

THE IMAGERY OF RUSSIA'S HUMANITARIANISM - A CRITICAL GEOPOLITICAL APPROACH AND THE CASE OF THE INTERVENTION IN SYRIA

By
Marita Lagidze

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of International Relations

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
International Relations

Supervisor: Professor Xymena Kurowska

Word Count: 10 778

Vienna, Austria
2022

ABSTRACT

The thesis addresses the puzzle of the duality of Russia's foreign policy regarding humanitarianism and the contradictory use of the humanitarian doctrine in its internal discourse around the intervention in Syria. The main argument presented is that standard explanations in the literature about how Russian humanitarianism works are insufficient to fully make sense of the humanitarian claims of Moscow. Materialistic and ideological foundations, as well as a widespread view that attempts of Russia to represent itself as a humanitarian actor to a great extent is a parody, mimicry, and mocking of the West, are limited since they do not allow looking at the issue from Russia's own lens. Instead, the thesis applies a critical affective geopolitical framework and argues that the construction of Russia as a humanitarian actor is a spatial project which sets up a specific geopolitical imaginary. Using the thematic analysis of articles from two Russian pro-government newspapers, eight generic themes are identified, allowing to assemble humanitarian geopolitical imagery of Russia, which is being constructed and reconstructed with an aim to create a specific mindset, values, and ideals that will prepare grounds for political legitimization and moral justification of foreign policy decisions of Russia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor Xymena Kuroswka. Without her guidance and insights this thesis would not have been possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1. Reconstructing Humanitarianism.....	5
1.1 Classical Humanitarianism and Contestation of its Principles	5
1.2 Politicized Humanitarianism.....	8
1.3 Russian Claims for Being a Humanitarian Actor	11
Chapter 2. Critical Affective Geopolitics	16
2.1 Geopolitics in IR	17
2.2 Critical Affective Geopolitics and the Concept of Geopolitical Imagery.....	19
2.3 Connecting Humanitarianism with Geopolitics.....	21
2.4 Geopolitical Imagery of Russia as a Humanitarian Actor	23
Chapter 3. Humanitarian Geopolitical Imagery of Russia in Empirical Material	27
3.1 Themes Characterizing Humanitarian Geopolitical Imagery of Russia	29
3.2 Discussion: Constructing Humanitarian Geopolitical Imagery of Russia	37
Conclusion	42
Bibliography	45

INTRODUCTION

Humanitarianism is a universal doctrine that values human life and seeks to protect it when in danger. Nevertheless, means of implementing humanitarianism in practice are not as universal as the doctrine itself. Generally, the classical paradigm of humanitarianism implies that decision to provide humanitarian aid must not be driven by political motives or self-interest and should be based on the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence¹. However, practical reality significantly differs from the theory. The world has seen numerous humanitarian operations conducted by different actors which were unable to alleviate human suffering and in some cases even ended up causing counterproductive consequences. Russia is considered to be one of the most controversial actors in this regard. On one hand, Moscow is engaged in criticizing the West for politicizing humanitarianism and claims to be the watchdog of international law that protects classical principles of humanitarian doctrine. On the other hand, Russian leadership actively justifies its actions based on the reinterpretation of the elements of politicized humanitarianism. This creates the following puzzle: Despite the contradictory, even illogical use of humanitarian doctrine, how does Russia manage to portray itself as a humanitarian actor, and justify and legitimize its foreign policy?

Russian foreign policy is most commonly analyzed within either (neo-)realist or constructivist theoretical frameworks. The former emphasizes geopolitical, material, and imperialist interests, while the latter focuses on the role of identity, self-perception, and

¹ Dorothea Hilhorst, "Classical Humanitarianism and Resilience Humanitarianism: Making Sense of Two Brands of Humanitarian Action," *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 3, no. 1 (September 10, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-018-0043-6>.

construction of the ‘other’ in making foreign policy decisions². The question of dual understanding of humanitarianism by Russia is usually addressed by the explanations that emerge from either one or another theory. The most widespread argument is that Moscow’s attempts to represent itself as a protector of classical humanitarian norms is a curtain to hide its political and imperialistic interests³. Some authors focus on strategic interests⁴, and geopolitical factors⁵ as main determinants, while others derive from a constructivist point of view which holds that states do not always pursue their national and geopolitical interests, and their foreign policies are (co-)determined by written and unwritten laws and norms, as well as ideals and values inherent in foreign policy discourses⁶. There is also extensive literature about how Russian foreign policy is being formed with a reference to and against the Western liberal world order, categorizing Russian humanitarianism as a form of mimicry and a parody⁷.

This thesis claims that standard explanations, because of their sole materialist or ideological foundations, are insufficient to fully solve the puzzle of the contradictory use of humanitarian doctrine by Russia. By applying a critical affective geopolitical framework that sees space and territory as objects of collective meaning-making and examines emotional dimensions of space and spatial relationships, I argue that the construction of Russia as a

² Babak Rezvani, “Russian Foreign Policy and Geopolitics in the Post-Soviet Space and the Middle East: Tajikistan, Georgia, Ukraine and Syria,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 56, no. 6 (July 23, 2020): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2020.1775590>.

³ Charles E Ziegler, “Russia on the Rebound: Using and Misusing the Responsibility to Protect,” *International Relations* 30, no. 3 (September 2016): 346–61, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117816659590>.

⁴ Justin Morris, “Libya and Syria: R2P and the Spectre of the Swinging Pendulum,” *International Affairs* 89, no. 5 (September 2013): 1265–83, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12071>.

⁵ Roy Allison, “Russia and Syria: Explaining Alignment with a Regime in Crisis,” *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (July 2013): 795–823, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12046>.

⁶ Babak Rezvani, “Russian Foreign Policy and Geopolitics in the Post-Soviet Space and the Middle East: Tajikistan, Georgia, Ukraine and Syria,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 56, no. 6 (July 23, 2020): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2020.1775590>.

⁷ See: Gregorio Bettiza and David Lewis, “Authoritarian Powers and Norm Contestation in the Liberal International Order: Theorizing the Power Politics of Ideas and Identity,” *Journal of Global Security Studies*, February 13, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogz075>; Vasile Rotaru, “‘Mimicking’ the West? Russia’s Legitimization Discourse from Georgia War to the Annexation of Crimea,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 52, no. 4 (October 19, 2019): 311–21, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2019.10.001>; Erna Burai, “Parody as Norm Contestation: Russian Normative Justifications in Georgia and Ukraine and Their Implications for Global Norms,” *Global Society* 30, no. 1 (November 5, 2015): 68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2015.1092424>.

humanitarian actor is a spatial project which sets up a specific geopolitical imaginary. This imaginary shapes the ways in which Russia attributes meaning to claims about humanitarianism and decides which claims to recognize as legitimate. Focusing on the case of the intervention in Syria, which is the largest recipient of Russian humanitarian aid since the outbreak of civil war in 2011⁸, the thesis answers the following research question - *How Russia's imagery as a humanitarian actor is being constructed and what role does it play in its foreign policy?*

The research seeks to make sense of Russia's claims to humanitarian action from within its own discourse. Taking the internal humanitarian discourse of Russia as an object of analysis, the thesis assembles the constitutive elements of humanitarian geopolitical imagery of Russia, which is constructed through printed media discourse with an aim to produce subjective realities that are convenient for the Russian government and elites. This imagery intends to create a specific mindset, values, and ideals that will prepare grounds for political legitimization and moral justification of foreign policy decisions of Russia. Contributing to the literature about the use of humanitarianism, critical affective geopolitics, and understanding of Russian foreign policy in general, the dissertation provides an alternative explanation of how Russian humanitarian discourse manages to gain popular support even if it is mostly illogical and is based on contradictory facts. The topic is particularly relevant in the wake of the ongoing war in Ukraine, which represents one more example of the pending puzzle of how it is possible to obtain popular support as a humanitarian actor and yet be clearly complicit in humanitarian atrocities.

The thesis proceeds in the following structure. Chapter one reconstructs and compares the principles of classical and so-called politicized humanitarianism. Different explanations in

⁸ Martin Russell, "Russia's Humanitarian Aid Policy" (European Parliament, May 2016), [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2016/582039/EPRS_ATA\(2016\)582039_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2016/582039/EPRS_ATA(2016)582039_EN.pdf).

the existing scholarly literature of how Russia uses humanitarianism are discussed and the need of taking the internal humanitarian discourse of Russia as an object of analysis is justified. Chapter two explicates choosing of critical affective geopolitical approach as a theoretical framework, defines the notion of geopolitical imaginary, and operationalizes the concept of humanitarian geopolitical imagery of Russia as a basis for building a conceptual framework for the empirical analysis. The third chapter represents an attempt to map out humanitarian geopolitical imagery of Russia in empirical material and answer the research question of how it is being constructed and what role it plays in the foreign policy of Russia.

CHAPTER 1. RECONSTRUCTING HUMANITARIANISM

Humanitarianism, despite a widespread agreement about its universality, is a significantly complex doctrine, usage of which is characterized by multiple controversies and different interpretations. In order to understand how and for what Russia uses humanitarian discourse, and uncover the puzzle behind constructing the imagery of humanitarian actor that aims to justify and legitimize the foreign policy of Russia (including its own humanitarian atrocities conducted around the world), it is necessary to map out different debates about humanitarianism and clarify how the doctrine per se operates in the first place. For this reason, in this chapter, I will first briefly overview the historical roots of classical humanitarian doctrine and reconstruct the traditional principles it was based on. Then, I will discuss the reasons for contesting some of these fundamental principles that resulted in the creation of a separate direction of humanitarianism labeled as politicized. After contextualizing the concept of politicized humanitarianism in relation to a different state and non-state actors, I will focus on the contradictory use of humanitarian doctrine by Russia. I will analyze different logics explaining humanitarian claims in Russia's foreign policy and highlight the need of taking the internal humanitarian discourse of Russia as an object of analysis to fully understand how Russia's imagery of a humanitarian actor is produced.

1.1 Classical Humanitarianism and Contestation of its Principles

Humanitarianism originates from the XIX century and is defined as a doctrine that values human life and intends to alleviate the suffering of victims of natural and human-made disasters⁹. The classical paradigm of humanitarianism implies that decision to provide

⁹ Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, "Humanitarianism: A Brief History of the Present," in *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics* (Cornell University Press, 2008), 3.

humanitarian aid must not be driven by political motives or self-interest and should be based on the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence¹⁰. These core principles were first formed by Jean Pictet on behalf of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and have been used as a point of reference for any kind of humanitarian action since then. They are officially endorsed in the United Nations General Assembly resolutions, and numerous humanitarian organizations have expressed their commitment to these principles on the institutional level¹¹. According to classical definitions, *humanity* implies that human suffering should be equally addressed regardless of where and how it happens. *Impartiality* demands that the distinction should not be made between who is more worthy of aid based on their race, gender, nationality, religion, or political beliefs. Instead, humanitarian action should be guided solely according to the needs. As determined by *independence*, humanitarian agencies should be free from any political, economic, or military influence from the sides involved in the conflict or their political allies. The concept of *neutrality* signifies the non-involvement of humanitarian agents in actions that benefit or disadvantage any of the stakeholders¹². These principles situate humanitarianism as an apolitical, altruistic practice that is driven by morality and values.

Throughout the time humanitarianism experienced significant transformation. It appeared that it is not easy to ensure that humanitarian organizations act in accordance with these guidelines, as humanitarian action is almost always carried out in highly politicized and militaristic settings. It is argued, for instance, that principles of humanity and impartiality were violated in the case of Serbia where, regardless of the same needs, humanitarian response after

¹⁰ Dorothea Hilhorst, "Classical Humanitarianism and Resilience Humanitarianism: Making Sense of Two Brands of Humanitarian Action," *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 3, no. 1 (September 10, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-018-0043-6>.

¹¹ Simon Bagshaw, "What Are Humanitarian Principles?" (OCHA, June 2012), https://www.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/OOM-humanitarianprinciples_eng_June12.pdf.

