects of each conflict, it is only the most recent conflict in 2022 that led to such opposition from the international community. This includes unprecedented action including Russia's exclusion from the SWIFT banking system (RadioFreeEurope 2022), multiple fossil fuel embargos (United States Government 2022; House of Commons Library 2022) and neutral nations like Switzerland (Reuters 2022) and San Marino (San Marino Rtv 2022) engaging in sanctions regimes. So how did Russia get away with previous invasions without suffering similar consequences? This is the question this paper looks to answer; why didn't Russia get away with its 2022 invasion?

Using role theory to qualitatively analyse Security Council meetings will provide an explanation as to how Russia was able to conduct behaviour outside the expectations of its role, without escalating significant role conflict before 2022. Russia did this by constructing a situation in which ambiguity around significant aspects of its '[co]compatriot defender' role allowed it to present invasions as appropriate humanitarian interventions. The lack of clarity in the fulfillment of foreign policy expectations not only gave Russia the ability to present justifications for previous invasions in 2008 and 2014, but similarly explains why these justifications didn't work in 2022 escalating role conflict.

Role theory

Foreign policy always takes two or more actors. It is therefore a fundamentally social interaction between individuals. However, it is rarely studied as an interaction. Foreign policy literature often studies individual country's foreign policy – how one state acts and reacts to a given situation. Role theory, by contrast, theorises foreign policy as interactive and dynamic, where action, reaction and re-evaluation are analysed together. Role theory first emerged in behavioural science and psychology with the work of George Herbert Mead in the 1930s (Mead & Morris 2005). Role theory refers to a family of approaches that conceptualise social life (Biddle 1986; Mead & Morris 2005; Bruening 2017). It notes the centrality of the 'role', based upon status, value and involve-

ment, as the core of social identity and personal interaction (Mead & Morris 2005; Bruening 2017).

Role theory holds a wealth of descriptive and analytical capability for analysing international relations. Holsti introduced role theory into foreign policy literature in 1970 (Holsti 1970; Harnisch, Frank & Maull 2011; Bruening 2017). Role theory conceptualises international relations as the interaction of roles. Roles are themselves the interaction between a state's self-identity, status and expectations (Holsti 1970: 240). In these interactions, a state's self-identity reflects how it sees its 'self' (Harnisch, Frank & Maull 2011: 9). This is secondarily interacted with the state's self-perceived status within the international community (Holsti 1970). These two aspects interact to proscribe the sorts of behaviour the state sees as conducive with its position vis a vis other states. Behaviours refer to the actions taken by states. Thirdly this self-identity and status interact with the expectations of other states (Harnisch, Frank & Maull 2011: 11). This reflects the behaviour others expect to be conducive with its status and the other's relative position and status. This will then guide 'the general kind of decisions, commitments, rules and actions suitable to their state' (Holsti 1970: 245). This combination of self-identity, status and expectations define the state's 'role'. This is known as a National Role Conception (NRC) (Holsti 1970; Harnisch, Frank & Maull 2011; Bruening 2017). This state will then interact with other states through this NRC (Holsti 1970; Harnisch, Frank & Maull 2011; Harnisch 2011; Beneš & Harnisch 2014; Bruening 2017). In short, foreign policy occurs as the interaction between the NRCs of one state and the expectations of an 'other'. This theorises international relations through an interpersonal interactional metaphor, similar to that of individuals within society (Holsti 1970: 237; Bruening 2017).

Role theory uses Mead's terminology to describe the interactional positions of respective actors in foreign policy (Mead & Morris 2005). 'Ego' refers to the combination of self-identity and status that makes up an NRC (Harnisch, Frank & Maull 2011; Harnisch 2011; Beneš & Harnisch 2014). Ego's self-conceptions, defined as NRCs, are in turn identified by repeat patterns of behaviour (Holsti 1970: 254). 'Alter' refers to an 'other' the actor interacts with. This 'Alter' has its own expectations of Ego's behaviour and status (Walker 1987; Harnisch, Frank & Maull 2011; Harnisch 2011; Beneš & Harnisch 2014, Holsti 1970).

Alter can be defined both by Alter's expectations of Ego and by Alter's status. Holsti describes Alter through its expectations of Ego (Holsti 1970: 239-240). Where 'Ego' defines behaviours in terms of NRC prescriptions, 'Alter' defines the expectations of Ego's role (Holsti 1970: 239). Role prescriptions are the expected behaviours associated with the role from Ego's perspective. Role expectations are expected behaviours associated with Ego's role from Alter's perspective (Holsti 1970: 239).

This initial assessment of 'Alter' was expanded upon by Harnsich and others (Harnisch, Frank & Maull 2011; Harnisch 2011; Beneš & Harnisch 2014). Harnisch developed 'Alter' through the notion of 'others'(Harnisch, Frank & Maull 2011; Harnisch 2011). This combined Holsti's understanding with a notion of Alter's status vis a vis Ego (Holsti 1970; Harnisch, Frank & Maull 2011: 11). This allowed Harnisch to split the 'alter' by its socialising effect upon the ego, noting three distinct types of 'other'; Significant, Generalised and Organising others. Socialisation is the effect of Alter changing Ego's behavioural prescription to better align with Alter's behavioural expectations (Harnish 2011; Maull 2011). For this paper, Significant and Generalised others are key. Significant others have a direct impact upon the ego by interacting through behaviours with Ego's role (Harnisch, Frank & Maull 2011: 12). Generalised others, by contrast, have the effect of structuring the prescriptions of the ego; however, where the significant other is a concrete actor acting through behaviours, the generalised other is used as a referential frame (Harnisch, Frank & Maull, 2011: 12; Harnisch 2011; Beneš & Harnisch 2014). The combination of these two perspectives defines 'Alter' based on its expectations of Ego's role and its own status.

The combination of these generalised and significant others theorises two key aspects of Russian role enaction. First, there is the interaction that Russia undertakes directly with actors like the United States or Ukraine. This is theorised within the realms of the significant other. Second, there is the referential space in which the Russian ego interacts with but never meets, generalised others. Alters, such as the United States, can be used as both a reference and an audience for Russian behaviours. Therefore, the US can exist as both a significant and generalised other. This leads to an Ego interacting with an Alter as a significant other, through Ego's prescriptions and Alter's expectations, whilst referencing that same Alter as a generalised other, referring to historical behaviours.

Role conflict

One such interaction between states is role conflict. Role conflict comes broadly in two forms: conflict within roles (Tewes 1998; Demirduzen & Thies 2021) and conflict between roles (Malici & Walker 2017). Conflict within roles can occur when *an* actor performs contradictory behaviours associated with differing role conceptions (Holsti 1970; Tewes 1998; Kaarbo & Cantir 2013; Wehner & Thies 2014; Demirduzen & Thies 2021). Tewes has noted conflict within Germany's EU role conception, between behaviours associated with deepening or widening the EU (Tewes 1998). Conflict between roles occurs when *more than one* actor holds differing behavioural expectations of a *single* role (Malici & Walker 2017). Malici and Walker have noted role conflict between the behavioural expectations the United States and Iran have regarding Iran's 'revolutionary' NRCs (Malici

& Walker 2017). This paper will focus on the conflict between the behaviour(s) associated with the *role prescriptions* of Ego and the behaviour(s) associated with the *role expectations* of Alter (Holsti 1970). Therefore, this work will both follow and go beyond the inter-state role conflict framework developed by Malici and Walker (Malici & Walker 2017). This describes role conflict as a situation in which the socialising attempts of Alter have failed. This creates a situation in which two competing and antagonistic conceptions of behavioural expectations occur. In this form of role conflict, the role prescriptions of the Ego are different and antagonistic to the expectations Alter has of the role. The foreign policy conflict between the US and Iran, for example, is continually reproduced as Iranian revolutionary role prescriptions clash with role expectations the US has of Iran (Malici & Walker 2017). This framework understands role conflict, between the prescriptions Ego has of the role and the expectations Alter has of that role, becoming consistently (re)produced antagonistically. This framework holds a lot of untapped promise in understanding Russia's foreign policy, especially Russia where it seeks to justify behaviour to the international community.

Role ambiguity

Role ambiguity is a term often used in management or psychology (Jackson & Schuler 1984; Maden-Eyiusta 2021). Role ambiguity is usually defined in terms of clarity of role expectations. Role ambiguity describes a lack of clarity, certainty or predictability with regards to behaviour of a given role (King & King 1990: 49). This is often due to ill-defined or ambiguous role descriptions and/or uncertain objectives (King & King 1990: 50). In management and psychology literature, role ambiguity describes this uncertainty toward an individual directed from the organisation and structures which define their role. If role conflict comes from a search for validity between competing role expectations, then role ambiguity can lead to such conflict (King & King 1990).

Translating this to international relations presents some issues. The first deals with who defines the role. Within IR, roles are often self-defined by Ego and interacted with Alter. In other words, there is no overarching structure or organisation that defines the role and the acceptable boundaries. Absent such structure, it is the iterative process of foreign policy interaction that defines appropriate behaviour. States must define for themselves the acceptability of foreign policy associated with a role. Moreover, if states define the boundaries of acceptable foreign policy, then they can also attempt to push the boundaries of what is acceptable behaviour. Whilst Bruening notes this behavioural incongruity as a form of role conflict, this paper notes the behavioural ambiguity within a singular NRC (Breuning & Pechenina 2019). In this, states themselves can attempt to create role ambiguity. This means Ego pushing the boundaries

of acceptable behaviour whilst preventing role conflict with Alters. This means the construction of ill-defined or ambiguous role prescriptions. Far from creating role conflict, role ambiguity notes Ego's attempt to create uncertainty as to whether Alter's socialised behavioural expectations are being met. This reduces role conflict by more closely aligning Ego's behaviour to Alter's expectations.

In this sense, new behaviours can be framed as reflecting the previous behaviours of an Alter. This infers validity because Alter's previous behaviours come from its prescriptions. These are presented as acceptable behaviour already socialised within the role. For example, Russia uses the previous acceptability of humanitarian intervention by the US to justify its own interventions. This validates ego's behaviour based on Alter's past behaviour. In short, role ambiguity becomes constructed by the Ego (Russia) through referencing the behaviour of a significant other (US) through reference to a generalised other (previous US humanitarian interventions). In engaging with historical expectations of a significant other through this generalised other, Ego creates uncertainty about whether particular behaviours it seeks to introduce as acceptable already match socialised Alter expectations. This creates *role ambiguity* that can be used to shield itself from perceived role conflict between Ego's new behaviour and the Alter's expectations whilst avoiding the socialising process.

The Russian '[co]compatriot defender'

Historically, roles have been and continue to be used by policy makers (Holsti 1970; Jönsson & Westerlund 1982). Russia is no exception. Russian policy makers are no exception, using a myriad of roles to frame their foreign policy actions in the 20th and 21st centuries. Previously, scholars have pointed to Russia's attempts to construct an 'imperialist' role (Malici & Walker 2017: 7), Cold War role (Holsti 1970) and post-Soviet role (Breuning & Pechenina 2019). This imperialist role has morphed into an anti-hegemonic role as described by a number of scholars (Grossman 2005; Engström 2014; Akin 2019). Role theory's use to describe conflict within anti-hegemonic roles is shown by Akin (Akin 2019).

One such prominent role that this paper will explore is Russia's NRC as a '[co] compatriot defender'(Chafetz 1996; Souleimanov, Abrahamyan & Aliyev 2017; Strycharz 2020, 2022). This role, synonymous with the notion of a Russian protector, is a role that can be traced back decades. It was used to justify Russian support for Slavic nations during the first and second Balkan Wars (Boeckh 2016: 109). The result of this support was a protective alliance system between Imperial Russia and other Slavic nations (Boeckh 2016). Pan-Slavism ideologically justified a Russian sphere of influence over large tracks of eastern Europe, politicising the Russian populous and framing Russian foreign policy on the eve of the First World War (Gulseyen 2017). Furthermore, as Engstrom notes, under

the Soviet Union the notion of the Soviet 'protector' was commonly identified as a role conception (Engström 2014: 357). This '[co]compatriot protector' role conception went hand in hand with Bolshevik and Marxist political ideology toward the emancipation and protection of the working class. Through a notion of the global proletariat, the Soviet '[co]compatriot defender' was used to frame the Second World War with the Soviet Union protecting the world from Nazism (Engström 2014: 366, Dimbleby 2022).

Yet this [co]compatriot defender role is not confined to these timeframes. Indeed, Grossman identified the '[co]compatriot protector' role conception in post-Soviet Russian foreign policy, in which Russians are conceptualised as in need of protection (Grossman 2005: 343). The fall of the Soviet Union created a new socialising space for Russian role prescriptions, similar to the period of transition between Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union. Russians had previously travelled throughout the Soviet Union. Following its breakup, large numbers of Russians were left in emerging post-Soviet states. The '[co]compatriot defender' role meant elevating the Russian diaspora and putting focus on populations within post-Soviet republics (Chafetz 1996: 684; Strycharz 2020; Strycharz 2022; Souleimanov, Abrahamyan & Aliyev 2017, Engström 2014, Breuning & Pechenina 2019, Grossman 2005). As Engström notes, Putin reinterpreted Katechonic messianism protecting Russian people – including those beyond the borders of Russia – from outside threats within complimentary anti-hegemonic roles (Engström 2014: 373). One behaviour not associated with this role was invasion or armed intervention. Whilst similar in scope the [co]compatriot defender NRC often explains why Russia engaged in certain behaviours but not how Russia attempted to get away with its invasions, requiring further analysis.

The post-Cold War Russian construction of the '[co]compatriot defender' NRC was therefore filtered through both Russian perceptions and Alter expectations. This socialises a set of acceptable behaviours when Russia uses its '[co]compatriot defender' NRC. These behavioural sets included domestically defining 'Russian' populations in need of protection (Grossman 2005: 343; Strycharz 2020, 2022). Behaviours that express self-determination of peoples as 'Russian' define these Russian populations. This includes Russian citizenship, referenda and armed defence in concert with these actions. Russian citizenship can likewise be achieved conventionally through naturalisation or through passportisation; the mass conferral of citizenship through the distribution of passports (Artman 2013; Nagashima 2017). This provides the reference point for populations in need to be defended.

The '[co]compatriot defender' NRC does not exist in a vacuum. The Russian '[co]compatriot defender' NRC comes with a series of specific socialised expectations from other states. The post-Cold War international environment

socialised many new roles including other humanitarian 'protector' roles (Grossman 2005; Harnisch 2001; Engström 2014). These expectations often came from the US with its hegemonic position giving it significant influence socialising role expectations (Maull 2011). Previous Cold War [co]compatriot defender role expectations were disrupted by emerging US prescriptions toward 'universalist' principles based on liberal values and norms (Choi 2013: 124; Holsti 1970; Hoffmann, Johansen & Sterba 1997; Talbott 2007). Russian prescriptions moved to reflect this socialising process through the promotion of 'universalist' human rights through the [co]compatriot defender NRC As Grossman notes, Russian role conceptions are 'expressed in statements that refer to Russian obligations to protect human rights and to Russia's acceptance that the protection of individual rights is a basic component of Russian foreign policy' (Grossman 2005: 345). This defines the expectations and the preconditions for engaging in the '[co]compatriot defender' NRC.

   The US used a similar humanitarian NRC to validate its interventions during the 1990s and 2000s further socialising expected behaviour (Choi 2013). Responsibility to protect in Somalia, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, Bosnia East Timor, Iraq and Rwanda provided a framework for the expected behaviour of a state defining itself as a 'protector' (Lischer 2006; Pickering & Kisangani 2009; Choi 2013). As Choi notes, the protection of civilians was an expected behaviour (Choi 2013). Moreover, the precondition of an existential threat would frame the necessity of using such an NRC (MacWhinney 2002; Choi 2013). Interventions would often come hand in hand with political self-determination for the affected populations (MacWhinney 2002). These behaviours marked the socialised expectations of [co]compatriot defender role conceptions in the international system (Choi 2013: 134).

Methodology

This paper uses the methodological approaches of Holsti's foundational work and role theory works that have studied the [co]compatriot defender role (Holsti 1970; Souleimanov, Abrahamyan & Aliyev 2017; Strycharz 2020, 2022). Speech acts in the UN Security Council (UNSC) will be used to show how foreign policy elites engaged in this role. The UNSC remains a key forum for international interaction and provides the space for Russia to use its [co]compatriot defender NRC. Moreover, behavioural framing associated with the [co]compatriot defender NRC occurs within a relatively short timeframe, primarily during crises. Such crises provide the moment in which role conflict is most apparent and therefore behaviours associated with this conflict, such as escalation, de-escalation and/or role ambiguity, become clearest. Based on these considerations, the first month after the intervention in Georgia, Crimea and the 'special military operation' in 2022 will be assessed in this paper.

The most common way most role theorists determine NRCs is by analysing speeches made by 'foreign policy elites' (Holsti 1970; Walker 1983; Harnisch 2001; Harnisch, Frank & Maull 2011; Bruening 2017). Taking Harnisch's definition, 'foreign policy elites' refer to foreign ministers as well as heads of state (Harnisch, Frank & Maull 2011). Holsti expands this definition to include ambassadors (Holsti 1970). Foreign policy behaviour can be discursively acted through speeches made by foreign policy elites such as ambassadors, heads of state and foreign ministers. These speech acts represent vocal guides toward role behaviour (Holsti 1970; Bruening 2017). This notes particular terminology associated with the role and creating a lingua franca for the behaviour associated with a role. As Bruening suggests, this methodological approach can be useful in determining NRCs (Bruening 2017; Harnisch 2001). The interaction of these NRCs in turn provide an explanation for foreign policy behaviour (Bruening 2017). Therefore I will be looking for vocal guides that reflect the behavioural prescriptions and expectations of the [co]compatriot defender NRC.

In analysing the Security Council meetings, particular focus will be turned to the Russian Permanent Representative Vitaly Churkin, Vasily Nebenzya and Nebenzya's deputy Gennady Kuzmin. These speeches will be used to determine the vocal guides of role behaviour. The term '[co]compatriot defender', 'protector', 'protecting' and 'protected' will be searched for directly. Furthermore, references to key expectations and prescriptions of the [co]compatriot defender role NRC such as humanitarian intervention, responsibility to protect and right to self-determination will be used to locate vocal guides (Strycharz 2020, 2022; Souleimanov, Abrahamyan & Aliyev 2017). The instances in which these key features are referenced will be highlighted as it shows direct use of the behaviours associated with this role.