¹² Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, "Humanitarianism: A Brief History of the Present," in *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics* (Cornell University Press, 2008), 3-4.

NATO intervention was characterized by a relatively lower level of engagement than in other Balkan countries, that were perceived to be more “politically correct”¹³. Furthermore, many humanitarian organizations keep being financially dependent on big donor countries, contradicting the idea of independence. Yet, the most controversial principle is neutrality, which is contested not only for implementation problems but on ideological terms as well. The notion that humanitarianism *cannot be*, and *should not be* neutral represents an argument of a branch of humanitarianism categorized as politicized humanitarianism.¹⁴ Supporters of this position criticize classical humanitarianism for being idealistic, dysfunctional, and in certain cases even counterproductive. They problematize the meaning, effectiveness, and morality of humanitarian principles. According to them, classical humanitarianism only offers immediate relief, is “putting Band-Aids on a malignant tumor” as David Rieff labeled it¹⁵, and does not address the root causes of why people need help in the first place. For this reason, these scholars have expanded the meaning of humanitarian action beyond saving individuals in emergencies and include conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and peace enforcement processes in humanitarian work as well. They also claim that neutrality can, in fact, be an unethical position, since it implies not taking sides. Condemning what is wrong and assisting what is right is an obligation of the humanitarian community and staying neutral in the conflict can also mean staying quiet about human rights abuses, genocide, and ethnic cleansing, which cannot be considered moral action¹⁶.

¹³ Vladimir Baranovsky, “Russia: Reassessing National Interests,” in *Kosovo and the Challenge of Humanitarian Intervention: Selective Indignation, Collective Action, and International Citizenship*, ed. Albrecht Schnabel and Ramesh Thakur (United Nations University Press, 2000), 103.

¹⁴ Ed Schenkenberg van Mierop, “Coming Clean on Neutrality and Independence: The Need to Assess the Application of Humanitarian Principles,” *International Review of the Red Cross* 97, no. 897-898 (June 2015): 295–318, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s181638311500065x>.

¹⁵ Adam Shatz, “Mission Impossible - Humanitarianism Is Neutral or It Is Nothing | MSF,” Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) International, October 20, 2002, <https://www.msf.org/mission-impossible-humanitarianism-neutral-or-it-nothing>.

¹⁶ Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, “Humanitarianism: A Brief History of the Present,” in *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics* (Cornell University Press, 2008).

1.2 Politicized Humanitarianism

The opinions of scholars about why and when this major shift in humanitarian doctrine has happened are divided. Fiona Fox argues that after the Cold War, the classical humanitarian doctrine has been replaced with new humanitarianism that rejects traditional principles, is more politically sensitive, and sees humanitarian aid as a tool to achieve not only human rights but also political goals¹⁷. Addressing the reasons for the conflicts and getting involved in promoting peace and justice in order to ensure long-term effects cannot remain apolitical as it causes transformation that has political consequences. According to Michael Barnett, humanitarianism has always been a part of politics. The only difference is that now it is no longer limited to saving lives at immediate risk, and more self-consciously is separated from principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence¹⁸. Politicized humanitarianism is also more connected with militarism. Hugo Slim claims that Western humanitarianism has inherently been linked with violence¹⁹, while David Chandler believes that the role of military action in humanitarian responses has increased after humanitarian emergencies started to be considered “a threat to international peace and security”²⁰.

Didier Fassin, in his book “Humanitarian reason: a moral history of the present”, offers an extensive critique of this so-called politicized humanitarianism. Arguing that humanitarianism has emerged as the driving force of modern world politics, he claims that even in the cases when the intentions seem noble, humanitarian actions can easily be transformed into interventions causing inequality, violence, and authoritarianism. According to him, politics

¹⁷ Fiona Fox, “New Humanitarianism: Does It Provide a Moral Banner for the 21st Century?,” *Disasters* 25, no. 4 (December 2001): 275–89, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7717.00178>.

¹⁸ Michael Barnett, “Humanitarianism Transformed,” *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no. 04 (November 23, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592705050401>.

¹⁹ Hugo Slim, “Violence and Humanitarianism,” *Security Dialogue* 32, no. 3 (September 2001): 325–39, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010601032003005>.

²⁰ David Chandler, *From Kosovo to Kabul : Human Rights and International Intervention* (London: Pluto Press, 2006), 8.

and humanitarianism are inseparable as a result of the “humanitarianization of international crisis management and politicization of the non-governmental humanitarian field”²¹. Differentiating *humanity* as an idea that human lives should be protected and *humanness* as a sentiment, a will to take action to provide this protection, he looks at humanitarianism in two different dimensions – one driven by reason and the other governed by emotions. The former produces a need for universality, while the latter creates the obligation to provide assistance and attention to others.²² Fassin argues that humanitarian government, which he characterizes as deploying moral sentiments in contemporary politics, is dangerous as it moves the actions taken by states or other non-state actors from the legal realm to the moral sphere. The humanitarian language that shapes armed conflicts or international crisis causes affective sentiments and emotions that legitimize the actions that would not have been acceptable otherwise or are considered to be even illegal.

For Fassin, this kind of behavior is mainly associated with states, as he believes that it has been a while since humanitarian action is not the prerogative of only non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations. He makes his arguments mainly in a reference to Western countries, which have a reputation for being humanitarian actors protecting human rights and promoting liberal values, democracy, and welfare, yet at the same time are often criticized for violating principles of impartiality and neutrality, and therefore practicing politicized humanitarianism. Drawing on the examples of the NATO bombing of Kosovo, and the 2001 and 2003 interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, he converges the humanitarian reason with calculated realpolitik that follows the political geography of geostrategic objectives of Western powers shaped by the war on terror and the extension of liberalism²³. Other authors also argue

²¹ Didier Fassin, “Hierarchies of Humanity Intervening in International Conflicts,” in *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*, trans. Rachel Gomme (University of California Press, 2012), 224.

²² Ibid, 241.

²³ Didier Fassin, “Conclusion: Critique of Humanitarian Reason,” in *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*, trans. Rachel Gomme (University of California Press, 2012), 243–58.

that saving strangers is more convenient if it is in line with the interests of the liberal capitalist states and their market economies, therefore it is wrong to characterize humanitarianism as either pure ethic or as a self-serving intervention, as it can be both at the same time²⁴.

As a final product of militarized and politicized humanitarianism can be considered the concept of humanitarian intervention, which can be defined as the use of military force on the territory of another state justified by the humanitarian concerns about its citizens²⁵. Despite the rhetoric of humanitarianism, Woodward argues that humanitarian intervention practice is profoundly political and is carried out by states that are driven by political interests²⁶. While sharing a significant amount of similarities, it is important to distinguish between the concepts of humanitarian intervention and politicized humanitarianism. It is true that just like the latter, the former contradicts some of the principles of traditional humanitarianism. Nevertheless, politicized humanitarianism is more of an ideology that in a highly political environment taking sides can be crucial, while humanitarian intervention is an extreme form of putting this ideology into practice. For this reason, the concept itself is much more problematized and opposed than politicized humanitarianism, which is considered to be a different variation of a universal classical humanitarian doctrine. However, one of the leading humanitarian organizations Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) for instance, only recognizes the practices that follow fundamental principles of humanitarianism and condemn humanitarian intervention together with its successor Responsibility to Protect doctrine because of giving legitimacy to the war and violation of international humanitarian law, as well as criticizes politicized

²⁴ See: Michael N Barnett, *Empire of Humanity : A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca, Ny: Cornell University Press, 2011); S M Reid-Henry, "Humanitarianism as Liberal Diagnostic: Humanitarian Reason and the Political Rationalities of the Liberal Will-To-Care," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 39, no. 3 (October 25, 2013): 418–31, <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12029>.

²⁵ Lucas Knotter, "Contemporary Humanitarian Intervention," *Human Rights in War*, 2021, 5, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-5202-1_5-1.

²⁶ Susan L. Woodward, "Humanitarian War: A New Consensus?," *Disasters* 25, no. 4 (December 2001): 331–44, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7717.00182>.

humanitarianism for disrespecting the spirit of neutrality and impartiality, which risks compromising humanitarian immunity and threatens access to victims²⁷.

Because of all these critiques and controversies associated with politicized humanitarianism, most countries tend to present themselves as protectors of classical humanitarian doctrine and claim to be neutral, while blaming each other for taking sides and being politicized. As indicated prior, the humanitarian sector is mainly dominated by Western powers. They are often criticized for defining humanitarianism in their own terms, being selective, and deciding who is worthy of assistance and who is not. While the criticism is arguably valid, it also represents a chance for non-Western actors such as Russia to use these narratives about politicized humanitarianism to challenge and question the legitimacy of the actions conducted by Western states. Here comes the contradictory nature of the use of humanitarianism by Russia. On one hand, it constructs itself as a protector of classical humanitarian principles, condemning the international interventions in Sudan, Somalia, Rwanda, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the former Yugoslavia on the bases of violating the norms of neutrality and impartiality. Simultaneously, on the other hand, Kremlin intensively mobilizes as a humanitarian actor that is politicized and takes sides in the cases of Georgia, Ukraine, Syria, etc. What I attempt to do is to show how this contradiction is expressed in the internal humanitarian discourse of Russia, how it is legitimized, and what it is used for.

1.3 Russian Claims for Being a Humanitarian Actor

Russia and its predecessor USSR played a significant historic role in forming international humanitarian law. Boyd van Dijk challenges the assumption that the Geneva Conventions of 1949 are a product of Western European design and liberal humanitarianism,

²⁷ Fabrice Weissman, "Not in Our Name: Why MSF Does Not Support the 'Responsibility to Protect,'" Doctors Without Borders - USA, October 3, 2010, <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/latest/not-our-name-why-msf-does-not-support-responsibility-protect>.

and highlights the contribution of the Soviet Union in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), referring to it as “the Great Humanitarian”²⁸. Russia actively promotes itself internationally as a peacemaker and a mediator in multiple conflicts and crises, such as in civil wars in Syria, Libya, the Central African Republic (CAR), and Nagorno-Karabakh²⁹. Although taking into account all the humanitarian atrocities conducted by Russia, it is impossible to consider Russian claims of being a humanitarian actor seriously, it is a fact that these claims exist. The widespread argument as a response to them is that the attempts of Moscow to portray itself as a protector of humanitarian norms represent a curtain to hide its political and imperialistic interests. While some authors focus on strategic interests³⁰, and geopolitical factors³¹ as main determinants, there is extensive literature about how Russian foreign policy is being formed with a reference to and against the Western liberal world order.

Bettiza and Lewis point out four modes of contestation of liberal international order by Russia: liberal performance, liberal mimicry, civilizational essentialization, and counter-norm entrepreneurship³². When it comes to foreign policy framing around humanitarianism, the first two modes of contestation might be relevant. Liberal performance is described as a situation when an authoritarian state performs the role of a watchdog of liberal norms on an international stage. It represents a strategy to challenge the ability of the opponents to properly practice liberal norms and aims to undermine the influence of the West and liberal norms themselves. Liberal mimicry, conversely, refers to the type of contestation which entails taking on the

²⁸ Boyd van Dijk, “‘The Great Humanitarian’: The Soviet Union, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the Geneva Conventions of 1949,” *Law and History Review* 37, no. 1 (February 2019): 209–35, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0738248019000014>.

²⁹ David Lewis, “Contesting Liberal Peace: Russia’s Emerging Model of Conflict Management,” *International Affairs* 98, no. 2 (March 2022): 653–73, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaab221>.

³⁰ Justin Morris, “Libya and Syria: R2P and the Spectre of the Swinging Pendulum,” *International Affairs* 89, no. 5 (September 2013): 1265–83, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12071>.

³¹ Roy Allison, “Russia and Syria: Explaining Alignment with a Regime in Crisis,” *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (July 2013): 795–823, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12046>.

³² Gregorio Bettiza and David Lewis, “Authoritarian Powers and Norm Contestation in the Liberal International Order: Theorizing the Power Politics of Ideas and Identity,” *Journal of Global Security Studies*, February 13, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogz075>.

appearance of liberal discourses and behaviors while injecting non-liberal content into them³³. These concepts, if applied to humanitarian principles instead of liberal norms, help to visualize how the identity of Russia as a humanitarian actor is being constructed as a mirror of Western politicized humanitarianism. Russia advocating for respecting fundamental humanitarian principles can be considered a form of liberal performance, as it is an attempt to undermine western credibility. Being involved in politicized humanitarian actions can be a form of mimicry, that originates from practices of western powers, yet with an emphasis on different priorities, such as putting authoritarian stability above justice, human rights, and democracy, and giving more importance to short-term conflict management goals than to long-term conflict resolution objectives.

To draw on specific examples, many scholars consider Russian interventions in the conflicts of Georgia and Ukraine in 2008 and 2014 a response to the ‘Kosovo precedent’, mimicking the West in legitimizing a war with a humanitarian rationale. According to Vasile Rotaru, the aim of this mimicry is twofold – to expose the West exploiting humanitarian justification, and at the same time use humanitarian arguments to legitimize its own narratives and behaviors. Manipulating the concepts of genocide, ethnic cleansing, and war casualties, Moscow was trying to justify and make its actions acceptable, while emphasizing all the time that the West was doing the same in other places of the world³⁴. Erna Burai also considers the ‘humanitarian’ actions of Russia a parody of Western normative discourse. She argues that Russia explicitly cited Western normative arguments used in Kosovo to legitimize its actions in Georgia and Ukraine, emphasizing military intervention for security reasons, the fact that systematic violence against a segment of the population makes coexistence in one state

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Vasile Rotaru, “‘Mimicking’ the West? Russia’s Legitimization Discourse from Georgia War to the Annexation of Crimea,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 52, no. 4 (October 19, 2019): 311–21, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2019.10.001>.

impossible, and that remedial secession is justified in such circumstances. According to her, parodic imitation represents a Russian reproduction of Western original discourses that aims to cover strategic motives by “mocking the norms of civilian protection and secession”³⁵. Dunn and Bobick similarly suggest that Putin satirizes the moral and legal arguments used by Western states to rationalize Russia’s international interventions on the grounds of humanitarianism and the Responsibility to Protect³⁶. Mirroring of Western politicized humanitarianism was arguably present in the case of Syria as well, where despite criticizing the West for getting involved in the conflict based on political calculations, Russia took the side of the Assad regime, neglecting the principle of neutrality³⁷.

To sum up, as a large part of the scholarship suggests, Russian humanitarianism to a great extent represents a parody, mimicry, and mocking of Western politicized humanitarianism. Reconstruction of classical and politicized understandings of humanitarian doctrine, together with the discussions about contesting fundamental principles and sources of critique, makes it easier to understand why Russia attempts to construct itself as a humanitarian actor and how it manages to manipulate different narratives in order to discredit the West and at the same time legitimize its actions. These attempts are embodied in and supported by humanitarian discourses internally and externally. Even though these discourses are full of propaganda based on the distortion of facts, they still have a significant power to provoke acceptance and empathy towards the foreign policy of Russia, especially those addressed to the domestic audience. Critically looking at how such humanitarian speech operates and assuming that there might be a different geopolitical logic and rationale behind Russia’s (re)interpretation

³⁵ Erna Burai, “Parody as Norm Contestation: Russian Normative Justifications in Georgia and Ukraine and Their Implications for Global Norms,” *Global Society* 30, no. 1 (November 5, 2015): 68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2015.1092424>.

³⁶ Elizabeth Cullen Dunn and Michael S. Bobick, “The Empire Strikes Back: War without War and Occupation without Occupation in the Russian Sphere of Influence,” *American Ethnologist* 41, no. 3 (August 2014): 405–13, <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12086>.

³⁷ Philipp Casula, “Russia’s Foreign Policy from the Crimean Crisis to the Middle East: Great Power Gamble or Biopolitics?,” *Rising Powers Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (2017): 27–50.

of humanitarian principles that carries the elements of politicized humanitarianism, and is driven by emotions and affect, might open up new perspectives.

CHAPTER 2. CRITICAL AFFECTIVE GEOPOLITICS

Russian foreign policy has been analyzed from multiple theoretical perspectives. While geopolitics usually plays an important role in the explanations provided by traditional IR theories such as realism, liberalism, or constructivism, a critical geopolitical approach that I am going to apply as a principal analytical framework for contextualizing imagery of Russia as a humanitarian actor, offers a different understanding of how foreign policy decisions are being made, justified and legitimized in the international community. Critical geopolitics, which represents a critique of classical geopolitics and differs in the way that it sees foreign policy as a social, cultural, discursive, and political activity of “creation of ontological claims,” rather than as a result of imperial ideology or a never-ending fight for power waged by states³⁸, has already been used in academia to analyze Russian foreign policy in the post-soviet space. Gerard Toal’s critical geopolitical explanation of why Russia invades its neighbors offers various interesting insights and stresses the importance of understanding the politics of Russia within its own lens³⁹. Mariya Omelicheva also embodies a leading scholar connecting the hard and soft power of Russia to geopolitical reasoning in order to search for a ‘rationality’ behind its foreign policy actions⁴⁰. Building on the works of these authors, together with other prominent figures in the field of geopolitics, I will apply this framework to the case study of Syria and I will argue that critical geopolitics can explain Russia’s interpretation of humanitarianism and provide a new perspective on a broader geographical scale as well.

³⁸ Mariya Y. Omelicheva, “Critical Geopolitics on Russian Foreign Policy: Uncovering the Imagery of Moscow’s International Relations,” *International Politics* 53, no. 6 (September 22, 2016): 711, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-016-0009-5>.

³⁹ Gerard Toal, *Near Abroad : Putin, the West, and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

⁴⁰ Mariya Y. Omelicheva, “Critical Geopolitics on Russian Foreign Policy: Uncovering the Imagery of Moscow’s International Relations,” *International Politics* 53, no. 6 (September 22, 2016): 708-726, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-016-0009-5>.

In this chapter, I will first define what geopolitical thinking means in IR and highlight the main differences between critical and classical geopolitical approaches. Next, I will focus on the affective part of critical geopolitics, defining the notion of geopolitical imagery as a basis for building a conceptual framework for the empirical analysis presented in the next section. After operationalizing the concept of humanitarian geopolitical imagery in Russian foreign policy and explicating particular elements and analytical components it is consisted of, I will argue that identifying and analyzing these ‘geopolitical imaginaries’ in an internal discourse of Russia can substantially enhance scholarly knowledge about how such kind of humanitarian speech operates and can contribute to a better understanding of Russian foreign policy in general.

2.1 Geopolitics in IR

Geopolitics plays an important role in forming the foreign policy of any state. Defined as a set of ideas describing interdependence between politics and geographical settings which manifest as different types of spatial control⁴¹, geopolitics has emerged as a discipline that studies how geographical features, such as size, location, climate, population, distribution of natural resources, etc. influence political behavior of states⁴². In an attempt to understand, explain and predict how certain foreign policy decisions are being made, geopolitical thinkers argue that the geographical position of a country is the main factor determining its political place in the international system. A broad field of geopolitics can be divided into two related but distinct directions – classical or traditional geopolitics and critical geopolitics. While both are focused on the importance of geographical spaces, the main difference is that the former takes the reality as given, being independent of the observer and therefore allowing for

⁴¹ Eduard G. Solovyev, “Geopolitics in Russia—Science or Vocation?,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 37, no. 1 (March 2004): 85–96, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2003.12.009>.

⁴² Njord Wegge and Kathrin Keil, “Between Classical and Critical Geopolitics in a Changing Arctic,” *Polar Geography* 41, no. 2 (March 26, 2018): 87–106, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1088937x.2018.1455755>.

objective analysis. It advocates for the empirical, logical, and intuitive articulation of facts, assuming that rational states will always pursue national interests and these interests will always be in line with pre-given geographical realities⁴³. On the contrary, the latter questions these static conceptions of space and argues that space is primarily narrated, contextual and reliant on social constructions, discourses, and identities⁴⁴. There is no ‘objective’ geography as every country is constantly developing, defending, and experiencing different claims about the “truths of global politics”, and as a result, each of them has a unique geopolitical perspective of international relations⁴⁵.

Critical scholars view geopolitics as a deeply ideological and political method of analysis. They demonstrate that geographic claims are inherently geopolitical since they inscribe areas as particular types of places that must be dealt with in a specific manner, just as all international politics is geopolitics because it necessarily contains geographical and spatial assumptions about people and places. These assumptions represent an essential component of forming interests and identities which make geopolitics an “an interpretative cultural practice and a discursive construction of ontological claims”⁴⁶. Inspired by the concept of “imaginative geography” developed by Edward Said, meaning that places acquire imaginative and cultural, as well as symbolic significance, and that construction of meaning is always a product of power relation dynamics⁴⁷, critical geopolitics gives great importance to spatiality and subjectivity. Regarding spatiality, the field contributes to the transition from territorialized understandings of politics toward more sophisticated conceptions of multidimensional

⁴³ Phil Kelly, “A Critique of Critical Geopolitics,” *Geopolitics* 11, no. 1 (March 2006): 24–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040500524053>.

⁴⁴ Njord Wegge and Kathrin Keil, “Between Classical and Critical Geopolitics in a Changing Arctic,” *Polar Geography* 41, no. 2 (March 26, 2018): 87–106, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1088937x.2018.1455755>.

⁴⁵ Mariya Y. Omelicheva, “Critical Geopolitics on Russian Foreign Policy: Uncovering the Imagery of Moscow’s International Relations,” *International Politics* 53, no. 6 (September 22, 2016): 719, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-016-0009-5>.

⁴⁶ Klaus Dodds, Merje Kuus, and Joanne Sharp, “Introduction: Geopolitics and Its Critics,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics* (Routledge, 2013), 7.

⁴⁷ Edward W Said, *Orientalism : Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Routledge, 1978).

spatiality of power, while when it comes to subjectivity, critical geopolitics extends geopolitical research beyond state actors and includes in its analysis an everyday life of non-state actors as well⁴⁸. As a result, the field is more open to considering who are the primary actors of geopolitics and how their behaviors create particular spatial relations. According to Ó Tuathail (Gerard Toal), critical geopolitics should mainly focus on the social or decision-making level of analysis, since certain national security elites have significant power to influence the nature of international politics by producing particular “scripts” about places, people, and issues that transform into reality and give meaning to the international system where great power hegemony is exercised⁴⁹.

2.2 Critical Affective Geopolitics and the Concept of Geopolitical Imagery

Central to critical geopolitical theory is the notion of geopolitical imagery or imaginary. Since the critical geopolitical scholars believe that there is no objective reality, how the subjective realities are thought about, talked of, and imagined has crucial importance⁵⁰. Defined as constructed views of the world that reflect the vision of the role of a place, a country, or a society within world politics, geopolitical imaginations create cognitive frameworks that filter information and give meaning to events, while also legitimizing certain policy decisions⁵¹. The role of imaginaries is to reduce complexity and bring order to a chaotic world that can be translated into permanent social constructs that shape the habitus and identities of the actors⁵².

⁴⁸ Klaus Dodds, Merje Kuus, and Joanne Sharp, “Introduction: Geopolitics and Its Critics,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics* (Routledge, 2013), 1-14.

⁴⁹ Gearóid Ó Tuathail, “The Bush Administration and the ‘End’ of the Cold War: A Critical Geopolitics of U.S. Foreign Policy in 1989,” *Geoforum* 23, no. 4 (January 1992): 439, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-7185\(92\)90001-k](https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-7185(92)90001-k).

⁵⁰ Edward Heath Robinson, “A Documentary Theory of States and Their Existence as Quasi-Abstract Entities,” *Geopolitics* 19, no. 3 (July 3, 2014): 462, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2014.913027>.

⁵¹ David G. Lewis, “Geopolitical Imaginaries in Russian Foreign Policy: The Evolution of ‘Greater Eurasia,’” *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no. 10 (November 14, 2018): 1612–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1515348>.