This paper will also qualitatively assess the framing of the significant and generalised 'others'. This will focus on the way the 'other' is being defined; whether they are being referenced as a generalised or significant other. This will focus on the juxtaposition between a referential historical alter and contemporary significant other. This will note how role ambiguity is engaged to provide justification for the expansion of behaviours not associated with the [co]compatriot defender role. This paper focuses inherently on the Russian perspective. This focuses on how Russia attempted to get away with its behaviour; however, it does not ignore the fact that it takes two actors – an Ego and an Alter – to engage in any potential role conflict.

Georgia 2008

The Russian intervention in Georgia in August 2008 marked the low point of relations between the two states. South Ossetia and Abkhazia remained semi-

independent oblasts within Georgia following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Separatists in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia fought Georgian state forces to a standstill, gaining recognition by Russia. This was maintained by a Russian peacekeeping force, creating de facto independence. Internally, South Ossetia attempted to define their own independence by issuing Ossetian passports (Artman 2013; Georgia Civil 2006). The legitimacy of these were denied by the international community as South Ossetia remained an internationally recognised part of Georgia.

Similarly in Abkhazia, Georgian status of the population was mired in controversy. This meant the adoption of a Georgian passport was unlikely, with many instead continuing to use soviet passports or switching to Russian citizenship (Artman 2013; Nagashima 2017). For international travel individuals often took Russian passports creating a secondary form of citizenship (Littlefield 2009: 1462). Passportisation therefore defined South Ossetians and Abkhazians as Russian citizens, creating the space in which Russia could engage its [co]compatriot defender role.

Passportisation allowed Russia to engage with the notion of self-determination. The right to self-determination is enshrined in the United Nations charter marking a foundational principle of international law. It also marks one of the key behavioural expectations of engaging the '[co]compatriot defender' NRC. Russia had already begun to move regular troops into South Ossetia to bolster their peacekeeping forces when, on 8 August in the Security Council, this role was engaged (IIFFMCG Vol III p.342-343). Ambassador Churkin referenced Russian President Medvedev's speech, noting the citizenship of Ossetians and Abkhazians as a choice to self-determine as such:

> Russia will not allow the deaths of our *compatriots[1]* to go unpunished, and that the lives and dignity of *our citizens*, wherever they are, will be *protected,* in accordance with the Constitution of Russia and in accordance with the laws of the Russian Federation and international law (UNSC 5952: 5).

With Russian citizens defined, Churkin engaged with the expectations of significant others, specifically the United States, European actors and separately Georgia. Firstly, to the expectations of the United States and European actors and secondly to Georgia, Churkin stated:

> We hope that our European colleagues and our American colleagues, who in recent weeks have been in active contact with us and who appar-

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1   Italics added by author.

ently were taking some steps to prevent this situation shifting to a hot phase, will start to understand what is going on: we hope that they will draw the right conclusions from this . . .

We recently heard the Georgian Government Minister, Mr. Yakobash-vili, say that Russia should intervene as a real peacekeeper. Well, that is precisely what we are doing now (UNSC 5952: 5).

Churkin directly references the role conflict between Russian behaviour and Georgian, US and European expectations. In response Churkin is directly speaking to the expectations of the [co]compatriot defender role, highlighting their fulfilment. Passportisation was actively used by Ambassador Churkin to define a 'Russian' population allowing the rhetoric of self-determination and [co]compatriotism to be engaged in.

With this Russian population materially and discursively constructed, Russia defined a threat to this population. Without a threat there is nothing to protect against, negating the need to defend [co]compatriots. At a UNSC special meeting on 10 August, Churkin referenced fighting between Georgian forces and South Ossetians as genocide (UNSC 5953: 8). Again, Churkin referenced the citizenship of South Ossetians referring to them as 'Russian Citizens' (UNSC 5953: 8). Churkin defined this threat to Russian citizens in existential terms to add to the necessity of further intervention. Churkin explained Russian behaviour as expanding Russia's existing commitments in line with its [co]compatriot defender role:

> We could not leave the *civilian population* in South Ossetia in dire straits or leave our *peacekeepers without protection*.[2] So, additional troops were sent to Georgia, and they are still engaged in the task of removing Georgia from South Ossetia (UNSC 5953: 8).

By defining the threat as existential and the population under threat as Russian citizens, Russia was able to use its [co]compatriot defender NRC. Therefore, in line with its prescriptions of the [co]compatriot defender role Russia moved to defend its citizens. This behaviour came in the form of an invasion. This behaviour, outside the standard repertoire of the [co]compatriot defender role, was justified in line with previous behaviours socialised within the role. This role ambiguity was directly referenced on 19 August to describe its actions (UNSC 5961: 11). In engaging in this role Churkin further referenced both previous US and NATO actions through a generalised other.

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2   Italic added by author.

> The statement made by Ambassador Khalilzad (United States Permanent representative) with regard to terror against the civilian population is absolutely unacceptable, particularly from the lips of the Permanent Representative of a country whose actions we are aware of, including with regard to civilian populations in Iraq, Afghanistan and Serbia (UNSC 5961: 11).

This marks a direct use of role ambiguity. The role conflict between the expectations of the United States (significant other) and Russia (Ego) are being directly referenced through the use of a generalised other (historic US behaviour). This is done to justify the behaviour being taken by Russia outside the existing repertoire of behaviour associated with the [co]compatriot defender role. This marks an attempt by Russia to infer validity because if the previous action of Alter was valid then the action being taken by Ego is likewise valid even if the behaviour is different. This made possible the introduction of role ambiguity making it uncertain whether the expectations of the [co]compatriot defender role are being met by new behaviour.

Ukraine: February and March 2014

A similar pattern occurred in 2014 in Ukraine. Following the Maidan protests and the flight of President Yanukovych from Kiev, Russia began expressing concern in the UN (UNSC 7117: 21). The process was more disjointed but it still followed the previous process. Again, it began by defining a Russian [co]compatriot. The first act of this process occurred on 24 February with Churkin using 'Russian language' to define a [co]compatriot in Crimea (UNSC 7117: 21). This included internationalising calls from deputies in the southern and eastern parts of Ukraine (Donetsk and Luhansk). This was further augmented by defining an emerging though still nascent threat to the 'Humanitarian rights of *Russians[3]* and other national minorities in Ukraine' (UNSC 7117: 21).

Once Russian forces began to directly intervene in Crimea this process became much more evident. This included framing actions in Crimea as popular self-determination and vice versa Ukrainian reactions as an existential threat (UNSC 7124: 4). In constructing a Russian [co]compatriot Russian language was used to define Russian citizens and Russian minorities (UNSC 7124: 4). Minority calls for Crimean reunification with Russia further framed actions of Russian compatriots as popular self-determination (UNSC 7124: 4-5).

Again, in line with the process that occurred in Georgia, the threat was escalated. Churkin rhetorically pushed 'threats against the lives of Russian citizens, our compatriots', from 'a number of political groups whose membership

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3   Italics added by author.

includes radical extremists working in the field of Ukrainian security' (UNSC 7124: 4). Again, on 3 March Churkin repeated:

> The issue is one of defending our *citizens and compatriots*,⁴ as well as the most import human right — the right to life (UNSC 7125: 3) . . . assistance is entirely legitimate under Russian law, given . . . the threat posed to Russian citizens, our compatriots (UNSC 7125: 5).

Churkin referenced Alter expectations of Russia's foreign policy noting its position was in accordance with 'humanitarian law, in defence of human rights and the rights of national minorities' (UNSC 7125: 5). By using the Russian language as a determining factor Churkin included both Russian citizens and 'Russian' minorities to discursively create a Russian population. This population was then in need of protection due to the threat of Ukrainian security forces. [Co]compatriots and threat defined, the enaction of role ambiguity to justify an invasion became based upon the protection of compatriots through humanitarian intervention.

As March continued, this process began to augment with further efforts to frame self-determination. This included the threat becoming more existential.

> It is clear that the achievement of the *right to self-determination*⁵ in the form of separation from an existing state is an extraordinary measure. However, in the case of Crimea, it obviously arose as a result of the legal vacuum created by the violent coup against the legitimate Government carried out by nationalist radicals in Kyiv, as well as by their direct threats to impose their order throughout the territory of Ukraine (UNSC 7134: 12).

The description of the action being undertaken as an 'extraordinary measure' is indicative of it existing outside the realms of socialised behaviour and therefore Alter expectations. According to Russia the existential threat justified the need for invasion and annexation under the guise of a compatriot protecting humanitarian intervention. This framed the expanding behavioural repertoire of a [co]compatriot defender NRC as already socialised, and therefore expected, legitimate behaviour.

However, this behaviour came under increased scrutiny with the potential for role conflict. The US representative frequently criticised the Russian representative for failing to follow international law (UNSC 7138: 2; 7234: 6; 7239: 14). More time was therefore dedicated towards mitigating this role conflict. This

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4   Italics added by author.
5   Italics added by author.

was done primarily through role ambiguity. Practically, this was achieved by referencing the new behaviour, annexation and invasion, as consistent with the expectations of the significant other, referencing previous behaviour through a generalised other. Again, this was an attempt to shield Russian foreign policy from role conflict by referencing conflictual states' previous foreign policy.

> It is well known that the concept of a referendum is not new. Referendums have been or will be held in Puerto Rico, Gibraltar, the Falkland Islands, Catalonia and Scotland . . . the inhabitants of those territories were or will be given the opportunity to express their free will. Why should the people of Crimea be an exception? (UNSC 7134: 16)

As referenda became a further means for framing compatriot self-determination it again was deployed through role ambiguity. In response to numerous criticisms surrounding the referenda in Crimea and claims of self-determination, Churkin stated:

> The Permanent Representative of the United States blamed Russia for illegally pursuing its ambitions. That does not apply to us . . . why has she negated the right of the people of Crimea to express their will tomorrow during the referendum? (UNSC 7138: 12)

On 15 March Churkin referenced the island of Mayotte and a French independence referenda that separated it from Comoros. France used its veto to deny the Comorian position of integrity between Comoros and Mayotte (UNSC 7144: 16). These cases highlight Russian attempts to frame new behaviour as consistent with already socialised behaviour. This is done by engaging in role ambiguity highlighting the new behaviour being enacted as consistent with the expectations of a significant other based on its previous behaviour. The direct interaction with previous significant others (United States and French) foreign policy throughout March was used to construct validity in the engagement of the [co]compatriot defender role. This was commonly in reference to the expectations of Russia that would reflect previous significant other foreign policy (UNSC 7144: 18).

Ukraine 2022

In late February 2022 Putin announced Russia's 'special military operation' into Ukraine (al Jazeera 2022a). It marked yet another phase of the ongoing conflict begun in 2014. The [co]compatriot defender role that was previously engaged was used; however, it ran into some serious inconsistencies when implemented.

The compatriot defender role conception was consistently implemented when justifying engagement in the Donbas region of Ukraine. This follows from its use in 2014 during the August invasion (UNSC 7234, 7244, 7253; Pakhomenko, Tryma & Francis 2018). This was combined with references to referenda that fit the pattern of similar behaviour already described. When justifying the invasion in 2022 to the UNSC, Nebenzya highlighted the threat to compatriots through the 'restriction' of language rights, the actions of Ukrainian forces and the ongoing passportisation in the region.

> The purpose of the special operation is to protect people who have been subjected to abuse and genocide by the Kyiv regime for eight years (UNSC 8974: 12).

> [F]or eight years the Council turned a blind eye to crimes perpetrated by Ukrainian nationalists in Donbas. Today once again, no mention was made of the suffering of the people of Donbas (UNSC 8980: 7).

> Everyone is well aware that, starting in 2014, Russia and Russia alone has provided assistance to the civilian population of Donbas, who were faced with constant shelling by the Ukrainian army and the blockade imposed by Kyiv. . . . An important support measure for the people of Donbas was the 2019 decree by the President of Russia, Mr. Putin, entitled 'On defining for humanitarian purposes categories of persons entitled to apply for citizenship of the Russian Federation via a simplified procedure' (UNSC 8983: 14).

This shows that the [co]compatriot defender role conception was being used in behaviour related to Donbas. That this justification was being used by Putin in the initial speech beginning the 'special military operation', then repeated consistently by both Nebenzya and Kuzmin, shows this strategy was employed by the Russian government as a whole (Bloomberg 2022). When geographically isolated to the Donbas region, this behaviour was justified using a similar strategy to that in 2014 and 2008. However, the 'special military operation' included the entirety of Ukraine. The response of the Ukrainian government and populous is clear, rejecting the Russian intervention (Moscow Times 2022). This denied the rhetorical space for Russia to create a self-determining Russian [co]compatriot populous to defend. This in turn made the role conflict between its existing role behaviour and the new behaviour more obvious to the international community.

However, that there were so few cases of the [co]compatriot defender being vocally engaged and that they became confined to one specific region shows the

inability to coherently deploy relevant justifications. The new behaviour enacted in the 'special military operation' was justified through demilitarisation and denazification. This was in part used by Russia to justify its wider actions in Ukraine outside the Donbas (UNSC 8979). In doing so it attempted to add these behaviours towards its repertoire. However, it made no attempt to engage in role ambiguity when enacting these new behaviours. Instead, most speeches made in the UN in the period just after the 'special military operation' began with an extensive list of grievances (UNSC 8979; UNSC 8983; UNSC 8988; UNSC 8989).

This fits the behaviour associated with the anti-hegemonic role described by Engström and Grossman suggesting the potential for a change in role priority (Grossman 2005; Engström 2014). The accusations of biological weapons cooperation between Ukraine and the United States is a case in point with Russia directly challenging the United States role as hegemon (UNSC 8991).

> According to the project documents, the United States has actively funded biological projects in Ukraine. Experiments were conducted to study the transmission of dangerous diseases by ectoparasites, such as lice and fleas (UNSC 8991: 5).

Direct challenges to US hegemony have become a regular feature of statements by Nebenzya at the UN (UNSC 8979; 8983; 8988; 8989; 8991; 8999).

> For almost 20 years, the United States has blocked efforts of that kind, while refusing to provide such information. . . . The other issues I again mentioned on 11 March (UNSC 8991) are just the tip of the iceberg. . . . We will continue to keep the international community informed about the unlawful activity carried out by the Pentagon on Ukrainian territory (UNSC 8999: 6).

It marks a change toward more direct confrontation with the United States, something noted by Köstem (Köstem 2018). This change in turn led to a more direct inter-state role conflict between US hegemonic role conceptions and Russian anti-hegemonic role conceptions (Maull 2011; Engström 2014).

Thirdly, the grievances, used to justify the inclusion of new behaviour, remain unconnected to the behaviour of significant others. This includes accusations of US and Ukrainian biological weapons production presented by Russia to the UNSC (UNSC 8991). Use of biological weapons for instance remains unconnected to the defence of compatriots role. Instead it is presented as a direct confrontation to the role taken by the United States (Maull 2011). Therefore, it exists simply to confront the United states within the anti-hegemonic role conception.

This highlights two emerging phenomena. Firstly it indicates the potential for role change within foreign policy justifications directed by Russia towards the international community. This change came in the form of a priority shift from the [co]compatriot defender role conception towards the anti-hegemonic role conception. This led to more direct inter-state role conflict between the hegemonic role conception or the US and the anti-hegemonic role conception of Russia in 2022. Secondly, it indicates that the role ambiguity previously used to justify invasions in 2008 and 2014 was largely discarded. This is shown through less reference between current Russian behaviour and previous foreign policy by the likes of the United States and other Western states. Both these changes disrupt the justifications Russia puts forward highlighting the clear conflict between Russian actions and expectations.

Conclusion

Russian invasions in 2008 and 2014 have followed a common approach. This begins with the discursive creation of a Russian [co]compatriot population. This is done through the 'independent' expression of a right to self-determination by the [co]compatriot population. This is expressed in the form of referenda, passport ownership or militias. In the case of South Ossetia and Abkhazia the issuance of passports expressed their independence as Russian [co]compatriots. In Crimea, 'referenda' calling for Russian reunification expressed their [co]compatriot status. In Donbass, calls for Russian sponsored independence codified in 'referenda' defended through the calling of militias expressed their [co]compatriot status. This discursively created a Russian population. This was followed by the inference of an existential threat. In the case of South Ossetia and Abkhazia it was Saakashvili's Georgian government. In the case of Crimea and Donbass, the post Yanukovych government. This threat then prompts engagement of Russia's [co]compatriot defender NRC. This frames the invasion as a humanitarian intervention.

These invasions then require justification to significant others within the international community. As new behaviour this invasion is presented as within the expected repertoire of the [co]compatriot defender role. This is catered toward the expected behaviour of the [co]compatriot defender role, framing new behaviour in terms of humanitarian intervention, international law and the right to self-determination. This frames Russian foreign policy in reference to historical action taken by the conflictual Alter, as a generalised other. With invasions presented as humanitarian interventions, in the case of the US, previous interventions justify the inclusion of this behaviour. This is designed to validate Ego's new behaviour by reference to Alter's previous behaviour. This process, role ambiguity, attempts to shield the behaviour from role conflict inferring

a lack of clarity as to whether Alter's behavioural expectations are met by this new behaviour.

In the most recent escalation of conflict Russia failed or decided not to engage in role ambiguity. There is an inability to define a compatriot population in threat outside of the Donbas region. Russian attempts to define an existential threat through 'neo-fascists' in the Ukrainian government was equally rejected. The 'special military operation' therefore remained unrelated to any historical action taken by other members of the international community. Fundamentally, this drew a clearer distinction between Russia's behaviour and the expectations of its [co]compatriot defender role. Furthermore, when related to its anti-hegemonic role it highlighted clear inter-state role conflict between itself and the US. This lack of role ambiguity denied Russia the space to engage adequately in its [co]compatriot defender NRC whilst exacerbating role conflict between other roles. This gave the political space for western governments to engage in unprecedented responses, including increased military spending (Pancevski 2022), military aid investments (al Jazeera 2022b) and new alliances (NATO 2022). This marks a dramatic increase in inter-state role conflict. By failing to properly use its [co]compatriot defender role and being unable to engage in role ambiguity, Russia now faces significant role conflict. This change in priority and inability to engage previous mechanism for international justification leaves Russia isolated and unable to get away with yet another invasion in Europe.