⁵² Doris Wydra, “Between Normative Visions and Pragmatic Possibilities: The EUropean Politics of State Recognition,” *Geopolitics* 25, no. 2 (December 18, 2018): 317, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1556643>.

Space and territory are objects of collective meaning-making and spatial imaginary that Boudreau refers to as “mental maps” that constitute and reaffirm the identities of states against the images they hold about themselves⁵³. In other words, geopolitical imaginaries are ideas that allow actors to assign meaning to territory, create order in an otherwise anarchic reality through classification and categorization, and design their strategies accordingly.

How these geopolitical imageries are co-created and brought into being can be best explained by affective geopolitics, which is the concept formed by Gerard Toal and is described as “the study of powerful forces of emotion, the experience of being outraged, the desire to condemn, to abhor the behavior of another state”.⁵⁴ Affect and emotions, which find expression in “values” and “ideals”, are as central as strategic interests and material calculations. Examining emotional dimensions of space and spatial relationships, affective geopolitics attempts to understand the complex interplay between the affective and cognitive dimensions of decision-making⁵⁵. Affect in this context can be defined as automatic and unconscious phenomena expressed in particular behaviors, decisions, or emotions that if organized and mobilized can have significant political implications. Toal argues that affective geopolitics through media, tabloids, and other communication channels, plays an important role in shaping foreign policy decisions of states⁵⁶.

According to the critical geopolitical perspective, the reproduction of geopolitical knowledge takes place on three levels: formal, practical, and popular. The first one refers to knowledge production by academic institutions and intellectuals, the second is related to the

⁵³ Julie-Anne Boudreau, “Making New Political Spaces: Mobilizing Spatial Imaginaries, Instrumentalizing Spatial Practices, and Strategically Using Spatial Tools,” *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 39, no. 11 (November 2007): 2593–2611, <https://doi.org/10.1068/a39228>.

⁵⁴ UCL, “The Affective Geopolitics of the New Cold War,” Global Governance Institute, May 15, 2018, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/global-governance/news/2018/may/affective-geopolitics-new-cold-war>.

⁵⁵ Marcus Holmes, “Believing This and Alieving That: Theorizing Affect and Intuitions in International Politics,” *International Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (2015): 706–20, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43869054>.

⁵⁶ Gerard Toal, *Near Abroad : Putin, the West, and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

everyday practice of statecraft through foreign policy discourses, while the third one focuses on mass media and popular culture⁵⁷. Whereas critical geopolitics emphasizes the importance of discourses and problematizes the ways in which the world has been measured, characterized, and appraised through geopolitical discourses and practices⁵⁸, the affective nature of geopolitics is mainly expressed on the popular level because of the powerful impact the media has on general public opinion. Just as Foucault believes that nothing significant exists outside the discourse and in each discourse there is a hidden reality (even though none of the discourse has a complete truth)⁵⁹, critical geopolitical scholars also argue that facts don't speak for themselves. Instead, to identify the dominant elite vision of the world, one must go deeper into the meanings of speech and context⁶⁰. To analyze the geopolitical imagery of Russia as a humanitarian actor I will rely on the combination of the practical and popular levels of geopolitical knowledge (re)production articulated in pro-government newspapers as a representation of Russia's internal discourse.

2.3 Connecting Humanitarianism with Geopolitics

Considering humanitarianism as a political discourse challenges its universality and represents it as a conjunctural and relational phenomena. Following the understanding of discourse by Laclau and Mouffe, political discourse is more than a text, it is also the ideology, institutions, and actions to which it is connected, and thus represents a particular "social logics" which is constantly contested by other, in many cases contradictory logics⁶¹. Hence,

⁵⁷ Mariya Y. Omelicheva, "Critical Geopolitics on Russian Foreign Policy: Uncovering the Imagery of Moscow's International Relations," *International Politics* 53, no. 6 (September 22, 2016): 711, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-016-0009-5>.

⁵⁸ Phil Kelly, "A Critique of Critical Geopolitics," *Geopolitics* 11, no. 1 (March 2006): 24–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040500524053>.

⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, "Orders of Discourse," *Social Science Information* 10, no. 2 (April 1971): 7–30, <https://doi.org/10.1177/053901847101000201>.

⁶⁰ Phil Kelly, "A Critique of Critical Geopolitics," *Geopolitics* 11, no. 1 (March 2006): 40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040500524053>.

⁶¹ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 2001), 142–143.

humanitarianism is a constructed concept that gains meaning through social logics embedded inside certain discourses. Thomas Moore argues that seemingly universal humanitarian claims are the products of specific geopolitical discourses, involving a variety of political subjectivities derived from the international system's structure, and individual understandings of guilt, innocence, and responsibility under international ethics⁶². In order to understand how humanitarianism is discursively constituted as a geopolitical concept, it is necessary to go beyond the normativity of universal principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence. Instead, it is necessary to examine how it provides a structure for addressing political claims within IR⁶³.

In the analysis of humanitarianism, it is vital to avoid territorialized understandings of geopolitics. Because the traditional geopolitical approach, as indicated prior, considers a state as the main actor of international relations, and therefore looks at the world from the conceptual lens of the Westphalian system, it situates humanitarianism within the realist paradigm and overlooks how historically negotiated power dynamics shape geopolitical claims. On the other hand, critical geopolitics understands the world as spatialized, seeing territorial divisions as political imaginaries shaping how we make sense of humanitarianism itself. A critical geopolitical lens allows perceiving humanitarianism as a performative act. As Simon Dalby argues, it entails an understanding of the “performance of political acts, the specifications of friends and enemies, the designation of spaces as theirs and ours, the distinctions between hostile and friendly places and peoples”⁶⁴. The ways in which humanitarianism operates as a performative concept within political discourse highlights its interpretative and co-constitutive

⁶² Thomas Moore, “Saving Friends or Saving Strangers? Critical Humanitarianism and the Geopolitics of International Law,” *Review of International Studies* 39, no. 4 (December 11, 2012): 935, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0260210512000368>.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Simon Dalby, “Calling 911: Geopolitics, Security and America’s New War,” *Geopolitics* 8, no. 3 (October 2003): 62–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040412331307712>.

nature, generating different geopolitical imageries explaining the foreign policy of Russia from a different perspective.

2.4 Geopolitical Imagery of Russia as a Humanitarian Actor

According to Toal, two aspects of affective geopolitics are particularly important for understanding the foreign policy of Russia - how individuals and groups implicitly comprehend and adopt deeply rooted attitudes toward the state's territory and those that surround it, and how affective geopolitics influences and shapes major actors' leadership styles and foreign policy decisions. The first one is closely related to the size, and the sense of security or insecurity that it brings to the state. Despite the fact that Russia's size as the world's largest country would appear to provide safety and stability, Toal argues that instead, it has historically caused a feeling of vulnerability, accompanied by imaginary plots of diminishing and undermining the power of Russia and representing it as a "besieged fortress". Territorial images as such circulate daily on television, in newspapers, and on social media and create Russian society's collective unconscious, in which their country is perceived as a "sacred space" and a "civilizational achievement". The second aspect looks at the ways in which political figures are shaped by specific affective geopolitical circumstances, that results in, knowingly or unknowingly, putting into practice their subject positions and gendered ideals. Articulated by heroic masculinity to protect the powerless and vulnerable, together with affective emotions of anger, pride, and resentment, this approach allows even empathizing with these politicians as individuals who are motivated by specific views and fighting for certain causes that were influenced by their past experiences. Toal brings examples of Kosovo precedent, as well as interventions in Libya and Egypt, which he characterizes as anger points for the leadership of Russia that later were translated into certain foreign policy decisions. Similarly, Russia's

invasions in Georgia and Ukraine, from the Russian point of view, were instances of ‘heroic’ behavior, supporting co-ethnic and compatriot communities against ‘fascist’ nationalism⁶⁵.

Based on these two points, multiple geopolitical imageries can be formed, some of which have been identified and analyzed by different scholars of Russian foreign and domestic policy. Mikhail Suslov, for instance, discusses contemporary Russian geopolitical culture and argues that understanding Russia's behavior requires a greater comprehension of geopolitical conceptions and illusions. He analyzes the concepts such as “Eurasianism”, “Novorossya”, “Russian civilization”, “Holy Russia”, and claims that the identity of post-Soviet Russia is defined by the geopolitical imagination structured by these notions which “construct the self-perception of Russia as a sovereign great-power, a self-sufficient civilization, and as one of the poles in a multipolar world”⁶⁶. Andrei Tsygankov also emphasizes the importance of spatial imagination in creating post-Soviet Eurasia's political and cultural limits and examines emerging geopolitical ideas in Russia. Applying the critical geopolitical lens and considering geographical spaces as a product of political and cultural imagination, he suggests that the fall of the Soviet Union led to a sense of cultural trauma, resulting in a high level of contestation in Russian geopolitical discourse. According to him, Russia's spatial thinking in Eurasia is a product of intellectual and political imagination rather than “natural geopolitical interests” or “imperialist drive”⁶⁷. David G. Lewis examines another spatial project of such geopolitical imaginary - the concept of “Greater Eurasia”, which envisions a geopolitical geometry focused on Sino–Russian cooperation. Attempting to address fundamental challenges in post-Soviet Russia’s international identity, Lewis argues that the “Greater Eurasia” narrative not only gives

⁶⁵ Gerard Toal, *Near Abroad : Putin, the West, and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 46-47.

⁶⁶ Mikhail Suslov, *Geopolitical Imagination: Ideology and Utopia in Post-Soviet Russia* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2020).

⁶⁷ A.P. Tsygankov, “Mastering Space in Eurasia: Russia’s Geopolitical Thinking after the Soviet Break-Up,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 36, no. 1 (March 2003): 101–27, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0967-067x\(02\)00055-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0967-067x(02)00055-7).

Russia a new position in international affairs, but it also plays an important role in shaping the post-liberal world order⁶⁸. Last but not least, Toal himself also analysis “Novorossiya” as a revisionist geopolitical imaginary in his book “Near Abroad”, as well as with John O’Loughlin and Vladimir Kolosov, examining the reasons for its public support in south-east Ukraine⁶⁹.

Just like these geopolitical imaginaries, there also exists a spatial project portraying Russia as a humanitarian actor, which is expressed in and supported by humanitarian discourse. This imaginary shapes the ways in which Russia attributes meaning to claims about humanitarianism and decides which claims to recognize as legitimate. Images, ideas, and visions Russia holds about itself and the world are the main determinants of the process of producing and reproducing humanitarian discourse, and at the same time are conversely influenced and shaped by these discourses. My argument is that the use of humanitarianism by Russia can be explained neither solely based on materialistic or ideological foundations, nor on the basis of liberal mimicry of the West, as what Russia does is acting within its own humanitarian imaginary. Using Toal’s framework that connects foreign policy of Russia with a sense of place and spatial emotions, I will look at Russia’s internal humanitarian discourse having in mind the images of territory, heroic ideology, the process of othering the West, affective emotions of anger and resentment, as well as the notions of saving lives and fighting against fascism and terrorism. This will allow the identification of specific components of the humanitarian geopolitical imaginary of Russia that is constructed in order to intensify and deepen the affective impact of humanitarian discourse on the audience. Uncovering constitutive elements of this imaginary is necessary to make sense of how Russian

⁶⁸ David G. Lewis, “Geopolitical Imaginaries in Russian Foreign Policy: The Evolution of ‘Greater Eurasia,’” *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no. 10 (November 14, 2018): 1612–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1515348>.

⁶⁹ John O’Loughlin, Gerard Toal, and Vladimir Kolosov, “The Rise and Fall of ‘Novorossiya’: Examining Support for a Separatist Geopolitical Imaginary in Southeast Ukraine,” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 33, no. 2 (February 29, 2016): 124–44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586x.2016.1146452>.

humanitarian discourse manages to gain popular support even if it is mostly based on contradictory facts and lacks logic.