<div align="center">↬</div>

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Security Council Meetings

Security Council, Sixty-third year: 5952nd meeting: Friday, 8 August 2008, 4.20 p.m. New York.

Security Council, Sixty-third year: 5953rd meeting: Sunday, 10 August 2008, 11.35 a.m. New York.

Security Council, Sixty-third year: 5961st meeting: Tuesday, 19 August 2008, 4.15 p.m. New York.

Security Council, Sixty-ninth year: 7117th meeting: Monday, 24 February 2014, New York.

Security Council, Sixty-ninth year: 7124th meeting: Saturday, 1 March 2014, 4.15 p.m. New York.

Security Council, Sixty-ninth year: 7125th meeting: Monday, 3 March 2014, New York.

Security Council, Sixty-ninth year: 7134th meeting: Thursday, 13 March 2014, New York.

Security Council, Sixty-ninth year: 7138th meeting: Saturday, 15 March 2014, 11 a.m. New York.

Security Council, Sixty-ninth year: 7144th meeting: Wednesday, 19 March 2014, 3 p.m. New York.

Security Council, Sixty-ninth year: 7234th meeting: Tuesday, 5 August 2014, New York.

Security Council, Sixty-ninth year: 7239th meeting: Friday, 8 August 2014, New York.

Security Council, Sixty-ninth year: 7244th meeting: Tuesday, 19 August 2014, New York.

Security Council, Sixty-ninth year: 7253rd meeting: Thursday, 28 August 2014, 2 p.m. New York.

Security Council, Seventy Seventh year: 8974th meeting: Wednesday, 23 February 2022, New York.

Security Council, Seventy Seventh year: 8979th meeting: Friday, 25 February 2022, New York.

Security Council, Seventy Seventh year: 8980th meeting: Sunday, 27 February 2022, New York.

Security Council, Seventy Seventh year: 8983rd meeting: Monday, 28 February 2022, New York.

Security Council, Seventy Seventh year: 8986th meeting: Friday, 4 March 2022, New York.

Security Council, Seventy Seventh year: 8988th meeting: Monday, 7 March 2022, New York.

Security Council, Seventy Seventh year: 8989th meeting: Tuesday, 8 March 2022, New York.

Security Council, Seventy Seventh year: 8991st meeting: Friday, 11 March 2022, New York.

Security Council, Seventy Seventh year: 8999th meeting: Friday, 18 March 2022, New York.

Thematic section
The Russia-Ukraine War: Why the Conflict Was Not Prevented

Looking for Stepan Bandera: The Myth of Ukrainian Nationalism and the Russian 'Special Operation'

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Abstract

The so-called 'denazification' of Ukraine and the need to free the country from the radical nationalists was used by the Russian government as a central argument to justify the military invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. However, the discussion of radical right-wing nationalist groups allegedly active in Ukraine and violently oppressing the Russian-speaking population have been maintained by the governing regime in Russia already since the so-called Euromaidan protests in 2013-2014. The word 'banderivtsi', disciples or sons and daughters of Stepan Bandera, the leader of the Ukrainian nationalist organisations OUN and UPA, became widely used, first, by Russian pro-governmental media who this way referred to what they presented as the nationalist population of Ukraine. Consequently, the Ukrainians started using the term themselves, in an ironic way, to re-appropriate it and re-establish the national identity reshaped by the years of informational and actual wars. The present piece discusses the centrality of the concept of Ukrainian nationalism in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. It examines how, seeking further separation from Russia, the Ukrainian government has been changing its memory politics towards a significantly modified perception and interpretation of the shared past.

It argues that building parallels between attacking 'nationalist Ukraine' and the victory over Nazi Germany central to the glorious past of Russia within the state memory politics was used by Kremlin to justify the military action in the neighbouring country.

First published online on 1 September 2022, issue published on 30 September 2022

Introduction

In November–December 2013, Ukraine made it to the front pages of the Western press. At the central square of Kyiv, *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* (Independence square), or simply Maidan, a peaceful protest of young people against the government's decision to put the Association Agreement negotiations with the European Union on pause was violently dispersed by the state security service. This resulted in the largest anti-governmental protest in the history of the independent Ukraine that lasted several months and ended with the pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovych's government fleeing the country.

During the first months of this protest, I was in Berlin, doing my doctoral studies at Humboldt University, and as a Ukrainian political scientist, I was invited to deliver a talk about the situation in Kyiv. After I spoke about the protest camps in the centre of Kyiv, self-support networks, and solidarity among the protesters, I was struck by the first question coming from the audience. I was asked whether I found problematic the fact that among groups at the so-called Euromaidan protests, there were fascists. It was my first encounter with the myth of Ukrainian nationalism. During the years to follow, I heard this question multiple times, presenting topics from LGBTQ rights to marriage migration and sexual education in Ukrainian schools. Even though far-right parties have never passed the 5% threshold to gain seats in the Ukrainian parliament and had rather scarce public support, the narrative on Ukrainian right-wing forces shaping the country's politics persisted.

On 24 February 24 2022, Russia launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, defining it as a 'special operation' aimed at the 'denazification' of the country. For years before that, the Russian government and national and international media maintained the narrative of extreme right-wing nationalism and oppression of the Russian-speaking minority in Ukraine (Kuzio 2022; Zhurzhenko 2014). Nevertheless, starting from 2014, the Western media actively discussed right-wing parties and groups in Ukraine, featuring pictures of the activists excessively using national symbols, particularly those related to the memory of the Ukrainian nationalist organisations OUN and UPA. These organisations are infamous for

cooperation with Nazi Germany, antisemitic ideology and killing civilians (Törnquist-Plewa & Yurchuk 2019).

The present article discusses the ideological foundation of the ongoing war of Russia against Ukraine, to which the concept of Ukrainian nationalism proved central. The aim is to explore how the notion of radical nationalisation of Ukraine constructed by the Russian propaganda served the purpose of justification of the full-scale invasion in 2022. In doing so, the article engages with postcolonial theory as a helpful instrument in understanding the memory politics in Ukraine and around Ukraine (Chernetsky 2003; Gerasimov & Mogilner 2015) and its criticism and alternatives proposed by several scholars (Korek 2007; Morenets 2006). The article's argument is two-fold. First, it demonstrates that as Ukraine sought approximation with the European Union and separation from the Kremlin's influence, the government's memory politics changed towards the significantly modified perception and interpretation of the past shared with Russia. As the Russian government has been determined not to let Ukraine get out of the Kremlin's control, this memory politics change was framed in the Russian public discourse as radical nationalism detrimental to the human rights of Russian speaking population of Ukraine. Building a parallel between nationalist Ukraine and Nazi Germany central to the glorious past of Russia and state memory politics was used by the Kremlin to justify the military action in the neighbouring country.

The article proceeds as follows. After discussing the use of postcolonial lenses for understanding the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine and its shortcomings, the analysis is structured in a form of three vignettes. The first one deals with the transformation of the perceptions of the Great Patriotic / Second World War in Ukraine and Russia in Post-Euromaidan Ukraine stressing the importance of the Great Patriotic War as one of the core components of the Russian national identity. The second vignette is dedicated to the figure of Stepan Bandera as related to the rejection of the emancipation of the Ukrainian nation and its separation from the so-called 'Russkiy mir'. Finally, the third vignette analyses the notorious article by Vladimir Putin 'On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians'. The latter can serve as an illustration of the fact that for centuries Russian propaganda has been denying Ukraine its agency and subjectivity; first, refusing to recognise the sovereignty of Ukrainians as a nation and, second, perpetuating modern Ukraine's dependency on the West.

Russian-Ukrainian relations through a postcolonial lens?

In the past, there was a tendency in postcolonial studies to focus primarily on the regions where European colonialism had political and territorial history. The last decades changed it as more and more scholars began applying postcolonial analysis to 'other' places and new contexts in need of building new theoretical

bridges (Mayblin et al. 2014). The attempts to use postcolonial analysis for the cases of Central and Eastern European countries, including Ukraine, got a mixed reaction from support to strong opposition. As Törnquist-Plewa and Yurchuk (2019: 701) point out, one of the central arguments of the opponents is that relations between Russia and Ukraine, unlike those of Western European countries with their former colonies, do not include the race component and that racial chauvinism cannot be adequately compared with national chauvinism. According to Ryabchuk (2013: 50), the 'post-communist world was not colonial *sensu stricto* because it did not have the idea of racial superiority in its ideological core and never made racial exclusion into political practice.' Instead, he stresses the centrality of the linguo-cultural component in Russian-Ukrainian relations, arguing that within Imperial Russia and later the Soviet Union, most Ukrainians, unlike other ethnic groups, were visually vaguely different from Russians. Unless they tried to challenge Russian cultural, linguistic and political hegemony, they had no reason to face persecution (ibid).

Shkandrij (2009) relates the overall reluctance of some Ukrainian scholars to apply a postcolonial lens to Ukraine to the fact that they consider the concept of 'colony' demeaning, related to backwardness and harmful to national pride and identity building. Moore (2001) argues that the Soviet dominance was understood by many Eastern Europeans primarily as occupation, not colonisation, and that 'colonial' status would be undermining their 'European' identities in the eyes of more developed Western countries.

Another problem connected to a rather one-sided view of Ukraine as an eternal colony that has always been under the rule of imperial centres (Poland, Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Russian Empire), as Yurchuk (2013: 151) argues, has resulted in 'a stereotype that Ukraine cannot be imagined outside the imperial context.' She points out that even independent Ukraine used to have the authorities, like Viktor Yanukovych's government (2010-2014), who largely contributed to the reproduction of neocolonial discourse aimed at reintegration of Ukraine into Russia on the political, economic and cultural levels. Also, Ryabchuk (2013) warns against misuse of the terms 'colonial', 'empire' or 'subaltern' in popular texts for a broader audience as they can be easily used for propaganda and manipulative arguments, for example, presenting the West as a new colonial power replacing the old from the Kremlin.

Nevertheless, with all these arguments in mind, several studies have applied postcolonial theories to analysing Ukrainian culture, literature and memory politics (Chernetsky 2003; Gerasimov & Mogilner 2015; Törnquist-Plewa & Yurchuk 2019). Instead of comparing imperial contexts or transferring all the concepts directly to the Ukrainian context, applying some of the tools of the postcolonial theory to shed some light on the deeper processes at the core of the current Rus-

sian invasion of Ukraine may be more helpful. For example, as Ryabchuk (2013) observed, the pattern when the imperialist tries to implant across the colonised territory the notion of the superiority of its own culture while the culture of the colonised is seen as peripheral, inferior or non-existent is the one that fits very well into the description of Russian-Ukrainian relations.

There are at least two ways to use the postcolonial approach to analysing the current situation in the region. One would be, as Törnquist-Plewa & Yurchuk (2019) are doing, looking at Ukrainian politics of memory using the concepts of 'anticolonial nationalism' and 'hybridity'. As Loomba (2005: 146) defined it, anticolonial nationalist movements often drew on the ideas and vocabularies of colonisers to challenge colonial rule. However, while one may criticise such nationalism as shaped by the elites and perpetuating the subalternity of the colonised, we should not deny the agency of colonised people who challenge the colonial rule and use their own 'interpretive lens, and even using it to assert cultural alterity or insist on an unbridgeable difference between colonizer and colonized' (ibid). Törnquist-Plewa & Yurchuk (2019: 703) mention another important feature of anticolonial nationalism essential for the understanding of the processes in Ukraine. They stress the centrality of forgetting the colonial past and searching for national heroes and roots that would be instrumental in this separation. They point out that while this strategy can be helpful in this process of separation from the colonial past, it is rather a transitory stage of decolonisation and needs to be followed by the emergence of a new social consciousness (see also Fanon 1990).

This article does not aim to analyse the nationalist actors, scholars or political groups in Ukraine. There is already a solid body of literature not only exploring the Ukrainian far-right groups (Umland 2019) but also showing how exaggerating the role of these actors in Ukrainian politics was instrumental for the Kremlin in starting 'an alleged anti-fascist struggle against the newly established Ukrainian authorities' in temporarily occupied areas of Donbas (Shekhovtsov 2015). Instead, this article uses a postcolonial lens to explain why the Russian government treats modern independent Ukraine as an artificial entity that needs to be reintegrated into Russia as its historical part. Based on Spivak's thinking (2010), modern Ukrainians as 'subaltern' in their struggle for separation from Russia are not recognised in their attempts of self-representation because their self-representation does not fit into the expectations of those who 'imagine' Ukraine. The idea of Ukraine as an independent state goes against the image that the Russian authorities have of the country and its people. Therefore, the attempts of the Ukrainian government to re-interpret the shared past as the USSR and post-Soviet Russia presented it – and especially the revision of the Second World War by the Ukrainian government – are seen by

the Kremlin as an act of provocation, disobedience and separation that needs to be stopped.

Vignette 1 - Undoing Ukraine: decommunisation and reappropriation of memory politics

An important period to address in examining the construction of the ideological foundation of the Russian invasion is following the Euromaidan period of decommunisation of Ukraine and revision of the country's memory politics of World War II.

After Viktor Yanukovych, former president of Ukraine, fled Ukraine due to the Euromaidan protest, the new government with the president Petro Poroshenko declared strongly pro-European politics and launched a strategy aimed at cutting ties with Russia. His policy marked with the slogan 'Army. Language. Faith' included efforts to strengthen the Ukrainian military, which was in 2015 in quite a precarious weakened position, continuing Ukrainisation reforms and legitimising the Ukrainian Orthodox Church through getting the Tomos of Autocephaly of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in Istanbul. Finally, concerned by the communist nostalgia still present among some parts of the population, in April 2015, the government introduced a package of four so-called decommunisation laws.

The four laws adopted in Ukraine included Law no. 2558 'On Condemning the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes and Prohibiting the Propagation of their Symbols', banning Nazi and communist symbols, and public denial of their crimes; Law no. 2538-1 'On the Legal Status and Honouring of the Memory of the Fighters for the Independence of Ukraine in the 20th Century', elevating several historical organisations, including the OUN/UPA to official status and assures social benefits to their surviving members; Law no. 2539 'On Remembering the Victory over Nazism in the Second World War' and Law no. 2540 'On Access to the Archives of Repressive Bodies of the Communist Totalitarian Regime from 1917–1991', placing the state archives concerning repression during the Soviet period under the jurisdiction of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance. The laws were passed swiftly without public debate (Shevel 2016). In this article, it is worth discussing two of them, in particular, revising the memory of World War II and giving special status to the leaders of nationalist movements.

To better understand the appeal of the 'denazification' argument for the Russian audience and the supporters of Putin's regime, one has to be aware of the centrality of the Great Patriotic War to the Russian nationalism, Russian national identity and Russian memory politics. Called World War II by the rest of the world, the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945) was defined by the Soviet government as a war of

Europe's liberation from fascism in which the Soviet Red Army played the central role. Moreover, what many Central, Eastern European and Baltic countries saw as subsequent Russian occupation was presented as the liberation and the culmination of people's unity (Marples 2012; Alkatiri & De Archellie 2021). After 1965, the celebration of Victory Day, May 9, became the most important state holiday in the USSR, celebrated by a large military parade at the Red Square in Moscow. The central idea of the holiday is the victory over fascism with the slogan 'Never again'.

It is hard to overestimate the symbolic importance of the Great Patriotic War for the Soviet Union and, later, for Putin's Russia. It is enough to observe the annual parades demonstrating the country's military power. A large monument to the victory is present in all the larger Russian cities, and most cities have Victory Avenue (*Prospekt Pobedy*) among their central streets. The day is connected to a large number of rituals, some of them coming from the Soviet era, such as bringing flowers to the eternal flame burning next to the monuments, watching war movies (many of them from the Soviet times) on the TV, giving presents and postcards to a few veterans who have survived until today and singing patriotic songs. Newer rituals include events like the Immortal Regiment (*Bessmertniy Polk*), massive marches in major cities involving people carrying pictures of family members who served in the Soviet Army Forces.

To sum up, the celebration is a massive spectacle aimed at proving to the public that Russia won in World War II but also managed to keep the grandeur of its statehood and power of military industry. In 2020, Vladimir Putin welcomed an amendment to the state's Constitution to enshrine Russia's status as a winner in World War II to cement this in the country's memory politics. Such one-sided narratives of World War II were already questioned in the last years of the Soviet Union's existence (Yurchuk 2017: 109), and the tendency became much stronger as former republics gained independence. As I mentioned above, for Baltic states like Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania, the liberation from Nazism was followed by Soviet occupation and the imposition of a new Soviet identity. Similarly, some pages of Ukrainian history were to be revisited.

In his speech on Victory Day the year before the large-scale invasion, Putin (2021) said that the Soviet people liberated Europe from the 'brown plague' of Nazism, yet that nowadays there are insulting attempts to revise history and glorify traitors and criminals. This reference was likely made to the changes introduced by the abovementioned laws.

Until post-2014, the celebration of Victory Day in Ukraine, like in Russia, followed a similar scenario inherited from the Soviet times; though the military parade did not occur every year, it happened at least once with each Ukrainian president starting with Leonid Kuchma in 1994. In 2001, Vladimir Putin, who had just replaced Boris Yeltsin as the president of Russia, attended the parade in

Kyiv. In 2012, under the presidency of pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovych, both Ukrainian and Russian flags were carried by the soldiers ahead of the parade. The parades that took place after the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the military conflict in the Donbas area were designed to demonstrate the growing and consolidating military power of Ukraine. The military machinery and vehicles in Kyiv were either coming from the areas affected by the conflict or were about to be sent there. Several times soldiers from NATO member states marched on Kreshchatyk too, and the leaders of the ministries of defence of respective states took part in the celebration, which signalled changes in the memory politics created and was promoted by the Ukrainian state.

Law no. 2539 'On Remembering the Victory over Nazism in the Second World War', cancels the older law 'On Remembering the Victory in the Great Patriotic War in 1941-1945' and replaces the term 'Great Patriotic War' with World War II 1939-1945. It starts with the statement that World War II was caused by the agreement between Nazi Germany and the communist totalitarian regime of the USSR and introduces a new holiday, a Day of Memory and Reconciliation, on May 8. The Victory over Nazism Day, May 9, was not replaced and remains a national holiday. The government also introduced a new symbol of Remembrance, a poppy flower, separating from the old symbol of the St. George ribbon and carnation used in the Soviet Union and Russia. The law also contained a vague phrase about 'not accepting falsification of the history of the World War II of 1939-1945 in scholarly research, textbooks, media' and other sources. One practical consequence of the law, among others, became the mass demolition of statues of Lenin that were still in hundreds of Ukrainian cities. In 2015-2016, more than 1,200 statues were taken down across the country (Shevel 2016: 261).

This visible separation from the shared communist past parallel to signing an association agreement with the European Union and being granted a visa-free regime for Ukrainians sent worrying messages to the Kremlin that, starting from 2013-2014, was promoting public discourse on Ukraine being manipulated and used by the West in their interests and was trying to gain control over at least predominantly Russian-speaking territories. Nevertheless, it was rather the change in Ukrainian state politics and the law 'On the Legal Status and Honouring of the Memory of the Fighters for the Independence of Ukraine in the 20th Century' that became particularly useful for the new denazification narrative.

Vignette 2 – Stepan Bandera and the Great Patriotic War: old villains and new heroes in post-Euromaidan Ukraine

The history of the OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) founded in 1929 in Polish-controlled Galicia) and the UPA (the Ukrainian Insurgent Army formed by OUN leaders in October 1942 and active until 1952) is one of

two competing interpretations; one coming from the Soviet times and maintained until the present by the Russian government. By them, the OUN and UPA are presented as small radical groups of nationalists and fascist collaborators who did not consider the interests of ordinary Ukrainians welcoming the Soviets on their lands. In his notorious piece on the 'historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians', Vladimir Putin refers to OUN's leader, Stepan Bandera, as one of the 'war criminals' who 'collaborated with Nazis'.

Stepan Bandera, a leader of the Ukrainian nationalist movement in the first half of the twentieth century, became a symbolic figure heavily loaded with different political meanings for Russians and Ukrainians. An underground fighter against Polish rule in the 1930s, Bandera was arrested and got a life sentence in a Polish prison for local protest campaigns and assassinations of Polish officials. He left prison in 1939 during the outbreak of World War II and first saw, together with his followers, the Nazi invasion as an opportunity for Ukrainian independence. As L'viv was occupied in June 1941, his supporters, without the Nazi's permission, declared the creation of the Ukrainian state. As Bandera and his group refused to withdraw the declaration of independence, he and many of his supporters were arrested and spent most of the war in the concentration camps. In late 1942, the Banderites (supporters of Bandera) formed the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) that, according to different sources, included over 40,000 fighters (Yekelchyk 2015: 55). From 1942 to 1945 there were periods when the UPA fought against Germans and when Germans and the UPA observed neutrality, expecting the common enemy, the Red Army, to approach. However, the most problematic pages of the UPA's history are related to the Poles' massacres in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia, interpreted by many historians as ethnic cleansing. Nowadays, many modern historians admit that the war crimes of Bandera and the UPA are not to be overlooked and have to be critically addressed (as opposed to glorifying them as national heroes by some authors and movements). However, neither the OUN nor the UPA can be viewed as only 'fascist collaborators', ignoring the context of the Ukrainian people's struggle for independence, the Great Famine of 1932-33, and other atrocities visited by the Soviets upon the region (Yurchuk 2017: 115; Yekelchyk 2015: 56). Until the Euromaidan protests in Ukraine, however, the debates around Bandera's image and Ukrainian nationalism, also with regard to World War II, took place mainly in scholarly debates and some public discussions.

The Euromaidan, or the Revolution of Dignity, brought mythology around Stepan Bandera to the public sphere. Indeed, the figure of Stepan Bandera and the OUN/UPA had considerable importance for the right-wing groups in Ukraine who were present among Maidan protesters carrying Ukrainian nationalist symbols. Ironically, however, it is in response to the Kremlin's propaganda

calling Maidan fascist and nationalist that many protesters who did not define themselves as nationalists started calling themselves 'banderivtsi' (the Bander-ites) (Portnov 2016). While some people readily picked up this term without a deep knowledge of Bandera's past and questionable actions, it is worth noting that for the majority, re-appropriating this pejorative term used by Russian media was a response to the Kremlin's attempts to present these peaceful protests as non-democratic and led by a small group of fascists.

In this light, Law no. 2538-1, 'On the Legal Status and Honouring of the Memory of the Fighters for the Independence of Ukraine in the 20th Century', prohibiting disrespectful attitudes toward the recognised fighters for Ukrainian independence, got a somewhat mixed reception. Not surprisingly, together with other decommunisation laws, this one received strong criticism from the Kremlin, which accused Ukraine of false interpretation of history and a wrong vision of past events. Nevertheless, many Ukrainian scholars, political activists and public figures criticised the package of laws.

On the one hand, the decommunisation package of laws, as many authors point out, presented probably one of the major decolonisation steps in the history of independent Ukraine and a clear political statement of Poroshenko and his government (Yurchuk 2017). Nevertheless, this package was clearly designed in a hurry without due attention to the details and formulations. For example, Law no. 2538-1 did not define what can be considered a 'disrespectful attitude toward the recognized fighters for Ukrainian independence'. The laws also were not consulted and discussed properly with the experts and larger public and needed further edits.

As a result, at the international level, there were concerns about the freedom of expression that the law banning the communist party and ideology would imply. Some experts also voiced criticism that these laws can be read as the 'fas-cisisation' of Ukraine that would be something that the Russian propagandistic discourse could make use of (Yurchuk 2017: 11). In sum, as Shevel argues, the laws did not result in genuine decommunisation of the country and did not succeed in moving Ukraine from a largely politicised approach to history toward European standards of memorialisation policies (Shevel 2016: 263).

Despite all this fair criticism, however, the period from 2015 to 2021 was a period of gradual decommunisation of Ukraine when both people and the government were trying to deal with their post-imperialist vs. post-communist past in the process of building a postcolonial national identity against the background of long-lasting Russian aggression in the eastern part of the country. The steady process of separation from the Russian dominance through language, religious separation, strengthening of the military and though inconsistent revision of the history and dealing with the memory politics was also sending a message

to the Kremlin. All these changes were regularly reported in the Russian state-controlled media as strong rise of radical nationalist sentiment in Ukraine compared by the Russian authorities to the Nazi regime.

Zhurzhenko discusses the controversial restrictions on Russian mass culture in post-Maidan Ukraine as an element of a complex palimpsest of post-Soviet culture wars as the government in Ukraine banned Russian TV channels and put restrictions on the import of Russian books and magazines; many Russian actors and artists were banned from entering Ukraine for supporting the Putin regime and visiting annexed Crimea (Zhurzhenko 2021). While this step was partially mutual, as Russia also limited the inflow of Ukrainian authors and pro-Ukrainian artists to the state channels, and anti-Ukrainian propaganda was largely present in Russian media, these restrictions still provoked concerns regarding freedom of art and expression as well as the limits of state censorship. Finally, but not least, the Russian government also used these restrictions and cultural struggles to support the discourse on Ukrainian radical nationalism and oppression of the Russian-speaking population, justifying the invasion in 2022.

It is also important to stress that radical right groups, though small, gained somewhat more acceptance during the state's forceful attacks on the protest when many protesters were shot. More organised, *Pravy Sektor* (Right Sector) and *Svoboda* (Freedom) (names of right-wing groups) activists were, therefore, more active and visible (Shevtsova 2017; Yekelchyk 2015). At this critical point, some symbols and slogans of right-wing forces originating in OUN/UPA struggles were introduced to the protest culture and later in the broader public discourse. The most known one, 'Slava Ukraini!' (Glory to Ukraine!) and its response, 'Heroiam slava!' (Glory to the heroes!) acquired new meaning on the Maidan (Yekelchyk 2015: 108). Another nationalist slogan from the 1940s, 'Slava natsii, smert voroham!' (Glory to the Nation, Death to Enemies), did not catch on in 2014. However, it acquired a new wave of popularity after the full-scale invasion in February 2022.

In other words, with the Euromaidan and the so-called European choice of Ukraine against the background of the Russian military aggression, Stepan Bandera stopped being just a historical figure for the broader population of Ukraine and Russia. For Ukrainians, it turned into a symbol of resistance, of defining Ukraine through everything that Russia is not, of independence and freedom – which may have little to do with the real historical figure of Stepan Bandera. For the Kremlin, on the contrary, the image of Bandera and 'banderivtsi', mythological Ukrainian nationalists aiming to kill the Russian-speaking population, proved to be instrumental in creating a narrative on the Nazification of Ukraine and the call for liberation of the 'brotherly nation'.

As the next section shows, all the transformations in the memory politics of Ukraine, some more efficient while others rather controversial, were to serve

the purpose of the self-identification of Ukraine as an independent state with close ties with the European Union and the symbolic West and separation from Russia. Often it has been done as an attempt to re-set the country's identity as not inferior to Russia, to define itself often through something that Russia is explicitly not.[1] Many postcolonial scholars tend to be very critical of such self-definition, arguing that such changes are often elitist and tend to only replace older discriminatory structures with new ones that keep existing inequalities instead of challenging them (Balibar 2015; Doran 2019). However, some Ukrainian scholars demonstrate that there is an alternative dimension to the changes, the hybrid one, which opens up a space for negotiations, critically approaching the past and looking for new meanings between Soviet and postcolonial historical narratives (Törnquist-Plewa & Yurchuk 2019: 17).

Nevertheless, finding out what direction these changes will take in post-war Ukraine is a topic of important future research, while the point of this piece is to show how the Russian government instrumentalised the same transformations to build up the image of neo-fascist Ukraine, manipulated and exploited by the West. Such perceptions are reflected in the notorious article by Vladimir Putin, 'On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians', discussed in the following section.

Vignette 3 – 'On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians'

On 12 July 2021, half a year before the full-scale invasion, an article allegedly written by Vladimir Putin was published on the official webpage of the President of Russia. The article is available in the Russian, Ukrainian and English languages. This piece, titled 'On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians', can serve as a condensed yet very clearly articulated summary of the post-imperialist and post-communist narratives mixed in the modern Russian ideology justifying; first, the annexation of Crimea and the support of separatists in the eastern part of Ukraine, and, later on, the full-scale invasion framed as the 'denazification' of the Ukrainian state. There are already quite a few works going into detail over the manipulations and historical inaccuracies in the text of the aforementioned article (see, for example, Mankoff 2022). This section, therefore, will only focus on some parts of the text that illustrate Russia's rejection of Ukrainian agency and subjectivity.

In his interview published on the Kremlin's website the following day, Putin comments that this 'analytical article' is a response to the 'anti-Russia' project and numerous threats to the state security of Russia. He also claims that millions of Russians whose interests need to be protected live on the territory historically belonging to Russia [the territory of modern Ukraine] (Kremlin.ru 2021).

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1   A good illustration of this goes back to the year 2003 to a book entitled 'Ukraine is not Russia' written by Leonid Kuchma, the second president of Ukraine.

The text goes through the history of Ukraine and Russia in a rather frivolous way, selecting seemingly random episodes over the long period starting from the foundation of the Kievan Rus and highlighting the moments in which, the article argues, the closeness and similarity of Ukrainian and Russian peoples are particularly apparent. This interpretation of history is quite close to the one presented in the Soviet history books. All attempts of the Ukrainian territories to gain independence from Russia are claimed as traitorous and have negative consequences for the ordinary people.

As Spivak (1988, 2010) argues, colonised people as subaltern are denied political and cultural self-representation; similarly, Ukrainians are denied the right to write their history. Instead, their history is re-written and interpreted *for* them. Colonisation or occupation is framed as 'liberation', a civilisational project realised by the dominant nation. For example, the War for Independence in 1648–1654, led by Ukrainian Cossacks that failed and made Bohdan Khmelnytsky, their leader, sign the protectorate agreement with Moscow, is presented in Putin's article as

> a war of liberation. It ended with the Truce of Andrusovo in 1667. The final outcome was sealed by the Treaty of Perpetual Peace in 1686. The Russian state incorporated the city of Kiev and the lands on the left bank of the Dnieper River, including Poltava region, Chernigov region, and Zaporozhye. Their inhabitants were reunited with the main part of the Russian Orthodox people. These territories were referred to as 'Malorossia' (Little Russia)' and later the name 'Ukraine' was used more often in the meaning of the Old Russian word 'okraina' (periphery), which is found in written sources from the 12th century, referring to various border territories.

Even though the article speaks of the 'unification' of two 'brotherly nations', as can be seen above, Ukraine in this picture is given the role of the 'Little Russia' and periphery. At the same time, the Ukrainian language is largely overlooked through the text, and Russian is presented as universal and superior, the language of brotherhood and solidarity, which largely ignores its imposed nature and the fact that often the predominance of spoken Russian in some parts of Ukraine is the result of the ethnic cleansing, resettling of people and language policies.

For Western colonialism, the central point of the civilising mission was race (Pekanan 2016), yet for the case of Ukrainians who can 'pass' for white Russians by appearance, the artificiality of other characteristics, such as language or culture, is stressed. The Ukrainisation (i.e. the introduction of the Ukrainian language

as the official) is presented as imposed on 'those who did not see themselves as Ukrainians'. The 'large Russian nations' was artificially divided by the Soviets, giving concessions to the pressure of nationalists on 'three separate Slavic peoples: Russian, Ukrainian and Belorussian . . . a triune people comprising Velikorussians [Great Russians], Malorussians [Small Russians] and Belorussians'.

The article then goes into criticism of the existing nationalism in Ukraine as it is usually portrayed in Russian media as aggressive and hostile towards Russians:

> Today, the 'right' patriot of Ukraine is only the one who hates Russia. Moreover, the entire Ukrainian statehood, as we understand it, is proposed to be further built exclusively on this idea. Hate and anger, as world history has repeatedly proved this, are a very shaky foundation for sovereignty, fraught with many serious risks and dire consequences.

With this phrase, the article justifies 'defending' Russians living in Ukraine and Russia from aggressive nationalists who are compared to Nazi Germany earlier in the text and from whom Russia already liberated Europe – and Ukraine – once already. Therefore, Putin announces,

> All the subterfuges associated with the anti-Russia project are clear to us. And we will never allow our historical territories and people close to us living there to be used against Russia. And to those who will undertake such an attempt, I would like to say that this way they will destroy their own country.

Finally, the text reproduces the idea of Ukrainian dependency on the 'neo-colonial' West:

> In the anti-Russia project, there is no place either for a sovereign Ukraine or for the political forces that are trying to defend its real independence. Those who talk about reconciliation in Ukrainian society, about dialogue, about finding a way out of the current impasse are labelled as 'pro-Russian' agents.

Therefore, Sovereign Ukraine is portrayed as something absurd: unless a part of Russia, in historical unity, it will be absorbed and exploited by the West. Ukrainian emancipation from Russia, in other words, is impossible and useless since 'true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia'. Through the text, the author often slides to what can clearly be read as threats

or warnings if Ukraine chooses to define its path independently. The speeches of Putin and Russia's representatives internationally in the period following June 2021, and especially before the invasion, were in line with this text and maintained the same idea: being essentially one nation, two countries are separated now due to the manipulations from the West and actions of radical nationalists inside Ukraine, all acting against popular interests. As the same information has been translated to the Russian population through the state-controlled media for years, it was well-received and believed by a large part of the population.

Russia has been promoting the idea that Ukraine is run by a fascist junta since Euromaidan in 2014, stressing the power of radical right groups. More recently, the separation of Ukraine from Russia has been interpreted as a 'forced change of identity' – forced on a 'triune', as the article defines it, nation; as a result, the article states, 'the Russian people in all may decrease by hundreds of thousands or even millions'. This invasion, in other words, is now also presented as saving the Russian people from being forcefully converted into Ukrainians. The war against Ukraine, approached from this perspective, is also a question of survival for the Russian nation.

Concluding remarks

Since the Euromaidan protests in 2013-14 and as a consequence of the annexation of Crimea and the military conflict in Donbas, the government of Ukraine declared its intentions for further approximation with the European Union and NATO supporting this declaration with specific steps, such as a substantial change in legislation and domestic and foreign policy. Against the background of this legal and political transformation, the change in societal perceptions and attitudes was taking place as more and more scholars and public figures were openly questioning the past and challenging the firm beliefs of the population. Growing ties with Europe led to a change of values, both at the societal and governmental level threatening Russia's presence and influence in the region. The slogan of former president Petro Poroshenko's campaign, '[Ukrainian]Army, Language, Faith', marked strong intentions of cultural and political separation from the imperialist power; strengthening the military to fight back against the Russian military presence; promoting the Ukrainian language to strengthen Ukrainian national identity; granting autonomy to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to steadily decrease the influence of Moscow Patriarchy over the population of Ukraine.

This article argued that all these changes were driven by the desire for final separation from the Kremlin's influence rather than the radical nationalist spirit. While many of them had a strong rationale, they were also often rushed. Decision-making, in many cases, lacked transparency and could benefit from bringing more exerts and civil society activists to the discussion. Some moves,

like the ban of numerous TV channels and online resources, restrictions on the import of the literature, and vague formulations in the laws, could not withstand the criticism of Ukrainian and international experts, provoking concerns about the freedom of expression, speech and limits of censorship. How effective those changes were in shaping the new national identity and in strengthening national security, further research will show. However, it will be difficult now to separate the effects of the decolonisation/decommunisation struggle from the general effect of the full-scale war launched by Russia in 2022.

Finally, these separation efforts covering multiple spheres, from national legislation to teaching history in schools, were instrumentalised by Russian media and the Kremlin's propaganda to create an ideological foundation for the full-scale invasion of Russia to Ukraine in February 2022. With the centrality of the Great Patriotic War and liberation of Europe from fascism narrative supported by the long-lasting idea of Ukraine being an integral part of Russia, a smaller 'brother nation' that needs to be brought home from neo-colonial dependency on the West, the idea of a 'special operation' on the 'denazification' of Ukraine gained broad support among some groups of the Russian population as well as in some countries that remain Russian allies. With the invasion of 2022, it is clear that the Russian government is still not eager to recognise Ukrainian sovereignty, subjectivity and agency. However, it seems that Ukraine got the momentum to leave its postcoloniality behind and get broader international recognition and support. As the war is in its acute phase, it remains to be seen what the situation of the Ukrainian government and the people of Ukraine, who now have high hopes for rebuilding a new, more democratic state post-war, will be. It also remains to be seen if the Western world will meet these hopes and expectations and if we are about to see a more democratic Europe with an expanded European Union in the coming years.