CHAPTER 3. HUMANITARIAN GEOPOLITICAL IMAGERY OF RUSSIA IN EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

The critical affective geopolitical approach considers discourse as a principal method through which geopolitical players materialize and perceive reality. Different geopolitical perspectives portray global politics in diverse manners resulting in a wide range of descriptive and prescriptive imaginative geographies⁷⁰. As already mentioned in the previous chapter, I will use the combination of the practical and popular levels of geopolitical knowledge (re)production, which focuses on foreign policy discourses and popular culture and mass media. The intersection of these two levels of analysis provides a productive framework for uncovering constitutive elements of Russia's humanitarian geopolitical imagery and mapping them out in empirical material. Stuart Hall considers media as political semantics, which rather than just conveying the facts or events as they are, determines which interpretation and meaning to give to them⁷¹. To achieve their goals, actors can intentionally create compelling visual spectacles for media consumption and use communication tactics to spread their versions of storylines about events⁷². In this regard, state-controlled media is particularly important, as it has the power to influence how people perceive and react to geopolitical crises. Some distinct events might be portrayed as significant while others can be forgotten and unnoticed. Media that is ruled by the pro-government elites can be considered as a storyteller of a state that follows particular scripts and ideologically attempts to convert meanings into right reasoning⁷³.

⁷⁰ Mariya Y. Omelicheva, "Critical Geopolitics on Russian Foreign Policy: Uncovering the Imagery of Moscow's International Relations," *International Politics* 53, no. 6 (September 22, 2016): 721, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-016-0009-5>.

⁷¹ Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*. (London: Sage, 1997).

⁷² Gerard Toal, *Near Abroad : Putin, the West, and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 14.

⁷³ Zahra Ahmadypour, Mohammad Reza Hafeznia, and Reza Juneidi, "Representing Imaginary Enemy: A Geopolitical Discourse," *Geopolitics Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (2010): 9.

When it comes to Russia's humanitarian discourse, I will be looking at internal discourse rather than foreign, as this kind of psychological-affective strategy expressed through geopolitical imagery seems to be most effective at a domestic level. According to public opinion polls, Russia's foreign policy in Syria had high popular support and the majority of Russians believed that the military presence of their country in Syria had humanitarian reasons⁷⁴. As a representative of the internal discourse, I chose articles published online by two major pro-Kremlin daily newspapers in Russia – Izvestia and Rossiyskaya Gazeta. Although the domestic discourse of Russia is not by any means limited by these newspaper articles, they are considered to be “national newspapers” of Russia that have a significant influence on public opinion⁷⁵. As this fact is also acknowledged by the Russian government and political elites, it can be argued that the discourse produced by these newspapers reflects the attempts of constructing Russia as a humanitarian actor and therefore consists the elements of constituting the humanitarian geopolitical imagery.

To keep the number of articles within a manageable range, a one-year time frame has been chosen. It is assumed that the period six months before and after September 2015, which signifies the date of official direct military involvement of Russia in the Syrian civil war, was especially relevant for analyzing Russian claims about humanitarianism regarding the case of Syria. Consequently, articles were gathered from March 2015 to March 2016. The analyzed articles are the result of a keyword search for each newspaper. For identification of pieces that feed into the research topic, ‘Syria’ (‘Сирия’) and ‘humanitarian’ (‘гуманитарная’) were selected. After removing irrelevant and duplicate items, from a total of 36 out of 87 (Rossiyskaya Gazeta) and 59 out of 200 (Izvestia) articles were taken for analysis.

⁷⁴ Denis Volkov, “Do Russians Support Putin’s War in Syria?,” Carnegie Moscow Center, October 12, 2015, <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/61583>.

⁷⁵ Vera Zakem et al., “Mapping Russian Media Network: Media’s Role in Russian Foreign Policy and Decision-Making,” 2018, https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/drm-2017-u-015367-3rev.pdf.

To analyze the data, I used the method of thematic discourse analysis. In this highly inductive qualitative analytic method, the themes arise from the data rather than being imposed by the researcher⁷⁶. Processes of data collection and analysis take place simultaneously and result in identifying, examining, and interpreting emerging patterns with the goal of creating and consolidating new information within the context of a theory or conceptual framework⁷⁷. Using this method, each article was screened for relevant passages related to humanitarianism and its principles expressed in the sense of geopolitical space and affective emotions. This repeated process of rereading led to an identification of several prevalent themes that create bases for the construction of humanitarian geopolitical imagery of Russia. All quotes and referenced terms have been translated by the author.

3.1 Themes Characterizing Humanitarian Geopolitical Imagery of Russia

Russia as a hero and a role model

One of the themes that have been emerging frequently is the heroic nature of Russia which is courageous, not afraid of opponents and is ready to even sacrifice itself for a good cause. In “the struggle between good and evil”⁷⁸, Russia is at the forefront of ending a “humanitarian catastrophe” in Syria, freeing the country from terrorists and returning refugees to their homes.⁷⁹ Following the shooting down of a Russian aircraft by the Turkish military near the Syrian border, newspaper articles emphasized how the attempts of the “enemies” embodied by Turkish authorities to sow fear between Russian citizens would always fail and

⁷⁶ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, “Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>.

⁷⁷ Fugard, Andi, and Henry W Potts. "Thematic Analysis." In *SAGE Research Methods Foundations*, edited by Paul Atkinson et al., London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2019. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526421036858333>.

⁷⁸ “СМИ: НАТО стоит задуматься о членстве Турции в альянсе,” *Российская газета*, November 25, 2015, <https://rg.ru/2015/11/25/turciya-site.html>.

⁷⁹ “Валентина Матвиенко призвала отказаться от ‘навязываемой демократии,’” *Известия*, October 18, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/593427>.

only strengthen the Russian spirit: “They thought that we would run away from there! No, Russia is not that country. We have increased our presence in Syria, we have increased the number of combat aircraft”⁸⁰. Even some threats were made that “Russian politics, Russian public consciousness, the Russian economy will do everything to make the Turks dislike testing our patience”⁸¹. Despite spending resources and people’s lives in Syria, Russian people understand that their country is “intensively fighting a common threat” and “will provide all support for the Syrian army to liberate the country from international terrorists”⁸². These attempts are well appreciated by Syrian people as well who, after Russian involvement in the conflict, for the first time “have hope to live peacefully in their native land,” believing that “if Russia is next to them, then everything will be fine.”⁸³ When it comes to other great powers, “confident position of Russia, the consistency of its foreign policy based on respect for international law, sovereignty and identity of each country and people”⁸⁴ causes admiration and even jealousy⁸⁵.

Russia as an important actor in protecting international law

Emphasizing a significant share in making the decision to create the United Nations, which in fact was made “at the meeting of the leaders of the anti-Hitler coalition in Yalta”⁸⁶, Russia is portrayed as a guarantor of the preservation of the UN and its charters “as an instrument for ensuring the architecture of world security.”⁸⁷ With numerous references to

⁸⁰ “О чем говорил Владимир Путин,” Известия, December 17, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/599633>.

⁸¹ “Древо войны,” Известия, November 30, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/597648>.

⁸² “Лавров и Муаллем детально обсудят ситуацию в Сирии,” Российская газета, November 27, 2015, <https://rg.ru/2015/11/27/muallem-site.html>.

⁸³ “Асад заявил, что готов к политическим реформам,” Известия, October 28, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/594063>.

⁸⁴ “Нужно сделать всё, чтобы не допустить распространения ИГИЛ,” Известия, November 16, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/595574>.

⁸⁵ “Матвиенко: ‘Реакция запада на действия России в Сирии — это ревность,’” Известия, October 8, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/592826>.

⁸⁶ “С Обамой можно договариваться о тактике, а не о ‘большой игре,’” Известия, September 28, 2015, <https://iz.ru/309050/anastasia-kasevarova/s-obamoi-mozno-dogovarivatsa-o-taktike-ne-o-bolsoi-igre>.

⁸⁷ “Попытки расшатать авторитет ООН являются крайне опасными,” Известия, September 28, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/592182>.

fascism and Nazism, and the role the Soviet Union played in defeating them, Russia is one more time at the forefront of forming “coalition against inhumanity”⁸⁸. Because Russia represents one of the most important actors and great power in international society “both Europe and the United States are beginning to understand that it is impossible to effectively solve any international problem without Russia's participation”⁸⁹. What distinguishes Russia from “the US-led coalition, which operates outside the international legal framework” is that “Russia’s actions are carried out strictly within the international law”⁹⁰. Provision of military support to illegitimate structures does not comply with the principles of modern international law and the Charter of the United Nations, while assisting the legitimate government in a fight against terrorist organizations is allowed by every legal document. The RG quotes Sergey Lavrov stating that “none of my colleagues can cite a single case where we would deceive someone in regards to our obligations in facilitating the implementation of these documents”⁹¹. The key role of Russia is also highlighted regarding the protection of world culture and “the cultural heritage that is being destroyed by the barbarians”⁹². Calling on other countries to not “politicize the humanitarian ties and activities of UNESCO”, Moscow has a special responsibility to mobilize collective efforts to save centuries-old heritage from disappearing⁹³.

Putin as a personification of great Russia

The heroic spirit, high values, and strong identity of Russia are embodied in the person of the leader of the state - Vladimir Putin. Described as “a strategist and an ideologist” who is

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ “Нужно сделать всё, чтобы не допустить распространения ИГИЛ,” Известия, November 16, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/595574>.

⁹⁰ “Чуркин: Действия РФ в Сирии соответствуют международному праву,” Российская газета, February 10, 2016, <https://rg.ru/2016/02/10/churkin-dejstviia-rf-v-sirii-sootvetstvuiut-mezhdunarodnomu-pravu.html>.

⁹¹ “Лавров: РФ предложила США схему решения сирийского кризиса - Российская газета,” Российская газета, February 9, 2016, <https://rg.ru/2016/02/09/lavrov-rf-predlozhila-ssha-shemu-resheniia-sirijskogo-krizisa.html>.

⁹² “Москва вступилась за деятелей искусства и культурное наследие,” Известия, November 6, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/595072>.

⁹³ Ibid.

“ready to act quickly and decisively” and is “not afraid to use force when it is necessary”⁹⁴, Putin is considered to be loved by its citizens and feared by its opponents. President with a dream of “Russia's return to the international arena as a great power”, speaks not with words, but with actions, and “is distinguished by his determination and premeditated approaches to solving world problems”⁹⁵. Putin’s character is mostly discussed alongside and compared with the Western leaders, who are represented as the complete opposite of the Russian president. Mentioned as American or European colleges, or even referred to as specific figures such as Obama, actions of Western politicians are described as superficial and egocentric, while Putin “unlike Obama, does not say that one of the players has crossed an unacceptable ‘red line’ (as was the case with Syria), and then leaves his words without consequences and abruptly changes course”⁹⁶. “Unlike his American colleague, who spoke more about the role of the United States and its place in world politics, [Putin] touched on all important topics facing the international community”⁹⁷. He constantly reminds the West of “their hypocrisy and inconsistency”, and exposes their policies based on “double standards”⁹⁸. Vladimir Putin is always mentioned only in a positive context and as a proud image of ‘Great Russia’ whose actions are determined by the mission to make the world a better place.

Conspiracy of the West against Russia

The West holds a significant place in the Russian narratives about foreign policy. Just as every hero needs a villain who will challenge and make its path towards triumph more difficult, in the discourse of Russia there is always someone who tries to “push [Russia] away

⁹⁴ “С Обамой можно договариваться о тактике, а не о ‘большой игре,’” Известия, September 28, 2015, <https://iz.ru/309050/anastasia-kasevarova/s-obamoi-mozno-dogovarivatsa-o-taktike-ne-o-bolsoi-igre>.

⁹⁵ “На политическом фронте без перемен,” Известия, December 19, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/599848>.

⁹⁶ “С Обамой можно договариваться о тактике, а не о ‘большой игре,’” Известия, September 28, 2015, <https://iz.ru/309050/anastasia-kasevarova/s-obamoi-mozno-dogovarivatsa-o-taktike-ne-o-bolsoi-igre>.

⁹⁷ “Попытки расшатать авторитет ООН являются крайне опасными,” Известия, September 28, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/592182>.