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Thematic section
The Russia-Ukraine War: Why the Conflict Was Not Prevented

Did Germany Contribute to Deterrence Failure against Russia in Early 2022?

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Abstract

With signs of Russia's aggressive intentions mounting since Fall 2021, Ukraine and NATO allies criticised Germany for not sufficiently contributing to Western efforts at deterring a Russian invasion. The article evaluates this claim by applying deterrence theory and using congruence analysis on foundational policy documents, expert literature and interviews of Russian and Western policymakers. It establishes that states contribute to collective extended deterrence the more they have the capabilities to harm assets that are highly valued by the revisionist and the more the revisionist has reasons to believe that these capabilities would be used if it enacted aggression. The article then evaluates Germany's potential deterrence contributions, establishing that Germany's vast arms industry and economic clout allowed it to significantly threaten the Russian regime through economic destabilisation and prospects of high-casualty fighting. It then gauges Germany's actual deterrence contributions, finding them to have been significantly smaller: Germany deliberately avoided military threats and deliveries of arms to Ukraine. And while Germany did early on threaten to use its significant economic clout against Russia, it remained vague and non-committal over core issues of Russian economic interests, such as the Nord Stream 2 pipeline system. The results provide and inform further hypotheses on the causes of German behaviour and

indirect influences on deterrence against Russia. They also urge reconsiderations of strategic thinking in Berlin and elsewhere.

Introduction

By its Central and Eastern European allies, Germany was long considered the most important and least reliable European state when it came to Russia (Stewart 2013; Spanger 2020; Szabo 2015). This dual perception became especially salient in late 2021 to early 2022. With more and more signs of Russia's aggressive intentions mounting, Berlin came under harsh criticism for not sufficiently contributing to Western efforts at deterring a Russian attack on Ukraine. For example, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, diplomatic in his choice of words but unambiguous in the message, stated that Berlin's policy did not 'correspond to the level of our relations and the current security situation'. Kyiv's Mayor and Boxing Legend Vitali Klitschko, well-known and liked in Germany where he had lived for years, posted on Facebook 'On whose side is the German government today? On the side of freedom, which means — Ukraine? Or on the side of the aggressor?'. US President Joe Biden suggested there were divisions within NATO over Ukraine (NBC News 2022a). Three informal talks between informed policymakers in Washington, D.C., where the author was present, suggested the United States might sanction German companies doing business with Russia if Germany did not change course. Senior representatives of the transatlantic expert community also critiqued Germany's Russia policy (Carnegie Europe 2022).

While Germany drastically changed course once the Russian invasion was underway in mid- to late-February (Driedger 2022), the question arises to what extent Germany's earlier behaviour, specifically since the start of Russian preparations for what could well end up being an invasion in late-2021, contributed to a failure of deterring the Russian decision for invading Ukraine to begin with.

This article answers this question through four contributions to our understanding of German foreign policy, international security cooperation, deterrence dynamics, Russo-Western relations and European security. First, drawing on the literature on deterrence theory, I derive criteria to assess how individual states can directly contribute to collective extended deterrence: Such a contribution is greater the more the contributor has capabilities with which it can

harm valued assets of the potential aggressor and the more the potential aggressor believes that these capabilities would be used against it if it enacted aggression. As specific capabilities are a prerequisite to harming valued assets, such capabilities limit the extent of *potential* deterrence contributions. As credible threats are a prerequisite to having these capabilities affect the potential aggressor's behaviour, credibility determines *actual* deterrence contributions. This allows analysts to identify gaps in potential and actual deterrence contributions and adjudicate if a state contributed to deterrence failure.

Second, I evaluate Germany's potential deterrence contributions by mapping capabilities with which Germany could have feasibly threatened assets valued by the Russian regime. Overall, the evidence suggests, that, due to the Putin regime's consistent effort to ensure its own survival, it seeks to prevent widespread societal discontent due to macroeconomic instability and news on large-scale Russian war casualties. Because of Germany's wealth, top-tier arms industry and economic interconnections with Russia, it arguably had the ability to significantly harm Russia's macroeconomic stability and raise the prospects of a drawn-out and mutually bloody conflict by providing Ukraine with arms and training before Russia attacked.

Third, I gauge Germany's actual deterrence contributions by examining to what extent the use of these capabilities was credibly threatened to affect deterrence. On balance, the evidence suggests that Germany provided some contributions to deterring Russian aggression, but that it contributed significantly less than it could have in the light of its capabilities and the efforts of other states like the United Kingdom and the United States: Germany had only very limited overt stakes in Ukraine, rendering Germany's credibility largely contingent on specific signals and policies toward Russia. However, German policymakers actually ruled out the use of military means, including the supply of arms to Ukraine to worsen Russian prospects of a quick and easy victory. Thus, the formidable deterrent potential of Germany's military assets went largely unrealised. Early on, German policymakers did credibly threaten severe economic sanctions in case of a Russian invasion. However, these threats suggested that punishment would exclude key areas of Russian interest such as the pipeline project Nord Stream 2 as well as Russian access to the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT). Germany eventually halted Nord Stream 2, but it had not previously threatened to do so in a clear-cut and explicit way. Furthermore, the halt came just days before Russia invaded unoccupied Ukrainian territory, diminishing the deterrent effect of the measure.

Fourth, I extrapolate from my findings various policy implications and pointers for further research. German policy displayed less resolve for proactive deterrence than that of certain other states. Future research should probe into likely

causes, such as the largely civilian security culture in Germany, specifically in the broader population, the speed and military nature of the increasing war threat and dynamics within the newly formed three-party ruling coalition. My findings indicate that German policy might have had indirect effects on collective deterrence, too, due to demonstration effects on allies and the Russian elite as well as due to the complex ways in which the Nord Stream pipelines affect deterrence dynamics between Ukraine, Russia and Western Europe.

This article applies established theory to assesses a historically and politically significant case of deterrence contributions. As data on Russian elite perceptions are scarce, rarely reliable and often indirect, not all parts of the relevant causal mechanisms can be tested, rendering detailed process-tracing an ineffective tool of analysis (Beach & Pedersen 2016: 302–336). Hence, I employ theory-guided explaining-outcome congruence analysis to evaluate deterrence contributions by zeroing in on available evidence on candidate causes and mechanisms (Beach & Pedersen 2016: 271–272). Data stem from foundational policy documents, a survey of expert literature on German and Russian foreign policy and interviews with people involved in relevant policy processes.

The next section develops the framework for conceptualising and measuring direct contributions to collective extended deterrence. The next two sections apply the framework on Germany, respectively analysing potential and actual deterrence contributions. In the last section, I lay out some implications of my findings for future policy and research.

Assessing deterrence

Deterrence is the use of a threat by one party attempting to convince another party not to upset a given status quo. Extended deterrence aims to deter actions against third parties (Quackenbush 2010: 60–61). General deterrence relates to decision-making in conflictual relationships over longer periods of time, say between the United States and the Soviet Union over Western Europe during the Cold War. This article focuses on immediate deterrence, which relates to decision-making within crises, where the danger of attack is imminent (Morgan 1983: 30). Successful deterrence prevails when a potential aggressor has revisionist goals but chooses not to use military force in their pursuit because it fears that the deterrer(s) would retaliate.

Most analytical frameworks on deterrence, just like this one, assume that actors are rational in a thin, instrumental sense: given available information, they will seek to most efficiently employ their resources to realise their preferences (Zagare 1990).

Deterrence can only affect potential aggressors when two scope conditions apply. First, the potential aggressor needs to have revisionist goals towards the

target. Absent revisionist goals, the costly and risky instrument of military escalation (Fearon 1995) need not even be contemplated. Second, revisionism toward the target needs to be limited relative to other assets of the potential aggressor. If revisionist goals were valued over all other assets, no threat to them would deter a potential aggressor (Mazarr et al. 2018: 17–21).

Two factors jointly determine whether an actor's deterrent threats contribute to deterrence. First, the potential aggressor needs to perceive the actor as being sufficiently able to significantly harm the revisionist's valued assets. Second, there need to be credible threats that, in the case of the potential aggressor actually attacking, these capabilities would be used against these valued assets (Schelling 1960). This is an interactive relationship: Threats of using considerable capabilities will not affect the revisionist's behaviour if the revisionist does not believe they would actually be carried out; conversely, revisionists will ignore even believable threats if they calculate that the other side's actions would not significantly harm assets that they value highly.

The general validity of this model has been backed up by many empirical studies. For example, formal military alliances, whose security assurances are contingent on members being attacked, measurably reduce conflict likelihood between alliance members and other states (Johnson, Leeds & Wu 2015). Higher aggregate ally capabilities in extended deterrence have been found to correlate with less aggression against the target (Bak 2018).

Perceived credibility stems from two main sources (Danilovic 2001). The first source, regional stakes, denotes cases in which the challenger presumes strong credibility of the deterrer because the deterrer has a lot of overt and materially visible interests in maintaining the status quo (Danilovic 2001). Arguably, a good example of insufficient regional stakes leading to deterrence failure is the Falklands War, where the Argentinian Junta had reasons to believe the United Kingdom would not fight over a distant and small dependency.

The second main source of credibility is costly signals, sometimes conceptualised as 'risk escalation strategies' (Danilovic 2001: 349). Deterrers, especially when extending protection to others, often have strong incentives to overstate their commitment – a fact not lost on potential aggressors. A prominent example of deterrence failure due to a lack of costly signals is Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939, as Germany deemed an ally intervention unlikely due to repeated backtracking by France and the United Kingdom in past crises. To signal *actual* commitment and distinguish it from 'cheap talk', deterrers can send costly signals to the challenger by deliberately putting their resources, security and reputations on the line (Danilovic 2001). In doing so, deterrers accept future costs if they do not deliver on their deterrent threats in the future, signalling their resolve over the issue (Schelling 1960).

For democracies, a crucial source for credibility are specific and public commitments by leaders (Fearon 1994). If leaders publicly issue deterrent threats, but fail to deliver in the case of aggression, the incur the risk of their electorate perceiving this as dishonesty or incompetence, thus increasing the risk of being removed from office through democratic mechanisms. This mechanism is usually referred to as 'tying hands' in the literature (Fearon 1997). The intimate connection between such 'audience costs' and leader-specific public threats, especially in more democratic and liberal polities, is well-attested for (e.g. Lupton 2020; McManus 2018).

While relevant data on highly sensitive policy issues are by their very nature partially unavailable to researchers, there are enough suitable sources to assess all relevant concepts with some reliability and validity. Capabilities (such as Germany's troops, arms manufacturing infrastructure and economic links with Russia) as well as regional stakes (such as Ukraine's actual and potential role for the German economy) are largely material and therefore assessable through open sources and expert assessments.

The degree and nature of the Russian elite's revisionist intentions and vulnerabilities can be gauged through the implied costs of rhetoric and actions. Given an evidently pertinent goal and various policy options with varying degrees of likely efficacy and risks to key assets, the choosing of policy options that seem to entail less efficacy but also fewer risks to key assets indicate that the goal is only of limited importance relative to the key asset. For example, if, during the war, Russian elites had decided for general mobilisation, Russia's battle efficacy would have risen, but the risk of public discontent would have risen as well. I draw data from polls, foundational Russian documents, expert assessments of Russian policy and Russian elite statements.

Costly signals are largely assessed through the entailed costs of policies and rhetoric by the German political elite. Relevant and used evidence includes expert assessments, newspaper articles, databases and interviews with people knowledgeable on relevant policy processes. As deterrent signals entail higher credibility when they are specific and committed to in public (see above), the analytical focus will be on them.

In sum, a potential aggressor can be deterred when its revisionist goals are limited, when others can harm the potential aggressor's valued assets and when they can credibly threaten that this would be done if aggression were to happen. The next section applies the framework to identify assets that the Russian regime seemingly values so much that, in order to safeguard them, it is willing to jeopardise other policy goals, including over Ukraine. The section also maps the capabilities with which German political elites could have threatened these assets.

Potential deterrence contributions

A key interest of Russian policy has long been to ensure the political survival of Putin, his inner circle and the regime that grants them their elevated position (Frye 2021). This has been established by several thorough studies into the Russian informal system of authority and power (Monaghan 2012), the workings of its dominant party United Russia (Reuter 2017), the Kremlin's macroeconomic policies (Miller 2018) and the development of Russia's force structure and military doctrine (Renz 2019).

This consistent prioritisation of regime survival relates to two core interests that Germany arguably has had the capability to harm in response to a Russian invasion of Ukraine. First, the Russian regime has consistently sought to maintain macroeconomic stability to protect the regime's social contract with the population and ensure cohesion and loyalty in its own ranks. This has been established by research on Russian macroeconomic policies and the political economy of Russia (Dawisha 2014; Miller 2018). These considerations still rank high on the Kremlin's priority list. Putin put at the forefront of the 2021 state of the nation speech the themes of healthcare, social policy and economics, stating that '[e]nsuring macroeconomic stability and containing inflation within set parameters is an extremely important task' (Putin 2021). As of June 2022, despite the major economic fallout due to factors relating to the war, the Russian regime has not significantly slashed any welfare measures.

A second consistent element of Russian policy has been to avoid the adverse effects of drawn-out long-term warfare. This is arguably to prevent public dismay and diminishing regime support following news on Russian casualties. Past Russian military operations evince this Russian interest: When waging post-Soviet Russia's first interstate war against Georgia in 2008, Russian leaders ensured that Russia was well-prepared and could bring overwhelming force to bear, defeating the small Caucasus republic in a 5-day campaign with minimal casualties (Allison 2008). Russia designed its Crimea annexation in 2014 such that it could have retreated and denied involvement, should the early stages of this operation be met with violent resistance from the Ukrainian side (Allison 2014; Altman 2018). During the start of the subsequent war in Donbas, Russia threatened overt and full-scale conventional military intervention in Ukraine, only to step back when Ukraine ignored the threat and proceeded to fight the separatists. Russian leaders instead opted to engage Russian troops in fighting, but they used significantly less than they could have, and persistently denied the use of Russian forces internationally and to their own population (Bowen 2019). During its various operations in Syria in support of the Assad regime, Russia pursued only limited goals and minimised the use of regular combat forces on the ground, seeking to avoid conflict entanglement and mission creep (Kofman & Rojansky 2018).

Russian leaders had likely expected an easy victory over Ukraine in 2022 (NBC News 2022b). When, in the first months of the invasion in 2022, it became clear that Russia could not easily conquer Kyiv, Russian leaders apparently changed plans and gave up ground to focus on Ukraine's southern and eastern regions. As of June 2022, the Russian elite has still shied away from publicly referring to the war as a war. It has also not enacted general mobilisation, depriving itself from logistic and legal means to mobilise fighting power more effectively. Both these measures are arguably meant to minimise public discontent over the conflict.

The German economy's formidable clout and its many interconnections with that of Russia (gas, other trade, foreign direct investments) gave Berlin various means to harm Russian economic interests through sanctions. Russian exports of natural gas to Germany played a key role here. Russian energy exports are extremely important for the Kremlin's ability to fund generous welfare programmes, provide rents for elites and maintain its military and security services. For example, from 2005 to 2014, through various economic crises and fluctuating energy prices, oil and gas tax revenue consistently comprised about 40 percent of total Russian government revenue (Miller 2018: 40). Gas plays a key role in this income. For example, gas sales alone accounted for over five percent of Russia's gross domestic product in 2018 (Westphal 2020: 409). Europe is by far Russia's most important gas customer. For example, in 2020, 72 percent of Russian gas exports went to European OECD states. With 16 percent alone, Germany was by far the biggest buyer (EIA 2021: 12). Indeed, since 2013, over 20 percent of all Russian gas exports went to Germany alone (Westphal 2020: 418).

Russia also relied on Germany for significant volumes in other areas of trade. In 2020, Germany alone accounted for 10 percent of Russian goods imports and 5.5 percent of Russian goods exports. Struggling to modernise its economy and diversify beyond energy exports, Russia is particularly dependent on importing sophisticated products that Germany excels at (especially machines, chemical products, electronics, cars and car parts) (GTAI Germany Trade and Invest 2021). Lastly, Germany is a key provider of foreign direct investment in Russia, with a volume of 24 billion Euros in 2019, comprising about 4 percent of Russia's overall volume in 2021 (GTAI Germany Trade and Invest 2021).

Germany also had significant military capabilities with which it could have affected the utility calculus of Russian leaders. As neither Germany nor any NATO ally had ever seriously considered sending their own troops to Ukraine or threaten military strikes against Russia to increase deterrence, such a scenario is not considered here.

However, Germany could have significantly increased Ukraine's own ability to resist Russian military advances and inflict casualties as well as material losses in the case of a Russian invasion, thereby increasing deterrence. As many al-

lies had done so before the invasion, this policy option warrants consideration. Ukraine boasts a population of about 40 million people that, since the annexation of Crimea and the start of the hybrid war in Donbas in 2014, have gotten increasingly patriotic. While Ukraine has since modernised its armed forces, it has lacked the wealth to afford high volumes of modern weapons (Polyakov 2018). Despite its reputation for avoiding the use of military means in foreign policy, Germany is a major manufacturer and exporter of military hardware, ranking as the world's fourth-largest arms exporter, with historic record sales in 2021 (DW.COM 2021). Combined with its wealth, this industrial infrastructure put Germany in a suitable position to significantly bolster Ukraine's ability to inflict losses on Russia.

In sum, Germany could have feasibly used arms deliveries and the threat of sanctions to significantly increase the Russian leadership's perceived costs and risks of invading Ukraine. Hence, Germany's potential contributions to deterrence over Ukraine were considerable. The next section analyses to what extent German policy translated these capabilities into actual deterrent threats.

Actual deterrence contributions

Overall, German economic stakes in Ukraine were arguably miniscule, adding little credibility to deterrent threats. To be sure, for Germany, Ukraine did represent a source of cheap and skilled labour, due to the country's geographic proximity, large population, low average incomes and high education. Furthermore, with rising incomes, Ukraine could also develop into a significant nearby market for German goods and services. Nonetheless, calculating the share in Germany's overall trade volume in 2021 (Statistisches Bundesamt 2022), Ukraine represented only .3 percent, negligible compared to Germany's trade with the rest of the EU (well over 50 percent), China (9.5), the United States (7.5) and even with Russia (2.3). Thus, Germany's actual deterrence contributions were largely a function of the specific policies and rhetoric it adopted over its two main deterrent assets.

Military measures

German foreign policy, as opposed to that of other European middle powers such as France and the United Kingdom, has long been sceptical of military measures, including sending arms to factions that violate human rights or are engaged in military conflict (e.g. Eberle & Handl 2020). Berlin's track record before the 2021 federal election might have well served as an indicator that Germany would be hesitant to send arms to Ukraine.

However, recent German policies should have cautioned Russian policymakers against ruling out militarised responses by Germany. Germany did supply

weapons to potential and actual war participants in the past. Recent examples include the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, countries with less-than-stellar human rights records engaged in fighting rebels in Yemen (DW.COM 2020). Furthermore, following Russia's annexation of Crimea and the start of the war in Donbas in 2014, Germany's Russia policy has become much more militarised, suggesting that this tendency would exacerbate in the light of renewed Russian aggression. As attested by German and allied policymakers working on Russia, German policy started to align much more with NATO's stated Russia policy since 2014 (interview with high-ranking British Ministry of Defence official (October 2018); interview with two high-ranking German Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials; January 2019). Germany also became the lead country in NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence Operation for Lithuania, contributing combat troops to serve as tripwire forces to deter and defend against Russian aggression (Driedger 2021: 100). This ambiguity of Germany's long-term track record on arms deliveries and militarised policies heightens the importance of the German elite's rhetoric and policies in the run-up to the invasion.

From December 2021 and well into February 2022, the newly formed German government clearly signalled it was opposed to sending weapons to bolster Ukraine's deterrent capabilities, even though Ukraine and various NATO allies urgently petitioned it to do so.[1] The Coalition Treaty emphasised the newly formed German government would pursue a more restrictive policy of arms exports (SPD, Grüne, FDP 2021: 115–116). German leaders subsequently echoed the Treaty's sentiments that arms exports would escalate tensions, referring specifically to the case of Ukraine. In mid to late January, Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht stated that sending weapons to Ukraine 'will not help to defuse the crisis at the moment', and Chancellor Scholz, while expressing support for Ukraine's economy and democracy, ruled out the supply of arms (NBC News 2022a). German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock also

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1   Arms deliveries to a target state can both deter and incentivise aggression, depending on when the deliveries are respectively announced and delivered. If arms are delivered well before the aggressor could meaningfully attack, they add to deterrence, as the target could now enact a greater toll on the aggressor. If, however, arms deliveries are announced for a later date, they can incentivise aggression, as the aggressor would calculate that striking as early as possible, and before new arms arrive, promises better outcomes. However, all available evidence suggests that, in the period under investigation, Germany only seriously considered arms deliveries that would have arrived before Russia could have attacked. Allies were aware of Russian preparations by late-2021. Preparing an all-out invasion of a formidable opponent (including moving, feeding and supplying hundreds of thousands of troops) is a much more demanding and time-consuming task than simply sending existing weaponry and maybe some personnel for training to a willing recipient. When Russia did invade in late-February, its military misfortunes arguably signified that, even then, preparations had been inadequate, suggesting that an even earlier start of the invasion was deemed unfeasible. Furthermore, other allies did deliver weapons to Ukraine well before the invasion.

ruled out weapon deliveries when visiting Kyiv on 7 February 2022 (Länder-Analysen 2022).

This policy was in line with German societal views. An Infratest Dimap poll on 3 February found 72 percent of respondents opposing arms deliveries to Ukraine and only 20 favouring them (Länder-Analysen 2022).

Germany's actions further signalled its unwillingness to contribute to deterrence with military means: In January 2022, Germany even blocked Estonian shipments of German-manufactured weapons to Ukraine. Meanwhile, airborne arms deliveries to Ukraine from the United Kingdom avoided German airspace, taking longer routes to reach their destination (Business Insider 2022; DW.COM 2022). In mid-February, news surfaced that, in 2020, German corporations had sold goods with dual usability for military purposes worth over 350 Million Euro – not to Ukraine, but to Russia (Länder-Analysen 2022). When German Defence Minister Lambrecht announced on 26 January that Germany would send 5,000 combat helmets to Ukraine, she emphasised these were 'equipment, not weapons' (tagesschau.de 2022b).

In sum, Germany abstained from threatening or employing any military measures to deter Russian aggression. Rather, Berlin explicitly ruled this out. This, however, was different when it came to the threat of economic sanctions.

Economic sanctions

Germany's policy toward Russia under previous administrations provided some indications to Russian policymakers that Germany would likely enact further economic sanctions if Russia invaded Ukraine. After Russia annexed Crimea and started the war in Donbas in 2014, Germany was instrumental in bringing about, toughening and maintaining sanctions against Russia. This registered with Russian policymakers and experts, whose hitherto more cordial view of Germany turned negative (Driedger 2021: 100–101, 104–105). In subsequent formations of new German governments, 2018 and 2021, the respective coalitions maintained a consistent policy to keep the existing EU sanctions framework in place until Russia resolved its ongoing conflict with Ukraine in accordance with the Minsk Agreements (Driedger 2021: 104–105; SPD, Grüne, FDP 2021: 122). These past sanctions had a significant impact on the Russian economy. One study estimated Russia lost 2.5 to 3 percent of annual gross domestic product due to overall sanctions (Åslund & Snegovaya 2021). As the EU was, and is, Russia's most important economic counterpart, the major share of these losses can probably be attributed to European sanctions.

When the threat of a Russian invasion became evident in late 2021, German representatives did threaten early on to enact economic sanctions should Russia attack. On 15 November, the foreign ministers of Germany and France jointly

warned Russia that any attempt to violate the territorial integrity of Ukraine would have 'serious consequences' (French Foreign Ministry 2021).

However, the exact nature of these threats was vague and were tellingly non-committal on key issues, giving cause to doubt that they would be included. German statements did not mention, for example, the threat of shutting Russia out of SWIFT, as Scholz feared up until after the invasion that this would freeze significant German assets on Russian accounts (POLITICO 2022a). German parties outside the ruling coalition added to the impression of German hesitancy. The radical *Linke* and AfD parties opposed sanctions point-blank (tagesschau. de 2022c). In mid-January, Friedrich Merz, soon to be head of CDU and leader of the sole centrist opposition faction in the Bundestag (CDU/CSU) warned that shutting Russia out of SWIFT would trigger an 'atomic bomb in the capital markets' (POLITICO 2022b).

Even more importantly, up until days before the invasion, German policymakers did not publicly commit to sanctioning the Nord Stream 2 pipeline system. Indeed, in 2014, Germany successfully politicked to exclude the gas trade from EU sanctions on Russia, thus protecting core economic interests while accepting that other EU members did so as well (Driedger 2021: 101). The decision to build Nord Stream 2 and thereby enlarge the existing pipeline system was reached in 2015. This was only one year after Russia's annexation of Crimea and the start of its semi-covert war in Donbas. As the project involved German, French, Austrian and Dutch companies, the decision raised doubts about efforts of certain European states, particularly Germany, to punish Russia economically. Construction was finalised on 10 September 2021.

Nord Stream 2 was not mentioned in the Franco-German declaration of 15 November 2021 threatening repercussions if Russia invaded Ukraine (French Foreign Ministry 2021). The new administration continued this policy of omitting Nord Stream 2 from deterrent threats well into February 2022. For example, on 7 February, German Foreign Minister Baerbock merely stated on a visit in Kyiv that Germany was willing to pay a high economic price for sanctions against Russia and that it would increase economic and humanitarian aid to Ukraine (Länder-Analysen 2022). On the same day, in a press conference with US President Joe Biden, Scholz remained vague on whether the pipeline would be cancelled (ZDF Heute 2022). When Scholz met Ukrainian President Zelensky in Kyiv on 14 February 2022, he similarly warned Russia of far-reaching consequences if it attacked Ukraine. But Scholz also avoided any mention of Nord Stream 2, even though Zelensky called it a geopolitical weapon against Europe's energy security (Länder-Analysen 2022).

This policy was in line with German mainstream opinion. An Infratest Dimap poll on 3 February found only 43 percent of respondents supporting new sanc-

tions on Russia, with 57 percent favouring exempting Nord Stream 2 from sanctions (Länder-Analysen 2022).

Chancellor Scholz did confidentially assure key US policymakers that the pipeline system would be sanctioned in case of a Russian invasion. When meeting with US President Joseph Biden and various Republican and Democratic senators in Washington, D.C. in early February 2022, Scholz reportedly convinced the senators that Germany would put in place a robust response in the case of a Russian invasion, including a halt of Nord Stream 2. Scholz had reportedly made such assurances when he had not yet been officially nominated as Chancellor and met Biden at a G20 Summit in Rome in October 2021 (POLITICO 2022a).

However, no German leader publicly committed to sanction Nord Stream 2 until late-February 2022, even though context implied that this might happen. On February 7, in a press conference with Biden, Scholz did not make definitive statements on the pipeline. Rather, he said Germany and the United States, in regard to sanctions, would act in complete mutual agreement (*komplett einvernehmlich agieren*). An invasion would be followed by 'tough, jointly agreed, and extensive sanctions' (*harte, gemeinsam vereinbarte und weitreichende Sanktionen*). Possibly reflecting coordination between the statesmen, Biden had said, just before Scholz spoke, that a Russian invasion would spell the end for Nord Stream 2 (ZDF Heute 2022). Similarly, on 4 February, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen had announced wide-ranging financial and economic sanctions if Russia were to invade Ukraine, saying that the future of Nord Stream 2 would depend on how Russia acted. It stands to reason that von der Leyen acted with tacit approval of Germany, which, after all, holds major influence in the EU (Länder-Analysen 2022; Reuters 2022).

Further signs suggested Germany might halt the pipeline, though they were far from explicit and clear. In mid-January 2022, Greens Representative Omid Nouripour demanded to halt Nord Stream 2 if Russia invaded. He was joined by Roderich Kiesewetter from the opposition-party CDU. Both are considered influential foreign policy brokers in their respective parties (tagesschau.de 2022a). The Greens, being part of the ruling coalition, had long called for a more robust approach to Russia due to its human rights violations and opposed Nord Stream 2, albeit for largely ecological reasons. There have also been long-term irritations in the German-Russian gas trade, in part because of resistance to Nord Stream 2 by other EU member states (Westphal 2020).

Germany did end up enacting sanctions and halting Nord Stream 2 before the Russian invasion – but barely so. When Russia recognised separatist entities on Ukrainian territories, overtly breaking the Minsk Protocols on 21 February, Scholz coordinated sanctions with Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron in a video conference. Scholz then halted Nord Stream 2 on the next day

(POLITICO 2022a). Also on 22 February, EU foreign ministers agreed on further sanctions against Russia, including a ban on Russian access to EU capital markets and prohibition of trading Russian state bonds, as well as sanctions against nearly 400 Russian people and institutions (Länder-Analysen 2022). As Russia had started to build up the prerequisites for the invasion months earlier, the late timing of threatening and executing sanctions on Nord Stream 2 can safely be assumed to have vastly diminished the sanctions' deterrent effects. Indeed, Russia invaded hitherto unoccupied Ukrainian territory only two days after sanctions were announced. Deterrence had clearly failed.

Conclusion

By applying deterrence theory to Germany in late 2021 to February 2022, this article infers that Germany could have potentially added significantly to the risks and costs that the Russian regime would have had to factor in when invading Ukraine. The other main finding is that Germany's actual deterrence contributions stayed far behind its potential, as German leaders were much more guarded in communicating and specifying deterrent threats than were various other NATO allies. This notably includes the complete omission of military means and a refusal to publicly commit to threaten sanctions on Nord Stream 2 and Russia's access to SWIFT.

The study's findings yield supplementary insights into related areas. As other states had sent weapons to Ukraine and signalled large-scale retaliation, it seems worthwhile to explore why Germany (and others) adopted different policies. The results of this study and others (Spanger 2020; Driedger 2022) suggest that this is a combination of path dependency on widespread beliefs in the disutility of military measures to promote peace, the rapid and militarised way in which events developed, and short-term factors such as dynamics within the newly formed three-party coalition in Germany.

Of course, an overall assessment of the outbreak of the Ukraine conflict would need to fully factor in Russian revisionist intentions toward Ukraine, perceptions and risk acceptance as well as other states' deterrence contributions, and the effect of other policies, notably those of engagement (Nincic 2011). As this study shows, even the comparatively small sub-task of evaluating direct deterrence contributions from just one party necessitates serious conceptual and empirical work, which should caution both analysts and policymakers against prematurely confident interpretations about broader issues.

This study investigated the degree to which Germany directly used or did not use its own capabilities for deterrent threats, through issuing threats of sanctions against Russia, or transferring some capabilities to Ukraine to increase the efficacy of Kyiv's deterrent threats. Outside the scope of this study were hy-

pothetically possible, yet extremely unlikely measures that would exceed even the efforts of more committed allies (for example, stationing German troops on Ukrainian territory to act as tripwire forces).

Also not systematically investigated in this study was the question as to what extent German policy indirectly affected the resolve and credibility of other key actors. On this, the data discussed here suggest various plausible hypotheses: Due to Germany's formidable capabilities toward Russia, German behaviour might have caused some other member states to deem it safe and acceptable to support Kyiv less than they otherwise might have had. Others might have stepped up their efforts because they thought them even more necessary in the light of German passivity or because they were morally outraged about German behaviour, as in the case when Germany blocked Estonian arms shipments to Ukraine. Due to Berlin's pivotal role in the EU and NATO, German policy might also have incentivised Russian leaders to believe an invasion would not be met by strong resistance from either institution.

Another hypothetical indirect effect of German policy on deterrence over Ukraine relates to the Russo-German gas trade, which still awaits systematic investigation. Claims that German policy was long constrained or even driven by a dependence on Russian gas face various conceptual and empirical problems (Driedger 2018). The issue of transit fees does not directly bear on deterrence. However, before the construction of the Nord Stream pipelines, the Ukrainian transit enabled both sides to inflict mutual economic damage through blockages. If Russia had invaded Ukraine, collateral damage, unattributable sabotage or overt Ukrainian blockage could have disrupted the Russian gas transit to Europe, sharply diminishing Russian income and possibly forcing a hitherto reluctant Europe on Ukraine's side. The Nord Stream pipelines then provided an alternative route for Russia, minimising its risk of disruptions and diminishing deterrence over Ukraine. Notably, these considerations have rarely, if at all (tagesschau.de 2022a), been spelled out by Ukrainian or German policymakers, arguably because doing so would clearly imply that the respective other side is unreliable.

The results highlight that ruling out military measures can, within specific scope conditions, incentivise rather than prevent conflict. For Germany, whose foreign policy discourse has traditionally been sceptical of military means, these findings urge a serious rethinking. Strategies of engagement, institutionalisation and legalisation are staples in German foreign policy and have indeed been shown to promote peace, welfare and stability, provided the context is favourable (e.g. Kupchan 2010; Nincic 2011). But if German strategic thinking continues to not factor in that abstaining from threats and military measures can, under certain circumstances, permit conflict where it might have been avoided,

Germany and other states might inadvertently continue to contribute to crisis escalation in the future.

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Thematic section
The Russia-Ukraine War: Why the Conflict Was Not Prevented

Russian Private Military and Ukraine: Hybrid Surrogate Warfare and Russian State Policy by Other Means

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Abstract

This article investigates the Russian government's reliance on commercial soldiers in the hybrid war efforts against Ukraine until the invasion in February 2022. Russian private military companies (PMCs), such as RUSCORP and the Wagner group, have already been active in Syria and Africa over the last years, signalling the resurgence of Russian machinations on the world stage. They also played a key part in the annexation of Crimea in 2014, as well as the struggles on Ukraine's Eastern border areas around Luhansk and Donbas. The article shows that PMCs have become an integral part of the Kremlin's approach to foreign policy. Unlike Western PMCs, which can arguably augment their ability to provide effective public security, Russian PMCs are used to construct insecurities to the point of fighting hybrid surrogate wars. While they fulfil the same outcome for the Russian state to be strengthened through the public-private security arrangements, their function is radically different: (1) providing deniability without the deployment of Russian troops, (2) providing

military ambiguity and (3) thus, furthering the Kremlin's foreign policy objectives. The significance of the deployment of these PMCs is that they are an extension of the Russian security apparatus, closely linked to the FSB, GRU and SVR, and with similar command and control structures, staffed by former members of the Russian security services.

First published online on 8 September 2022, issue published on 30 September 2022

Introduction

Over the last 8 years Putin's Russia has sought to re-establish itself on the world stage by projecting power across the Middle East and Africa, harking back to the height of Soviet influence in the 1970s and 1980s. The Kremlin see this as Russia's right in the world. With this in mind Putin's Russia has started to employ what have been termed *Private Military Companies* (PMCs) or perhaps more accurately *semi-state security forces* to assist in the re-establishment of Russia's international standing (Marten 2019). However, Russia's deployment of these types of companies represent a very serious threat to international security as they have re-imagined the mercenary in their own way and in a departure from the traditional 'soldier of fortune' seen in the mid to late 20th century. Between 1800 and 1945 the mercenary profession was frowned upon and unlike previous centuries had almost dropped from view. However, mercenaries returned to the international stage in the aftermath of the Second World War and the Wars of Decolonisation between 1945 and 1980. British, French, Belgian and Portuguese mercenaries were prevalent during this period (Mockler 2006). The late 1990s saw their re-emergence in Africa particularly in Angola and Sierra Leone in the mould of the classic soldier of fortune. The trend continued in Afghanistan and Iraq after the invasion by the US led Coalition in 2001 and 2003. Their use has been well documented elsewhere.