⁹⁸ “Рассуждения о действиях России в Сирии,” Известия, October 21, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/593653>.

from solving pressing global issues”⁹⁹. Conspiracies are mostly related to Western countries, such as the United Kingdom, that “does not abandon attempts to steal the Russian victory”¹⁰⁰, or “certain political forces” deliberately spreading “horror stories” about it, “demonizing” their country, and “making it the evil of the world”¹⁰¹. While on one hand, Russian media represents the West as an enemy, on the other hand, there are attempts to also characterize Europe as a friend with “a number of common interests, especially in the context of the current crisis: the Islamic State is a real threat and a common enemy”, and “numerous centuries-old ties, as well as the obligation to preserve and protect common wealth on our continent, our Christian heritage”¹⁰². This demonstrates the inconsistency of the discursive logic of Russia, which changes based on the convenience of a storyline. The contradictions are also noticeable in the case of Turkey. President Erdoğan is labeled as a partner, then an enemy, and then partner again, depending on the circumstances. While sometimes Turkey is “an important neighbor with whom for the first time in centuries we have learned to maintain friendly relations” and “Russia and Turkey should improve relations, because a third party benefits from the conflict,”¹⁰³ other times Moscow cannot forgive hostile attitude to Istanbul that turns to NATO instead of resolving the problems with Russia¹⁰⁴.

Discreditation of the United States

All this leads to the United States, the main villain of a Russian story which is the reason for every problem Russia has with other states. Russian media actively promotes the narrative

⁹⁹ “Нужно сделать всё, чтобы не допустить распространения ИГИЛ,” Известия, November 16, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/595574>.

¹⁰⁰ “Делегацию сирийской оппозиции в Женеве возглавил союзник ‘Аль-Каиды,’” Российская газета, February 2, 2016, <https://rg.ru/2016/02/02/delegaciiu-sirijskoj-oppozicii-v-zheneve-vozglavil-soiuznik-al-kaidy.html>.

¹⁰¹ “Нужно сделать всё, чтобы не допустить распространения ИГИЛ,” Известия, November 16, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/595574>.

¹⁰² “Рассуждения о действиях России в Сирии,” Известия, October 21, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/593653>.

¹⁰³ “Нужен нам берег турецкий,” Известия, December 28, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/600696>.

¹⁰⁴ “Цена упрямства,” Известия, November 25, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/597152>.

that Europe is getting rid of the American influence, “the US does not rule the world. Countries have their own point of view on this or that problem, and if Russia’s actions fit into their paradigm as quite constructive, then they are ready to support them”¹⁰⁵. At the same time, there are claims about Washington putting pressure on European countries such as Greece and Bulgaria to close airspace for Russia, and “dictate with whom to deal with and with whom to not”.¹⁰⁶ Trying to construct the image of the U.S. as an actor that only involves in the conflicts because it does not get affected itself, is a part of creating Russia’s own image as a country that is not afraid to dirty its hands for a good cause. With statements such as “while the American Sixth Fleet is based in the comfortable ports of Barcelona or Naples, our ships are forced to be at sea and anchor there”¹⁰⁷, “we don't have the Atlantic Ocean between us”¹⁰⁸, and that fighting against ISIS has to be done "on the ground" instead of from “cozy capitals”¹⁰⁹, Russian discourse focuses on the discreditation of the policies and actions of the United States, while simultaneously constructing Kremlin as different in a positive way. The U.S. government is also criticized for using humanitarian reasons for its economic interests, and supporting "fathers of ISIS", such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait, while at the same time claiming to be fighting against terrorism¹¹⁰. Emphasizing the examples such as Guantanamo, Russian media blames Americans for “false ideas about its own exclusivity and infallibility in human rights affairs with reality”¹¹¹, as well as for seeing only what they want

¹⁰⁵ “Европа отказалась препятствовать полетам самолетов России в Сирию,” Известия, September 9, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/591253>.

¹⁰⁶ “В Госдуме назвали неприемлемым запрос США о закрытии неба Греции для РФ,” Российская газета, September 7, 2015, <https://rg.ru/2015/09/07/grecia-anons.html>.

¹⁰⁷ “Москва, Дамаск — рубежи обороны,” Известия, September 14, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/591462>.

¹⁰⁸ “Европа отказалась препятствовать полетам самолетов России в Сирию,” Известия, September 9, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/591253>.

¹⁰⁹ “Из Алеппо эвакуировали почти 10 тысяч человек,” Российская газета, December 18, 2016, <https://rg.ru/2016/12/18/iz-aleppo-evakuirovali-pochti-10-tysiach-chelovek.html>.

¹¹⁰ “Европа отказалась препятствовать полетам самолетов России в Сирию,” Известия, September 9, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/591253>.

¹¹¹ “С Обамой можно договариваться о тактике, а не о ‘большой игре,’” Известия, September 28, 2015, <https://iz.ru/309050/anastasia-kasevarova/s-obamoi-mozno-dogovarivatsa-o-taktike-ne-o-bolsoi-igre>.

to see. Instead of accusing Russia of “delivering airstrikes on the Syrian opposition”, the U.S. State Department should stop “dividing terrorists into ‘good’ and ‘bad’”¹¹².

Syrian civil war as a matter of national security

Syria, described as “the frontier of defense of Moscow”¹¹³, is characterized as the main ally of Russia in the Middle East. By creating a sense of foreign political threats and ‘enemies’, Russian discourse forms an idea that the country needs protection, especially from the army of Islamic radicals which, in case of defeating the system of Bashar al-Assad, “will rush to the Russian North Caucasus and Central Asia”¹¹⁴. The end of the Syrian regime is represented as “a monstrous event” that will destabilize the security of Russia¹¹⁵. These narratives enable Russian leadership to legitimate its military operation in Syria as “a decision of a peacemaker protecting its people”¹¹⁶. In order to demonstrate the accordance of this action with international law, the focus is on the fact that Russia’s military presence in Syria is based on the consent of Assad, a legitimate president who “should be helped, but not dictated by any means”¹¹⁷. The fate of Syria must be decided by its people, and “only those who feel their exclusivity allow themselves to behave in such a shameless way to impose their will on others”¹¹⁸.

Russia against politicized humanitarianism

¹¹² “МИД РФ: В Госдепе США видят только то, что сами придумывают,” Российская газета, January 16, 2016, <https://rg.ru/2016/01/16/mid-anons.html>.

¹¹³ “Москва, Дамаск — рубежи обороны,” Известия, September 14, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/591462>.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ “Рассуждения о действиях России в Сирии,” Известия, October 21, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/593653>.

¹¹⁶ “Госдума: Операция ВКС России в Сирии - в интересах нашей страны,” Российская газета, September 30, 2015, <https://rg.ru/2015/09/30/operacia-syria-site.html>.

¹¹⁷ “С Обамой можно договариваться о тактике, а не о ‘большой игре,’” Известия, September 28, 2015, <https://iz.ru/309050/anastasia-kasevarova/s-obamoi-mozno-dogovarivatsa-o-taktike-ne-o-bolsoi-igre>.

¹¹⁸ “Владимир Путин рассказал об операции ВКС в Сирии,” Российская газета, November 13, 2015, <https://rg.ru/2015/11/13/prezident-site.html>.

The discourse represents Russia's position about humanitarianism as "consistent and non-opportunistic, whether in Syria or elsewhere"¹¹⁹. Russian policymakers believe that attempts to divide terrorists into "good" and "bad" are unacceptable, and are concerned about "the politicization of the UN human rights agenda and attempts to use human rights to interfere in the internal affairs of states"¹²⁰. The United States and other Western countries "usurp the human rights sphere, completely politicize it, and use it as an instrument of pressure"¹²¹. The principles of Humanitarian Intervention and Responsibility to Protect are highly criticized in Russian discourse for being vague and "open to arbitrary interpretation and used in information wars" as well as an "an instrument of 'undeclared war' with geopolitical and geo-economic competitors"¹²². The response to accusations about "growing ambitions"¹²³ and that the main goal of Russian involvement in the Syrian conflict was "not to destroy the Islamic State, but to preserve the regime of Bashar al-Assad"¹²⁴ usually is not denial, but putting the blame on others, emphasizing that "other countries are already in full swing strikes at targets in Syria and Iraq"¹²⁵. Therefore, on one hand, Russia provides the principle of reciprocity as a justification of its actions, and on the other hand, claims to be separating politics from humanitarianism¹²⁶.

Affective emotions as a way to increase the impact

¹¹⁹ "МИД РФ раскрыл детали плана Совбеза ООН мирного урегулирования в Сирии," Известия, December 19, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/599840>.

¹²⁰ "Люди в Европе начинают стесняться христианских ценностей," Известия, December 28, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/600690>.

¹²¹ "Чуркин: Россия не собирается оправдываться за действия в Сирии," Российская газета, February 11, 2016, <https://rg.ru/2016/02/11/churkin-rossiia-ne-sobiraetsia-opravdyvatsia-za-dejstviia-v-sirii.html>.

¹²² "Валерий Зорькин: Современный мир столкнулся с архаическим варварством," Российская газета, November 24, 2015, <https://rg.ru/2015/11/24/khaos.html>.

¹²³ "Попытки расшатать авторитет ООН являются крайне опасными," Известия, September 28, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/592182>.

¹²⁴ "Рассуждения о действиях России в Сирии," Известия, October 21, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/593653>.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ "Керри назвал россиян важной нацией," Российская газета, December 15, 2015, <https://rg.ru/2015/12/15/vstrecha-site.html>.

Using expressions, metaphors, and adjectives to overdramatize the content is a common practice in Russian media discourse. Describing Syria as a “long-suffering, unbroken country¹²⁷” raises a level of compassion, as well as framing the actions of Turkey as a “betrayal” and a “stab in the back”¹²⁸ causes the negative sentiments in the reader. The statement that “no one has ever succeeded or will succeed in intimidating or putting pressure on our country”¹²⁹, provokes the feelings of pride and security, while characterizing Putin as being “outraged¹³⁰” by the accusations about Russian airstrikes killing Syrian civilians, evokes the anger towards the West and trust towards the virtuous intentions of Kremlin, as only someone who is falsely blamed for a crime can be outraged. Russia is portrayed as a proud country that requires an apology from its adversaries¹³¹ but at the same time, a merciful state¹³² as forgiveness is needed in order to move forward. Such kinds of phrases cause emotions that make it easier for the audience to empathize with the situation and hence accept it as right and legitimate.

3.2 Discussion: Constructing Humanitarian Geopolitical Imagery of Russia

In order to assemble constitutive elements of Russia’s humanitarian geopolitical imagery, it is necessary to analytically discuss the themes characterizing an internal discourse of Russia from a critical geopolitical perspective. This approach encompasses the construction of geographical imaginations, presumed “truths” about world politics, and their connection

¹²⁷ “Москва, Дамаск — рубежи обороны,” Известия, September 14, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/591462>.

¹²⁸ “Цена упрямства,” Известия, November 25, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/597152>.

¹²⁹ “Путин предупредил о подготовке Западом провокаций на выборах 2018 года,” Российская газета, March 26, 2015, <https://rg.ru/2015/03/26/putin-fsb-site.html>.

¹³⁰ “Федор Лукьянов: Цель междирийских переговоров нужно переформулировать,” Российская газета, February 9, 2016, <https://rg.ru/2016/02/09/fedor-lukianov-cel-mezhsirijskih-peregovorov-nuzhno-pereformulirovat.html>.

¹³¹ “Цена упрямства,” Известия, November 25, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/597152>.

¹³² “Нужен нам берег турецкий,” Известия, December 28, 2015, <https://iz.ru/news/600696>.

with foreign policy actions of states¹³³. Just like every country, Russia has its own perception of the international system and its role in it. Based on these perceptions particular narratives and scripts are created which intend to provide political legitimacy and moral justification for Moscow's actions. As demonstrated by empirical material, pro-government media discourse represents a theatre where the performative act of constructing Russia as a humanitarian actor takes place. Following the Kremlin storyline of intervention in the Syrian civil war, Russia, personified by its leader Vladimir Putin, is portrayed as a great power, a leading actor in the international community which safeguards stability and security of the world by protecting the principles of international law and ensuring the perseverance of the United Nations. While calling on the countries that go beyond commonly agreed legal framework, use humanitarian justifications to fulfill their national interests, and are guided by double standards and hypocrisy, Russia does not divide terrorists as 'good' and 'bad' puts its interests aside and is not afraid to do 'the dirty job' in order to save Syrian people from suffering. According to this narrative, Russia does not politicize humanitarianism like Western countries, especially the United States, and despite vicious attempts of its adversaries to discredit its achievements, the truth is that Russia is the one responsible for fighting against terrorists and protecting Syria, as well as its own territory from the spread of radical Islamism.

Analysis of the emerged themes from empirical material reveals that humanitarian geopolitical imagery of Russia has certain patterns, logic, and style, which directly relate to the first part of the research question - *how* this imaginary is being constructed. Putting the blame on others represents the most common pattern that keeps coming forth in almost every theme. 'Others' – the West, and mostly the United States, are always the ones who make mistakes, politicize humanitarianism, go beyond classical humanitarian doctrine, assist terrorists, and

¹³³ Mariya Y. Omelicheva, "Critical Geopolitics on Russian Foreign Policy: Uncovering the Imagery of Moscow's International Relations," *International Politics* 53, no. 6 (September 22, 2016): 719, <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-016-0009-5>.

violate international law. The foreign policy of Russia, on the other hand, is never flawed, criticized, or questioned. The second pattern is portraying the elements of politicized humanitarianism used by Russia itself as legitimate. Moscow does not negotiate with terrorists, however, supports the Assad regime, and therefore violates the principles of neutrality and impartiality. The concepts of humanitarian intervention and R2P are strongly condemned. Nevertheless, involving in the conflict using military power with the goal to free and protect the Syrian people is depicted as heroic behavior. This leads to the duality and contradictory style of the imaginary that emerges rather frequently. Europe, as well as Turkey, is sometimes described as hostile and antagonistic, while other times as an ally and a friend. Surprisingly, these logical gaps in the discourse do not represent a problem for the construction of solid imagery. This is one of the main reasons why a critical affective geopolitical framework is useful as it explains that the constitutive components of the imaginary can be different, contradictory, or illogical, and still achieve their aim because they are narrated as separate realities. Instead of one objective reality, there are multiple subjective ones that are created based on how it is required at the moment¹³⁴. The third pattern is related to the affective part of this theoretical perspective. Manipulating with emotions of pride, rage, pity, and empathy allows the construction of realities that are more easily reachable and credible for the targeted audience. The affective investments into the narratives make it easier to create “mental maps”¹³⁵ for the audience where they assign different meanings to spaces and make their own distinctions between who are friends or enemies, what is ‘their’ or ‘our’ territory, what can be perceived as dangerous or safe. In the humanitarian context, the intention of this discourse is for the Russian people to assign the meaning of an enemy and a rule breaker to the United

¹³⁴ Edward Heath Robinson, “A Documentary Theory of States and Their Existence as Quasi-Abstract Entities,” *Geopolitics* 19, no. 3 (July 3, 2014): 462, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2014.913027>.

¹³⁵ Julie-Anne Boudreau, “Making New Political Spaces: Mobilizing Spatial Imaginaries, Instrumentalizing Spatial Practices, and Strategically Using Spatial Tools,” *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 39, no. 11 (November 2007): 2593–2611, <https://doi.org/10.1068/a39228>.

States, the meaning of victim to Syria, ally or an enemy to Europe depending on convenience, etc. Therefore, the humanitarian imagery is indeed a geopolitical projection that is created through discourse with an aim to produce subjective realities that are convenient for the Russian government and elites.

This leads to the second part of the research question – what role does the imagery of a humanitarian actor play in the foreign policy of Russia. In this regard, two main possible functions have emerged. First, to provide political legitimacy by provoking acceptance and empathy towards certain people, countries, or events, such as towards Syrian people who are suffering and dying because of terrorists, or Russians themselves who will soon be the victims of aggression from radical Islamists unless they are defeated before. Second, to gain moral justification for Moscow's actions through intensifying and deepening the affective impact of humanitarian discourse on the audience. As a result of the successful construction of humanitarian geopolitical imagery, popular support for the foreign policy of Russia in the Syrian conflict is guaranteed.

Lastly, it is important to reflect on the differences and highlight the distinction between the geopolitical imaginary and propaganda. These discourses and narratives are indeed part of propaganda, based on falsification of facts, selection of information, and conspiracy theories aimed to seek public legitimacy. Nevertheless, it is not just an attempt to make people believe certain facts in order to justify particular actions. Humanitarian geopolitical imaginary is rather an effort to create a specific mindset, values, and ideals using affect and emotions that will prepare grounds not just for one single but for many different foreign policy decisions. Observing how these imaginaries are formed and shaped is crucial as they are in a constant process of changing. The internal discourse and foreign policy of Russia are interrelated. Together they construct the realities that are required at the moment, sometimes even producing

contradictory narratives simultaneously, and yet they manage to serve their goal to achieve public acceptance. The reasons for this should be found in the analysis of affective investments in words and images articulated through media discourses, as well as in constitutive elements and ideologies behind the humanitarian geopolitical imaginary of Russia.

CONCLUSION

This thesis addressed the puzzle of the duality of Russia's foreign policy regarding humanitarianism and the contradictory use of the humanitarian doctrine in its internal discourse around the intervention in Syria. Research demonstrated that the seemingly universal concept of humanitarianism is often misinterpreted, misused, and even contested in the international system. Russia manages to portray itself simultaneously as a protector of classical principles of humanitarianism, and (re)interpret them with the elements of politicized humanitarianism in practice. The main argument presented was that traditional explanations in the literature about how Russian humanitarianism works are insufficient to fully make sense of humanitarian claims of Moscow. Materialistic and ideological foundations, as well as a widespread view that attempts of Russia to represent itself as a humanitarian actor to a great extent is a parody, mimicry, and mocking of the West, are limited since they do not allow looking at the issue from Russia's own lens. The thesis instead suggested analyzing the puzzle from a critical affective geopolitical perspective that understands the world as spatialized, sees territorial divisions as political imaginaries, and perceives humanitarianism as a performative act.

Using the framework designed by Gerard Toal which connects the foreign policy of Russia to a sense of place and spatial emotions, I analyzed the internal humanitarian discourse of Russia having in mind the images of territory, heroic ideology, the process of othering the West, affective emotions of anger and resentment, as well as the notions of saving lives and fighting against fascism and terrorism. As a result of the thematic analysis of articles from two pro-government newspapers, eight generic themes were identified. After combining patterns, logic and style emerged from these themes, the humanitarian geopolitical imagery of Russia has been assembled which is being constructed and reconstructed with an aim to create a

specific mindset, values, and ideals that will prepare grounds for political legitimization and moral justification of foreign policy decisions of Russia.

The thesis contributes to the literature about Russian foreign policy, the use of humanitarianism, and a critical affective geopolitics. The relevance of the topic is significantly high as Russia keeps justifying its actions with humanitarian reasons and simultaneously condemns the humanitarian operations conducted by other actors. In the wake of the ongoing war in Ukraine, the question of how is it possible to gain popular support as a humanitarian actor despite obviously being involved in conducting humanitarian atrocities is especially startling. A critical affective geopolitical approach offers the most credible explanation in this regard as it shows that the moral legitimization of Russia's actions is more than a result of successful propaganda. Rather it is a geopolitical imaginary that has a significant impact on the mindset of the target audience because of affective and emotional investments in the discourse with which it is narrated. Knowing how the foreign policy decisions of Russia are being justified and legitimized internally is crucial for making sense of Russian foreign policy in general.

Although critical affective geopolitics provides a new perspective of looking at the use of humanitarianism by Russia, the methodology used in this thesis limits itself to solely internal discourse and a specific case of the intervention in Syria. Future research should be extended to studying the domestic discourse of Russia in more depth, including other mediums than printed media, as well as to foreign discourse of Moscow since how the actions are justified and narrated externally has equally significant importance. While my aim was to answer the question of how Russia's humanitarian geopolitical imagery is being constructed and what role does it play in its foreign policy, this is also an attempt to start a discussion on a broader scale about how geopolitical imaginaries can shape the foreign policies of states. Further research

should focus on developing a theoretical concept of humanitarian geopolitical imagery by applying it to different countries and case studies. Since it is a subject of a constant transformation, exploring the depths of its dynamic, and how it is changed and advanced is needed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahmadypour, Zahra, Mohammad Reza Hafeznia, and Reza Juneidi. "Representing Imaginary Enemy: A Geopolitical Discourse." *Geopolitics Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (2010).

Allison, Roy. "Russia and Syria: Explaining Alignment with a Regime in Crisis." *International Affairs* 89, no. 4 (July 2013): 795–823. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12046>.

Bagshaw, Simon. "What Are Humanitarian Principles?" OCHA, June 2012. https://www.unocha.org/sites/dms/Documents/OOM-humanitarianprinciples_eng_June12.pdf.

Baranovsky, Vladimir. "Russia: Reassessing National Interests." In *Kosovo and the Challenge of Humanitarian Intervention: Selective Indignation, Collective Action, and International Citizenship*, edited by Albrecht Schnabel and Ramesh Thakur. United Nations University Press, 2000.

Barnett, Michael. "Humanitarianism Transformed." *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no. 04 (November 23, 2005). <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592705050401>.

Barnett, Michael N. *Empire of Humanity : A History of Humanitarianism*. Ithaca, Ny: Cornell Univ. Press, 2011.

Barnett, Michael, and Thomas G. Weiss. "Humanitarianism: A Brief History of the Present." In *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics*. Cornell University Press, 2008.

Bettiza, Gregorio, and David Lewis. "Authoritarian Powers and Norm Contestation in the Liberal International Order: Theorizing the Power Politics of Ideas and Identity." *Journal of Global Security Studies*, February 13, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogz075>.

Boudreau, Julie-Anne. "Making New Political Spaces: Mobilizing Spatial Imaginaries, Instrumentalizing Spatial Practices, and Strategically Using Spatial Tools." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 39, no. 11 (November 2007): 2593–2611. <https://doi.org/10.1068/a39228>.

Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (2006): 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

Burai, Erna. "Parody as Norm Contestation: Russian Normative Justifications in Georgia and Ukraine and Their Implications for Global Norms." *Global Society* 30, no. 1 (November 5, 2015): 67–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2015.1092424>.

Casula, Philipp. "Russia's Foreign Policy from the Crimean Crisis to the Middle East: Great Power Gamble or Biopolitics?" *Rising Powers Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (2017).

Chandler, David. *From Kosovo to Kabul : Human Rights and International Intervention*. London: Pluto Press, 2006.

Dalby, Simon. "Calling 911: Geopolitics, Security and America's New War." *Geopolitics* 8, no. 3 (October 2003): 61–86. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040412331307712>.

Dijk, Boyd van. "'The Great Humanitarian': The Soviet Union, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the Geneva Conventions of 1949." *Law and History Review* 37, no. 1 (February 2019): 209–35. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0738248019000014>.

Dodds, Klaus, Merje Kuus, and Joanne Sharp. "Introduction: Geopolitics and Its Critics." In *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*. Routledge, 2013.

Dunn, Elizabeth Cullen, and Michael S. Bobick. "The Empire Strikes Back: War without War and Occupation without Occupation in the Russian Sphere of Influence." *American Ethnologist* 41, no. 3 (August 2014): 405–13. <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12086>.

Fassin, Didier. "Conclusion: Critique of Humanitarian Reason." In *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*, translated by Rachel Gomme. University of California Press, 2012.

———. "Hierarchies of Humanity Intervening in International Conflicts." In *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present*, translated by Rachel Gomme. University of California Press, 2012.

Foucault, Michel. "Orders of Discourse." *Social Science Information* 10, no. 2 (April 1971): 7–30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/053901847101000201>.