This marks a departure from the established norms for companies such as these and also signals a very worrying precedent. Russia can and has been using the legal ambiguity that surrounds these companies in terms of International Law to expand its influence in Ukraine, Africa and Syria. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the encroachment of so called Russian separatists in Eastern Ukraine highlight their increased use by Moscow to further its regional goals in a more aggressive interpretation of the 'near and abroad' policy or in Soviet parlance 'Spheres of Influence'. This has been made possible by the ambiguous legal standing of private military companies internationally. The most prominent

Russian mercenary group is the Wagner group which first appeared in Crimea in 2014 and since then has been in the vanguard of Russian foreign policy in Africa, the Middle East and in the contested areas of Eastern Ukraine. Thus, our article contributes to a dimension of the war in Ukraine, in particular the role of PMCs in Russian Foreign and Security Policy and their use in Ukraine. Russian PMCs have been used to construct insecurities to the point of fighting hybrid and proxy wars. The presence and activities of PMCs in Ukraine were actively involved in false flag operations as a pretext for Russia to intervene, as well as constructing war infrastructure in Crimea and the Donbas. The article is structured as follows: The first section analyses the theoretical framework of hybrid surrogate warfare, a term linked to state sponsorship of terrorism, but also broadened to include the use of proxy militias, insurgent groups, PMCs and even drones. We then analyse the rise of PMCs in Russia in other theatres of violence, such as Syria and Africa. The final section will apply the framework to Ukraine through the different periods from 2014 and the take over of Crimea until the start of the war in Ukraine in 2022.

Hybrid surrogate warfare and Russian semi state proxies

The phenomenon of hybrid warfare has been debated since it entered into the security and military lexicon. On the one hand, as states and non-state actors have employed both conventional and irregular methods to achieve their goals throughout history, some view hybrid warfare as the latest definition for irregular or asymmetric methods used to counter a conventionally superior enemy. On the other hand, others assert that the concept of hybrid warfare represents a new type of phenomenon implemented by contemporary threat actors (Jasper & Moreland 2014). According to Hoffman (Hoffman 2007: 8), hybrid warfare comprises different types of warfare, which can all be executed by both state and non-state actors. These types of warfare include conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts and criminal disorder. By conducting this variety of acts of warfare, Hoffman (ibid: 8), asserts that the main goal of hybrid warfare is to obtain 'synergistic effects in the physical and psychological dimensions of conflict'. In addition, Hoffman notes that in hybrid war, all the forces, whether they are regular or irregular, become blurred into the same force in the same battlespace (ibid: 8). Pindjak (Pindjak 2014:18) contends that Hybrid warfare involves multi-layered endeavours that aim to destabilise a functioning state and polarise its society. Thus, by combining kinetic operations with subversive efforts, the adversary goal is to have an impact on decision-makers. Usually, according to Pindjak (ibid: 18), in order to avoid attribution or retribution, the aggressor using hybrid warfare conducts clandestine actions that leave no credible smoking gun. In that sense, Deep (Deep 2020) argues that hybrid

warfare has the 'potential to transform the strategic calculations of potential belligerents due to the rise of non-state actors, information technology, and the proliferation of advanced weapons systems' (ibid).

This section analyses the theoretical framework of hybrid surrogate warfare. Given the fact that the phenomenon of hybrid warfare poses a substantial challenge to democratic states in the current era, the conundrum is what happens when a situation occurs where hybrid warfare poses an existential threat to a sovereign state. How does the threatened state respond to that hybrid threat when it poses an existential threat to it? Thus, in order to combine these two concepts, hybrid warfare and surrogate warfare, this article will synthesise hybrid and surrogate warfare, but now broadened to include the use of proxy militias, insurgent groups, PMCs and even drones. The term surrogate warfare has been used recently by Krieg and Rickli (Krieg & Rickli 2019: 7-8) to describe 'a sociopolitical phenomenon rather than just another mode of war' involving the externalisation of the burden of warfare. Initially a concept that emerged during the 1970s and referred to state sponsorship of terrorism, it has now been expanded to include the use of proxy militias, insurgent groups, PMCs and even drones. Thus, 'a surrogate force does not necessarily have to be indigenous, nor does it have to be non-national. Rather, any force . . . that conducts an operation on behalf of another is probably a more accurate definition of a surrogate' (Peltier 2004: 13). Surrogates have tactical and operational utility because they act as force multipliers for the Russian forces. As defined, the term is conceptually precise to cover the use of militias and PMCs by Moscow in Ukraine and Syria.

Where does the Russian military doctrine and strategy come from? It has been derived from the Soviet armed forces, in which, based on a Marxist perspective, war was viewed 'as a socio-political phenomenon . . . [where] armed forces are used as chief and decisive means for the achievement of political aims' (Glantz 1995: xiii). After the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks established a militia-type volunteer army, which, for instance, fought against the Basmachi insurgents in Central Asia (Statiev 2010: 25). Subsequently, Leon Trotsky transformed the Red Army into a regular army with hundreds of thousands of soldiers. After the end of World War II, the Soviet leadership used militias extensively to suppress nationalist insurgents in western Ukraine (ibid: 97-123) Militias were subsequently used as a tool of Soviet counter-insurgency efforts to tap into local knowledge and intelligence. Thus, militias played an important role of the regular army and the party closely supervised them (ibid: 26). The collapse of the Soviet Union facilitated nationalism in the former Soviet space. Ethnic conflicts prompted Moscow to intervene in former Soviet republics, whereby Russia had inherited most of the Soviet military capabilities, yet its army was trained to fight a conventional war against NATO. An example for Russia's new foreign pol-

icy approach in the post Soviet space is the case of the insurgents from the Russian-speaking region of Transnistria, who fought a short war against the former Soviet republic of Moldova in 1992. While the Moldova-based Soviet/Russian 14th Army was officially neutral, it covertly supported pro-Russian Transnistrian militias. During the 2008 Georgian war, Russian forces were helped by local militias in their support of the breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Several thousand South Ossetians and volunteers from North Caucasus, as well as up to 10,000 Abkhazians, participated in the war (ECHR 2009: 216).

The post war surge in mercenary activity prompted Geneva Protocols I and II in 1977 that banned mercenaries. The primary objection is that they were warriors without a state, fighting for money rather than national ideology. The most widely accepted definition of a mercenary in international law comes from Article 47 of Protocol I to the Geneva Convention. Article 47 forms the international legal basis against mercenaries (ICRC 1949). However it is widely regarded as not only unworkable legislation but also laughable as it is so ambiguous that any clever legal council would be able to argue their client out of it (Geoffrey 1980: 375). Russian military companies like their western counter operate globally with relative ease due to Article 47. This utilisation of poor law and loopholes within international legislation is called *lawfare* and has been exploited by the Russian Federation continually (Chifu & Frunzeti 2020: 47). Article 13 paragraph 5 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation and Art. 208 of the Penal Code prohibit the operation of private armed groups, and deal with concerns about the security of the state (Dyner 2018). While Russian Law prohibits mercenary activity there has been an upsurge in Russian mercenary activity in the last 8 years, papers relating to Wagner and the Slavonic corps have pointed out that the Kremlin uses the question of legality as leverage against the Russia military companies to keep them in line and operating in Russian interests (Chifu & Frunzeti 2020). However, this outlook fails to account for the fact that Russian Law is what the Kremlin says it is when it suits them. This is especially valid when it comes to matters of state security and foreign intelligence operations. Russian Law has been continually distorted to suit the ends of the oligarchs and of Vladimir Putin. In keeping with what has transpired in Russia since the end of communism in what Paul Klebnikov (Klebnikov 2001) termed the era of 'gangster capitalism', Russia has a propensity to act in the grey zone between peace and war, where they can deny involvement and quite often get away with actions that violate international norms, if not international law (Peterson: 30). Chifu and Frunzeti point out that these so-called Russian PMCs are the perfect tool for conducting *lawfare* by allowing the Kremlin to operate on the edge of the law or in territories where the law has no application (Chifu & Frunzeti 2020: 47). Private security and military companies are neither explicitly legal nor illegal in Russia,

a status that may serve Russian authorities well in situations where attribution and attention is unwanted. While the exact shape and role of the Russian PMSC industry may not be carved out fully, Russia is now home to a small, but potent, PMSC industry that can be mobilised to inflict harm on the country's enemies (Østensen & Bukkvoll 2020).

The registration of the various PMCs outside of Russia is not simply an effort to get around *Article 13* of the Russian Constitution, which forbids mercenary activities and enshrines the monopoly on violence with the military forces of the Russian Federation. It is a very simply cut out to provide Moscow with insulation when it comes to the deployment of these companies, in a word – deniability. But the closer we look at Wagner and its ties, the thinner the veil becomes and its relationship to the State more visible. Research by Kimberly Marten notes that training facilities used by Wagner were at one point situated on the grounds of the 10th Brigade of the GRU Spetznaz base and its original training facility in Mol'Kino in Krasnodar Kray was across the highway from a GRU facility there (Marten 2019: 192). Wagner Group Commander Dmitri Utkin who has been spotted in Donbas was originally a Colonel in the GRU Reserve; he formally ended his service in the GRU in 2013 (ibid: 192). Utkin was appointed CEO of Concord Management and Consulting in 2017, which is a holding company of Yevgeni Prigozhin catering empire.

The question of legality in the case of Russian military companies is merely a façade that shields Moscow and its intentions. The proximity of Oligarchs such as Wagner's owner Yevgeni Prigozhin to Vladimir Putin indicates collusion at the highest level. Prigozhin is an unusual individual to head up a military company, as he has no military background and made his money in a chain of restaurants in St. Petersburg after a stint in jail for petty crime (Harding 2020: 160-161). Kimberly Marten (Marten 2019: 196-197) considers him a middleman when it comes to Wagner, making money out of contracting Wagner operations. Prigozhin is worth in the region of 200 million dollars after securing lucrative catering contracts for the Russian military. He is closely linked to Vladimir Putin and has been called 'Putin's chef'. Prigozhin denies any links to Wagner and the Kremlin also denies their existence, after all being a mercenary is illegal in Russia. Prigozhin is no stranger to deniable operations as he is also suspected of funding a troll farm in St. Petersburg that was involved in the on-line manipulation of US voters in 2016 (Chifu & Frunzeti 2020: 47; Belton 2020: 483). This places Prigozhin firmly in the grey zone of hybrid warfare along with Wagner; yet, even Putin and the Russian Federation deny the existence of such entities. As Putin's press secretary Dmitry Peskov noted '*De jure* we do not have such legal entities' (Harding 2020: 153). However, Putin has noted that individuals do not represent the Russian Federation that 'it is a matter of private individuals not

the state' (Belton 2020: 483). Caroline Belton notes that in this instance Putin was being facetious, and that the term private individual was a typical KGB tactic that allowed for plausible deniability for any Kremlin involvement. She goes further by pointing out that by this time all of Russia's so-called private businessmen have become agents of the State (ibid: 483). This is a sentiment shared by Bill Browder (Browder 2015) who highlighted this same issue in his acclaimed book Red Notice.

In the same way as we have viewed groups like Wagner and RUS-CORP as PMCs and attributing the title company to them, we have perhaps also overestimated the oligarchs in this landscape. Far from being independent from the Russian state they are inextricably linked to it and to Vladimir Putin. They merely do the Kremlin's bidding and benefit financially by doing so acting as caretakers for Moscow's deniable operations, in this case Prigozhin and Wagner. This means that challenging such companies via international institutions is inherently difficult. The oligarchs owe their loyalty to Putin and the Russian State and are thus an extension of the Russian intelligence apparatus and in that regard insulated and protected. The motion to legalise PMCs in Russia in 2018 was vetoed, as it would have put at risk the GRU's deniable operations, it was not in the best interests of the Russian Federation to allow the legalisation of such companies. Maintaining the status quo is in the interest of the Russian secret services structures with which the PMCs are linked and through which they are controlled because legalisation of their activities could limit this influence and control (Dyner 2018: 2). Doing so would have destroyed the veneer plausible deniability that protects the GRU and its private army. It is not a coincidence that the Wagner group trains on GRU bases and deploys globally with the assistance of the regular Russian Military.

Even if international law could be applied, there would be a necessity to establish beyond any doubt who owns the companies and where they are registered. With the exception of the RSB-group and the Moran Group, it is unclear where Wagner is registered with a view to establishing culpability. Whether inside Russia or externally, challenging these groups is inherently difficult and, in terms of their use in Eastern Ukraine and in particular the Donbas, very worrying. On all levels, the Kremlin has built a very dangerous foreign policy tool. They have insulated themselves legally, financially and in terms of employment at all levels. Moscow has applied the deniability rationale completely, including the denial of the death of Russian contractors in Syria in 2018 at Deir ez-Zor. This deadly incident involving United States Special Forces led to the death of 200 to 300 Russian contractors of the Wagner Group. The death of Russian nationals in a foreign country should have elicited a strong response from the Kremlin, yet it did not (Neff 2018). This shows the lengths to which Moscow

is willing to go to pursue its foreign policy aims up to the point of allowing its operatives to be abandoned, if necessary. While Africa represents a significant part of Wagner's operations it also represents a learning curve. Moscow has used them on the continent to learn how to best employ them, using it as a proving ground with little or no consequence in any respect should the operations there fail (Østensen & Bukkvoll 2020). This approach as we have seen has been very successful and the scope of operations has become broad. Groups like Wagner are very well suited to making a significant contribution for low financial cost in a power as prestige way (Østensen & Bukkvoll 2022).

PMCs in Russia and their role in other theatres of violence

This section outlines and evidences the role of PMCs in Russian Foreign and Security Policy. Russian PMCs have been used to construct insecurities to the point of fighting hybrid and proxy wars, for which our theoretical framework on hybrid surrogate warfare is used in the analysis. This section outlines their role in other theatres of violence in order to make the broader point of their essential rise in Russian Foreign and Security Policy. The subsequent section will analyse the presence and activities of PMCs in Ukraine – which were actively involved in false flag operations as a pretext for Russia to intervene, as well as constructing war infrastructure in Crimea and the Donbas. The term surrogate warfare describes 'a sociopolitical phenomenon rather than just another mode of war' (Krieg & Rickli 2019: 7-8) and includes the use of proxy militias, insurgent groups, PMCs and even drones. '[A]ny force . . . that conducts an operation on behalf of another is probably a more accurate definition of a surrogate' (Peltier 2004: 13), and, thus, act as force multipliers for the Russian forces.

One of the most problematic aspects of understanding Russia's use of hired soldiers is the nomenclature that is used, in particular the term 'Private Military Company'. This term has been applied to the various mercenary groups that appear to be Russian, starting with the Moran Group followed by Anti-terror Orel, the Slavonic Corps, RUS-Corp and, of course, the Wagner Group. What makes the term 'Private Military Company' difficult is the fact that these groups are unlike any previous type of military company. A side-by-side comparison with Western firms that are private military companies and the new breed of so called Russian military companies shows us that there is a vast difference between the two. In the West private military companies are just that, they are registered companies and operate legally. They are also limited in the types of mission they can undertake while employed. Western companies such as Blackwater, Ageis, DynCorp and XE act as private contractors. The most important tasks of PMCs in a Western sense include securing the regular activities of the armed forces (providing logistics, convoy protection), training and protection of facilities and

people. Private military companies work for state and private entities.[1] They are also used by UN agencies, including UNICEF, the World Food Program and the UN Development Program. This is a very important distinction when it comes to the emergence of Russian military companies. Western PMCs are not employed in roles that meant they would be involved in the planning and execution of military operations. Private companies are used in special missions, their degree of use being relatively restricted to rescue after kidnappings, assistance and security of private individuals in hostile territories, above all, responsibilities regarding security and protection (Marten 2019). These are not the same types of mission as undertaken by Russian companies of a similar type. Russian use of PMCs differs from the standard Western perspective in the sense that Russian PMCs carry out purely military functions, both kinetic and non-kinetic, rather than the supporting and enabling tasks of Western PMCs (Peterson 2019: 71). Russian military companies have been involved in a wide-ranging area of assignments from the annexation of sovereign territory to régime change to extrajudicial killing (Harding & Burke 2019; Marten 2019; Mckinnon 2021). Kimberly Marten (Marten 2019) has called them semi-state security forces and this is the most succinct definition of what Russia has created. It has re-imagined the mercenary in its own image and in a way that presents a serious threat to international security. The Kremlin has created a deniable fighting force that does its bidding up to and including murder on a large scale by existing in the grey zone of international law.

Since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, which saw Wagner's first success, they have grown and Moscow has sought to expand their scope and mission in line with Russia's aim to re-establish itself on the world stage, harking back to the high watermark of Soviet influence in the 1970s and 1980s. By utilising the vast pool of former military manpower within Russia and post-Soviet states, the Kremlin seeks to achieve strategic effect and incremental advantage across multiple domains, while mitigating the risk of strategic over-commitment and military over-extension, as occurred during the proxy wars of the 1980s (Peterson 2019: 71). It has been most successful in Africa where we can see use of the Moscow's semi-state soldiers on an increasingly large and worrying scale. After Crimea was annexed in 2014 Russian PMCs were redeployed to Africa as well as

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1   Blackwater and Wagner as companies share the title of private military company. However they differ in terms of legality and purpose. Blackwater, which is now Xe (since 2009), is owned by private investors and legally registered in North Carolina as an Limited Liability Company (LLC) under US Law. Wagner by comparison is not a legally registered company, is not legal under Russian Law and even though Yevgeni Prigozhin is thought to be the owner there is no concrete proof of this either. In terms of the scope of their operations, Blackwater/Xe augment US operations and the activities of private companies in warzones. Whereas Wagner has been in the vanguard of Russia foreign policy moves in Crimea, Syria and Africa since 2014.

Syria. These deployments have continued up to the present day with Wagner involved in a number of countries on the continent including Libya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Central African Republic (CAR), Sudan and more recently in Mali and Burkina Faso. Its activities range in type from leading training exercises, fighting anti-government forces and brutally quelling protests; it also has interests in mining and extractive industries (Marten 2019). A United Nations Report in June of 2021 cited that Wagner instructors had been involved in indiscriminate killings, enforced disappearances while operating with the armed forces of the Central African Republic (UNSC 2020). In late 2021 and early 2022 Wagner was involved in régime change in Burkina Faso (Obaji 2022). These incidents highlight how Wagner has grown in terms of its scope of operations. From Crimea in 2014 to Burkina Faso in 2022 the group has become an increasingly dangerous organisation. This is not the work of a rogue company which is attempting to maximise its profit margins. It is undertaking missions that are normally the preserve of intelligence services. More simply put, it is working in the interests of the Kremlin and its masters at the GRU.