Fox, Fiona. "New Humanitarianism: Does It Provide a Moral Banner for the 21st Century?" *Disasters* 25, no. 4 (December 2001): 275–89. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7717.00178>.

Fugard, Andi, and Henry W Potts. "Thematic Analysis." In *SAGE Research Methods Foundations*, edited by Paul Atkinson. London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2019. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781526421036858333>.

Hall, Stuart. *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage, 1997.

Hilhorst, Dorothea. "Classical Humanitarianism and Resilience Humanitarianism: Making Sense of Two Brands of Humanitarian Action." *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 3, no. 1 (September 10, 2018). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-018-0043-6>.

Holmes, Marcus. "Believing This and Alieving That: Theorizing Affect and Intuitions in International Politics." *International Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (2015): 706–20. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43869054>.

Kelly, Phil. "A Critique of Critical Geopolitics." *Geopolitics* 11, no. 1 (March 2006): 24–53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650040500524053>.

Knotter, Lucas. "Contemporary Humanitarian Intervention." *Human Rights in War*, 2021, 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-5202-1_5-1.

Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy : Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso, 2001.

Lewis, David. "Contesting Liberal Peace: Russia's Emerging Model of Conflict Management." *International Affairs* 98, no. 2 (March 2022): 653–73. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iab221>.

Lewis, David G. "Geopolitical Imaginaries in Russian Foreign Policy: The Evolution of 'Greater Eurasia.'" *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no. 10 (November 14, 2018): 1612–37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1515348>.

Moore, Thomas. "Saving Friends or Saving Strangers? Critical Humanitarianism and the Geopolitics of International Law." *Review of International Studies* 39, no. 4 (December 11, 2012): 925–47. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0260210512000368>.

Morris, Justin. "Libya and Syria: R2P and the Spectre of the Swinging Pendulum." *International Affairs* 89, no. 5 (September 2013): 1265–83. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12071>.

O'Loughlin, John, Gerard Toal, and Vladimir Kolosov. "The Rise and Fall of 'Novorossiya': Examining Support for a Separatist Geopolitical Imaginary in Southeast Ukraine." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 33, no. 2 (February 29, 2016): 124–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1060586x.2016.1146452>.

Omelicheva, Mariya Y. "Critical Geopolitics on Russian Foreign Policy: Uncovering the Imagery of Moscow's International Relations." *International Politics* 53, no. 6 (September 22, 2016): 708–26. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-016-0009-5>.

Reid-Henry, S M. "Humanitarianism as Liberal Diagnostic: Humanitarian Reason and the Political Rationalities of the Liberal Will-To-Care." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 39, no. 3 (October 25, 2013): 418–31. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12029>.

Rezvani, Babak. "Russian Foreign Policy and Geopolitics in the Post-Soviet Space and the Middle East: Tajikistan, Georgia, Ukraine and Syria." *Middle Eastern Studies* 56, no. 6 (July 23, 2020): 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2020.1775590>.

Robinson, Edward Heath. "A Documentary Theory of States and Their Existence as Quasi-Abstract Entities." *Geopolitics* 19, no. 3 (July 3, 2014): 461–89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2014.913027>.

Rotaru, Vasile. "'Mimicking' the West? Russia's Legitimization Discourse from Georgia War to the Annexation of Crimea." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 52, no. 4 (October 19, 2019): 311–21. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2019.10.001>.

Russell, Martin. "Russia's Humanitarian Aid Policy." European Parliament, May 2016. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2016/582039/EPRS_ATA\(2016\)582039_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2016/582039/EPRS_ATA(2016)582039_EN.pdf).

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. London: Routledge, 1978.

Schenkenberg van Mierop, Ed. "Coming Clean on Neutrality and Independence: The Need to Assess the Application of Humanitarian Principles." *International Review of the Red Cross* 97, no. 897-898 (June 2015): 295–318. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s181638311500065x>.

Shatz, Adam. "Mission Impossible - Humanitarianism Is Neutral or It Is Nothing | MSF." Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) International, October 20, 2002. <https://www.msf.org/mission-impossible-humanitarianism-neutral-or-it-nothing>.

Slim, Hugo. "Violence and Humanitarianism." *Security Dialogue* 32, no. 3 (September 2001): 325–39. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010601032003005>.

Solovyev, Eduard G. "Geopolitics in Russia—Science or Vocation?" *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 37, no. 1 (March 2004): 85–96. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2003.12.009>.

Suslov, Mikhail. *Geopolitical Imagination : Ideology and Utopia in Post-Soviet Russia*. Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2020.

Toal, Gerard. *Near Abroad : Putin, the West, and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019.

Tsygankov, A.P. "Mastering Space in Eurasia: Russia's Geopolitical Thinking after the Soviet Break-Up." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 36, no. 1 (March 2003): 101–27. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0967-067x\(02\)00055-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0967-067x(02)00055-7).

Tuathail, Gearóid Ó. "The Bush Administration and the 'End' of the Cold War: A Critical Geopolitics of U.S. Foreign Policy in 1989." *Geoforum* 23, no. 4 (January 1992): 437–52. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-7185\(92\)90001-k](https://doi.org/10.1016/0016-7185(92)90001-k).

UCL. "The Affective Geopolitics of the New Cold War." Global Governance Institute, May 15, 2018. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/global-governance/news/2018/may/affective-geopolitics-new-cold-war>.

Volkov, Denis. "Do Russians Support Putin's War in Syria?" Carnegie Moscow Center, October 12, 2015. <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/61583>.

Wegge, Njord, and Kathrin Keil. "Between Classical and Critical Geopolitics in a Changing Arctic." *Polar Geography* 41, no. 2 (March 26, 2018): 87–106. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1088937x.2018.1455755>.

Weissman, Fabrice. "Not in Our Name: Why MSF Does Not Support the 'Responsibility to Protect.'" Doctors Without Borders - USA, October 3, 2010. <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/latest/not-our-name-why-msf-does-not-support-responsibility-protect>.

Woodward, Susan L. "Humanitarian War: A New Consensus?" *Disasters* 25, no. 4 (December 2001): 331–44. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7717.00182>.

Wydra, Doris. "Between Normative Visions and Pragmatic Possibilities: The European Politics of State Recognition." *Geopolitics* 25, no. 2 (December 18, 2018): 315–45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1556643>.

Zakem, Vera, Paul Saunders, Umida Hashimova, and P Hammerberg. "Mapping Russian Media Network: Media's Role in Russian Foreign Policy and Decision-Making," 2018. https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/drm-2017-u-015367-3rev.pdf.

Ziegler, Charles E. "Russia on the Rebound: Using and Misusing the Responsibility to Protect." *International Relations* 30, no. 3 (September 2016): 346–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117816659590>.

Sources Used for Empirical Analysis

Известия. "Асад заявил, что готов к политическим реформам," October 28, 2015. <https://iz.ru/news/594063>.

Известия. "Люди в Европе начинают стесняться христианских ценностей," December 28, 2015. <https://iz.ru/news/600690>.

Известия. "Нужно сделать всё, чтобы не допустить распространения ИГИЛ," November 16, 2015. <https://iz.ru/news/595574>.

Известия. "Попытки расшатать авторитет ООН являются крайне опасными," September 28, 2015. <https://iz.ru/news/592182>.

Известия. "«С Обамой можно договариваться о тактике, а не о 'большой игре'»,» September 28, 2015. <https://iz.ru/309050/anastasia-kasevarova/s-obamoj-mozno-dogovarivatsa-o-taktike-ne-o-bolsoi-igre>.

Российская газета. "Чуркин: Действия РФ в Сирии соответствуют международному праву," February 10, 2016. <https://rg.ru/2016/02/10/churkin-dejstviia-rf-v-sirii-sootvetstvuiut-mezhdunarodnomu-pravu.html>.

Российская газета. "Чуркин: Россия не собирается оправдываться за действия в Сирии," February 11, 2016. <https://rg.ru/2016/02/11/churkin-rossiia-ne-sobiraetsia-opravdyvatsia-za-dejstviia-v-sirii.html>.

Российская газета. "Делегацию сирийской оппозиции в Женеве возглавил союзник 'Аль-Каиды'," February 2, 2016. <https://rg.ru/2016/02/02/delegaciiu-sirijskoj-oppozicii-v-zheneve-vozglavil-soiuznik-al-kaidy.html>.

Известия. "Древо войны," November 30, 2015. <https://iz.ru/news/597648>.

Известия. "Европа отказалась препятствовать полетам самолетов России в Сирию," September 9, 2015. <https://iz.ru/news/591253>.

Российская газета. "Федор Лукьянов: Цель межсирийских переговоров нужно переформулировать," February 9, 2016. <https://rg.ru/2016/02/09/fedor-lukianov-cel-mezhsirijskih-peregovorov-nuzhno-pereformulirovat.html>.

Российская газета. "Главы МИД РФ и Сирии детально обсудят ситуацию на Ближнем Востоке," November 27, 2015. <https://rg.ru/2015/11/27/muallem-site.html>.

Российская газета. “Госдума: Операция ВВС России в Сирии - в интересах нашей страны,” September 30, 2015. <https://rg.ru/2015/09/30/operacia-syria-site.html>.

Российская газета. “Из Алеппо эвакуировали почти 10 тысяч человек,” December 18, 2016. <https://rg.ru/2016/12/18/iz-aleppo-evakuirovali-pochti-10-tysiach-chelovek.html>.

Российская газета. “Керри назвал россиян важной нацией,” December 15, 2015. <https://rg.ru/2015/12/15/vstrecha-site.html>.

Российская газета. “Лавров: РФ предложила США схему решения сирийского кризиса - Российская газета,” February 9, 2016. <https://rg.ru/2016/02/09/lavrov-rf-predlozhila-ssha-shemu-resheniia-sirijskogo-krizisa.html>.

Известия. “Матвиенко: ‘Реакция запада на действия России в Сирии — это ревность,’” October 8, 2015. <https://iz.ru/news/592826>.

Известия. “МИД РФ раскрыл детали плана Совбеза ООН мирного урегулирования в Сирии,” December 19, 2015. <https://iz.ru/news/599840>.

Российская газета. “МИД РФ: В Госдепе США видят только то, что сами придумывают,” January 16, 2016. <https://rg.ru/2016/01/16/mid-anons.html>.

Известия. “Москва, Дамаск — рубежи обороны,” September 14, 2015. <https://iz.ru/news/591462>.

Известия. “Москва вступилась за деятелей искусства и культурное наследие,” November 6, 2015. <https://iz.ru/news/595072>.

Известия. “На политическом фронте без перемен,” December 19, 2015. <https://iz.ru/news/599848>.

Известия. “Нужен нам берег турецкий,” December 28, 2015. <https://iz.ru/news/600696>.

Известия. “О чем говорил Владимир Путин,” December 17, 2015. <https://iz.ru/news/599633>.

Российская газета. “Путин предупредил о подготовке Западом провокаций на выборах 2018 года,” March 26, 2015. <https://rg.ru/2015/03/26/putin-fsb-site.html>.

Известия. “Рассуждения о действиях России в Сирии,” October 21, 2015. <https://iz.ru/news/593653>.

Российская газета. “СМИ: НАТО стоит задуматься о членстве Турции в альянсе,” November 25, 2015. <https://rg.ru/2015/11/25/turciya-site.html>.

Известия. “Цена упрямства,” November 25, 2015. <https://iz.ru/news/597152>.

Российская газета. “В Госдуме назвали неприемлемым запрос США о закрытии неба Греции для РФ,” September 7, 2015. <https://rg.ru/2015/09/07/grecia-anons.html>.

Известия. “Валентина Матвиенко призвала отказаться от ‘навязываемой демократии,’” October 18, 2015. <https://iz.ru/news/593427>.

Российская газета. “Валерий Зорькин: Современный мир столкнулся с архаическим варварством,” November 24, 2015. <https://rg.ru/2015/11/24/khaos.html>.

Российская газета. “Владимир Путин рассказал об операции ВКС в Сирии,” November 13, 2015. <https://rg.ru/2015/11/13/prezident-site.html>.