Since the 1990s, NATO has been cooperating with Ukraine. The Cooperation intensified in 2014 following Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for the self-proclaimed breakaway republics of the war in the Donbas region. During this period, the Armed Forces and NATO have supported Ukraine with the implementation of reform initiatives, training of personnel and the introduction of NATO standards (Danish Defense Forces 2022). This has been in keeping with agreements in place since the end of the Cold War. In comparison to Russian groups such as Wagner, NATO forces have not been involved in direct military operations and support of separatist groups in the region.

Recent journal articles have focused on the Wagner group calling it a company and one that is focused on private gain. This is merely fortuitous cover and a useful by-product, which conveniently muddies the waters in terms of trying to understand their motivations. The Wagner Group is driving Russian foreign policy aims wherever it goes, and, in a very methodical way, which, according to Parens (Parens 2022), is a three-tiered approach. First, it conducts disinformation and pro-government information warfare strategies, including fake polls and counter-demonstration techniques. Second, Wagner secures payment for its services through concessions in extractive industries, particularly precious metal mining operations. Wagner uses a variety of organisations and companies to oversee these extraction projects. Third, Wagner becomes involved with the country's military, launching a relationship directly with Russia's military, usually through training, advising, personal security and anti-insurgency operations. The most prevalent indicators or 'signposts' that an entity is vulnerable to Russian hybrid actions include political and social turmoil, large Russian invest-

ments in its key capabilities and weak security structures (Peterson 2019: 23). These tasks, while not outside the realm of mercenaries, go beyond simply soldiering for private gain. Wagner's operations are in depth and well thought-out and fit Moscow's efforts to re-establish itself as a global power. Throughout the process, the Russian foreign policy establishment's involvement is clear, particularly as the beneficiary of military-to-military relationships with a new potential client state (ibid). The process has become easier in recent years since the United States and the French have sought to cease their training missions in Africa. Russia has stepped into this void using Wagner as a proxy to extend its reach in a deniable fashion.

This leads us back to claims that Wagner is merely a military company; this needs to be challenged more vigorously as it is not only problematic, but also unwise. Moscow cannot be seen to be manipulating foreign states and effecting régime change in Africa directly, so it using Wagner to do it for them and thus keeping the Russian military out of such matters directly. Journalists Luke Harding and Jason Burke noted in a 2019 article for the Guardian newspaper that Moscow was using Wagner to re-establish itself on the African continent (Harding & Burke 2019). Part of this reengagement in Africa is to do with Russia's place in the world and where Vladimir Putin sees it, closely modelled on the idea of 'Russkiy Mir', or Russian world. The concept has become fashionable under Putin and signifies Russian power and culture extended beyond current borders (ibid). The Russian Strategic Intentions White Paper SMA TRADOC from 2019 notes that this is also an excellent way for the Russian Federation to streamline its expeditionary capabilities while advancing Russian geo-economic interests, without requiring major involvement of the state and its resources (Peterson 2019: 73). More simply put, it allows them to spread Russian influence without the necessity of deploying regular military units. These activities in Africa represent a very dangerous threat to international security as Moscow can deploy groups like Wagner with deniability and manipulate sovereign states without sanction and spread its influence more effectively (Sukhankin 2019). They are being used as a vanguard in the re-establishment of Russian influence globally and to paraphrase Von Clausewitz they are doing this via other means. The approach is very adroit, by utilising Wagner the Kremlin remains covert to a certain extent and if their plans come to fruition we see the regular Russian military move in to act as Russia's representative and consolidate the gains made initially by Wagner. Wagner also gives them deniability. If it does not work out on the ground, Moscow can deny them completely as it did in Syria after the Dar ez-Zor incident. As yet Wagner has not been challenged in Africa and has spread its shadowy spectre across the continent. Moscow has created and developed a very effective tool and has used Africa as a proving ground to hone its use over

the last decade. Wagner has established itself in the contested regions of Eastern Ukraine and worryingly it is at the heart of the unrest in that region supporting Russian Proxy groups and so called separatists thus giving Putin the ability to manipulate and foment unrest without sanction. This has been allowed to happen because of the nature of international law and Russia's deliberate manipulation of its own laws to create a safe environment for groups like Wagner to operate.

Ukraine as theatre of violence for Wagner

This section outlines and evidences the role of PMCs in Russian Foreign and Security Policy, specifically in Ukraine. Here, in particular, Russian PMCs have created insecurities through fighting hybrid and proxy wars. In our analysis, we have termed this hybrid surrogate warfare. This section outlines their role in Ukraine with an emphasis on military presence and activities, such as false flag operations, constructing war infrastructure in Crimea and the Donbas, etc. As outlined before, 'any force . . . that conducts an operation on behalf of another is probably a more accurate definition of a surrogate' (Peltier 2004: 13), and, thus, acts as force multipliers for the Russian forces. It would not be proper to claim that the war in Ukraine was a result of the Wagner group; however, they have played a significant part in the process. Since 2014 Wagner has been at the forefront of Russian operations in Ukraine and will continue to be.

The departure of President Yanukovych led to A Russian intervention in the autonomous republic of Crimea, initially, which was subsequently followed by operations in Donetsk and Lukhansk. Following the staged referendum of 16 March 2014, Russia officially annexed Crimea. Within two weeks, Russian-backed agitators and military personnel occupied government buildings in Kharkiv, Donetsk and Luhansk, with the ambition to also stage a so-called referendum in eastern Ukraine. After significant protests leading to clashes, Ukraine ordered 'anti-terrorist operations' to re-capture control, which largely did not succeed until representatives of Russia, Ukraine and the self-declared People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk signed the Minsk Protocol in early September 2014. Until the full invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022, eastern Ukraine had been in a state of semi-frozen conflict with occasional military skirmishes. In this conflict, while Russian regular troops had undoubtedly participated in the fighting, pro-Russian militias were also used, notably also Wagner soldiers.

The Wagner Group had become infamous during the war in Donbas in Ukraine in 2014, where it supported separatist forces of the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. As it operates in furtherance of Russian foreign policy interests and objectives, and is trained on installations of the Rus-

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sian Ministry of Defence (MoD), Wagner is seen as an arm's-length unit of the MoD or Russia's military intelligence agency, the GRU (Higgins & Nechepurenko 2018). Furthermore, the group is believed to be owned and/or financed by Yevgeny Prigozhin, an oligarch linked to President Putin. It has most recently been involved in the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, where it aimed to assassinate Ukrainian leaders (Alexandra 2022). The Wagner Group was founded in 2014 by Dmitriy Valeryevich Utkin, a veteran of the First and Second Chechen Wars, who until 2013, served as lieutenant colonel and brigade commander of a unit of special forces unit of Russia's Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) (Vaux 2016). Initially, he worked for the Moran Security Group, a private company founded by Russian military veterans. The Wagner Group became first active in Ukraine in 2014, in the Luhansk region (ibid). The company's name is reportedly derived from the German composer Richard Wagner, which Utkin is said to be very fond of due to his passion for the Third Reich, and Wagner being Hitler's favourite composer. Thus, Utkin is believed to be a neo-Nazi, with the Economist reporting that he has several Nazi tattoos (The Economist 2022). Wagner has also been linked to white supremacist and neo-Nazi far-right extremists. Russian Oligarch Yevgeny Prigozhin has links with both Wagner and Utkin personally, being either the funder and/or actual owner of the Wagner Group (Rabin 2019). Signals intelligence intercepts also placed Utkin at the heart of Wagner operations in Eastern Ukraine during the battle of Debaltseve in 2015. The battle which took place around the city saw the deployment of pro-Russian separatists, ethnic Russian volunteers from the former Soviet Republics as well as GRU and regular army field commanders (Noorman 2020). The likely sighting of a Russian general named Lentsov within the city of Debaltseve that day raised yet more questions about the true depth of Russian military involvement (McDermott 2015).

Wagner was first active in February 2014 in Crimea during Russia's annexation. They operated in tandem with regular Russian army units, disarmed the Ukrainian Army and took control over Crimea in an almost bloodless manner. They were part of the so-called 'little green men' given that they were masked with an unmarked green army uniform (Shevchenko 2014). Subsequently, they went to the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, taking part in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. With Wagner's help, the pro-Russian forces destabilised Ukrainian government security forces, took control of local government institutions and towns (Kyiv Post 2018). Their activities included attacks, reconnaissance, as well as intelligence-gathering and accompanying VIPs. In October 2017, the Ukrainian SBU claimed it had established the involvement of the Wagner Group in the June 2014 airplane shoot-down at Luhansk International Airport that killed 40 Ukrainian paratroopers, as well as a crew of nine (Interfax-Ukraine 2017). According to the SBU, Wagner PMCs were initially deployed to

eastern Ukraine on 21 May 2014 (Kyiv Post 2018) By late November 2017, the Ukrainian SBU published alleged direct links between Dmitry Utkin and Igor Kornet, the interior minister of the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR). Apparently, Wagner left Ukraine and returned to Russia in autumn of 2015, with the start of the Russian military intervention in Syria. Finally, in late November 2017, with the eruptions of a power struggle in the LPR in Eastern Ukraine between LPR President Igor Plotnitsky and the LPR's interior minister, Igor Kornet, who Plotnitsky wanted to dismiss. During the struggle, armed men took up positions in Luhansk who allegedly belonged to Wagner. The power struggle was resolved when Plotnitsky resigned and fled to Russia and LPR security minister Leonid Pasechnik was named acting leader. At the time, veteran Russian officer Igor Strelkov who had played a key role in the annexation of Crimea, confirmed that Wagner PMCs had returned to Luhansk.

Wagner's role in Eastern Ukraine has not just been limited to covert operations as part of a larger mercenary force. Regular separatist formations were reinforced with so-called volunteers and supported by Russian military advisors, often with Spetznaz operators or GRU operatives attached, especially for the conduct of reconnaissance and sabotage missions (Hoffman 2007). Given the close links between the GRU and Wagner there it is more than likely that the two are operating in concert with each other and indicates more than fomenting regional tension. It is no accident Wagner and other Kremlin-backed separatists have been using Soviet era legacy equipment with original Russian army unit-markings painted over and often replaced with a white open square (Inform Napalm 2015). Investigative journalism websites like Bellingcat and Inform Napalm attained considerable success in identifying Russian military hardware and personnel covertly being deployed into Eastern Ukraine and yet groups like Wagner make it very difficult to pin it on the GRU and the Kremlin (Noorman 2020). Russia has sought to use older vehicles of Ukrainian origin in an effort to conceal its material support including the deployment of Soviet era T64 tanks, which are also in service with the Ukrainian army adding to the layers of deniability (Miller et al. 2015: 14-20; Noorman 2020; Inform Napalm 2015). More recently social media pages such as AFV Recognition have reported on the use of Russian military equipment in the hands of Wagner group units in Eastern Ukraine as recently as mid-May 2022.

In the context of the 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia, Wagner units have been identified in eastern Ukraine, operating in conjunction with regular Russian army formations, the full extent of these operations has not yet been established. The nature of Wagner's operations with the Russian Special Forces units is as yet unclear. However, based on their activities in Crimea and Ukraine, as well as Africa, it is reasonable to surmise they are acting as auxiliaries (Trad 2022).

As of May, they have been implicated in massacres outside Kyiv (Harding 2022), and in mopping up operations in eastern Ukraine where they have been sighted using more modern Russian armoured vehicles (AFV Recognition 2022). To date, Wagner's presence on the eastern front has not been as visible as the group's operations in Syria or Africa, which have been widely documented on Telegram channels and by news outlets, as well as the DFRLab. In Ukraine, mercenaries have been reported in regions of strategic importance for Russia's military command. Most recently, the DFRLab has monitored their activities in Zaporizhya, Volodymyrivka and Klynove, in Donetsk oblast. Klynove was taken on 4 July by the Russian army with the assistance of Wagner (Trad 2022). Unlike previous operations in Ukraine and Africa, the movement of their fighters in Ukraine has been in secret as they have been mostly attached to the Russian Special Forces, Spetsnaz, and other elite forces of the Russian army (Trad 2022).

The Times (Rana 2022) reported that the Wagner Group flew in more than 400 contractors from the Central African Republic in January 2022 on a mission to assassinate Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and members of his government. The objective of this assassination was to prepare the ground for Russia to take control of Ukraine. The war finally started on 24 February 2022. The Ukrainian government was informed of this assassination attempt early on 26 February, and declared a 36-hour curfew to sweep the capital for Russian saboteurs. By 3 March 2022, according to The Times (ibid), Zelenskyy had survived three assassination attempts, two allegedly by the Wagner Group. On 8 March 2022, the Ukrainian military claimed they had killed the first Wagner PMC members since the start of the Russian invasion.

Over the last decade the Kremlin has been developing and learning how to handle their deniable fighting force. This makes Wagner a very dangerous force, not because they are a particularly large force but because they operate outside the rules of war and can undertake any type of operation without regard of international norms. In the case of Eastern Ukraine there is no doubt that they have been involved in the trouble in the region. During a Ukrainian Intelligence sting operation starting in 2019 it emerged that a large number of former Russian military personnel had worked in Eastern Ukraine. By September 2019, GUR MOU had accumulated background personal data, including current employment status, whereabouts and contact details of over two thousand former mercenaries. Most had fought in Eastern Ukraine at some point between 2014 and 2018. As the Ukrainian sting operation continued they began to gather a vast quantity of 'job' applications. The resumes contained direct admissions and details of how Russia's hybrid war in Ukraine had developed. Some militants described their arrival to Donbas in 2014 as 'under the cover of rebels', while others described their presence there as direct deployments by their regular Russian army units.

Crucially, the GUR MOU team started noticing names among the applicants that they knew were already wanted by their colleagues at the SBU for what they believed were serious crimes committed in 2014 and 2015 in Eastern Ukraine (Grozev 2021). Many of the recruits also provided insider data on how the Russian government had provided support to and steered the operations of the ostensibly private Wagner PMC. In the presumed job interview with Alexander Krivenko, a former Lt. Colonel in the Russian Army, he described how in 2014 he was instructed by his regional voenkomat (the Ministry of Defence's conscription and recruitment office) to form a battalion to fight in Eastern Ukraine. He spoke of his role of combat training chief for 'Wagner', which took him to Syria and the Central African Republic, where he served as advisor to that country's chief of staff. Notably, he describes a previously undisclosed training programme that was provided to the CAR's chief of staff at the GRU's Frunze Academy in Moscow (Grozev 2021). Even small groups of Wagner mercenaries could do serious damage not only in terms of acting as advisors and weapons experts but in fomenting unrest and sparking tensions. If their activities in Africa are an indicator, we can expect to see similar tactics in Eastern Ukraine up to and including crimes against the civilian population and destabilisation of the region in general, all at Moscow's behest and in a deniable fashion. The hybrid nature of Wagner means that they will be hard to counter in the long term as they can on the one hand act as cheap counterinsurgency force for the Kremlin or tool of foreign policy as we have seen, but also become insurgent groups themselves, they are a truly flexible fighting force. The latter is the most dangerous as Moscow seeks to stir up tensions in areas where there are Ethnic Russians, groups like Wagner could act as stay behind forces even in small numbers they could be lethal.

Even if diplomacy prevails there is nothing to stop the Kremlin from keeping groups like Wagner in play to suit their ends or to keep tensions simmering wherever they please. Due to the ambiguous nature of their formation we could see them disappear overnight only to reappear under a new name. A force like this could be kept in play by the GRU long term in the region to act as a 5th column for Moscow. If there is a lesson in Russian Military intelligence operations it is this, they are long term planners and Wagner is a part of a strategy as we have seen in Africa. As the War in Ukraine continues, Wagner will continue to feature in the contested regions of Eastern Ukraine. This is an important point as Wager has been at the forefront of tensions in the region since 2014 and in that the Kremlin has developed them as a tool in its foreign policy toolbox. As Trad (Trad 2022) outlines, they have been less visible on social media than they have been in Africa and Syria, which is quite telling; however, Luke Harding has shown that Wagner has already been implicated in war crimes (Harding 2022). Crimea was the beginning of Wagner and in the intervening period Moscow has

learned how to use the group quite effectively, as we have outlined. At this point there is no answer as to how to combat the use of such groups, making them one of the most, if not the most, dangerous developments in the international sphere since the Cold War (Østensen & Bukkvoll 2020).

Conclusions

Over the last decade the Russian intelligence has re-imagined and developed the mercenary in a way that is unlike anything we have seen historically. While the use of soldiers of fortune was popular during the Cold War the Kremlin has turned them into a 21st century tool of hybrid warfare. Russia has created a completely deniable military entity that can use any means necessary to achieve the end goal. A military force comprised of professionals that are not bound by the articles of war or international norms is truly dangerous. Russia has shown through military actions in Ukraine and Crimea, and through wider political influence operations, its willingness to openly flout international rules and norms to achieve its strategic goals (Peterson 2019). Operations in Africa have allowed them to develop and hone their skills to the point that we will see their use into the future and in a more overt way. 'We have Russia as a competitor that is willing, and did, break international law' . . . and 'I think Russia will continue to press against the international norms' (Scarparotti 2017). The appearance of Wagner in the future should act as a red flag to Western countries as to Moscow's intentions. They have consistently been in the vanguard of Russian foreign policy for near on a decade.

From Crimea to Central Africa to Eastern Ukraine the full gamut of dirty tricks has been employed by groups like Wagner and has been done so unimpeded. If the history of the Cold War has taught us anything it is that Russian intelligence operations are far reaching and long term in scope, we have not yet seen the extent to which Moscow has utilised so-called Private military companies, but they are not going away and if they are to be challenged it will require a broad and comprehensive approach that is flexible. Efforts to counter these groups will require a full spectrum of legal and financial resources, and very likely the use of military force to roll them back. Military force may well be the answer as doing so could make their deployment by Moscow unpalatable as it would begin to raise questions and necessitate a Russian response, thus, forcing the Kremlin to acknowledge their use of these companies. Until they are effectively challenged we will continue to seek their use in more and more aggressive ways. As Østensen and Bukkvoll (Østensen & Bukkvoll 2022) point out, Moscow would need very good strategic reasons not to continue to use them. Vladimir Putin's quest to re-establish Russian prestige globally has placed these groups in the vanguard of Russian strategic thinking, meaning they are here to stay.

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