LEGITIMATION PATTERN: A COMPARATIVE FOREIGN POLITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE RUSSIAN INTERVENTIONS IN SYRIA (2015) AND UKRAINE (2022)

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Signature

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Alessio: greenish breaks, crazy laughs, and rainy krapfens.

Abstract

Over the last decade, the Russian Federation has been engaged in multiple external military interventions that have piqued academic interest in examining the political discourse employed by Russian political actors to justify foreign policy actions. More precisely, in the aftermath of the 2014 Russian military incursion in Ukraine and the subsequent 2015 intervention in Syria, attention has been paid to exploring narratives, strategies and frames employed to justify these actions. This thesis contributes to the extant scholarly literature by proposing a systematic analysis of argumentation tactics utilised to justify the use of force during Russian military interventions in the Syrian Arab Republic in September 2015 and, more recently, in Ukraine in February 2022. Specifically, the thesis seeks to identify the strategies employed during the construction of discourses of legitimation utilising a comparative multi-method case study of the Russian official foreign political discourse. 25 transcripts by Russian President Vladimir Putin published four months preceding the official declaration of intervention on the Kremlin's official website are analysed through a combination of Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) and legitimation categories. The thesis demonstrates that a common legitimation pattern across time and different foreign policies within and outside the post-Soviet area exists. Such a pattern revolves primarily around blame allocation strategies via moralisation and authorisation legitimising discourses in conjunction with mythopoesis.

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Introduction

Legitimation in discourse is defined as a social and political act of argumentative justification (van Dijk 1998, 255) involving "a powerful group or institution […] seek[ing] normative approval for its policies, actions. It does so through strategies that aim to show that such actions are consistent with the moral order of society, that is, within the system of laws, norms, agreements or aims agreed upon by […] citizens" (Rojo-Martin and van Dijk 1997, 528). Discursive legitimation can be utilised in a variety of circumstances, comprising the public political (de)legitimation of social practices, as well as regular communication (van Leeuwen 2007, 91) and can be induced by a variety of underlying causes. One particularly relevant example in recent decades is the legitimation of violence in internal and external military interventions, as political actors to be considered legitimate during their violent actions necessitate socio-political argumentations capable of gaining domestic and international consent.

The Russian Federation has been involved in several military operations in the last decade alone, notably Ukraine in February-March 2014, the Syrian Arab Republic in September 2015, and, most recently, Ukraine in February 2022. "'Why?', 'Why should we do this?' and 'Why should we do this in this way?'" (van Leeuwen 2007, 93) are some of the immediate questions that arise, the answers to which require an examination of Russian foreign political discourse. Nevertheless, solely identifying legitimation practices appears insufficient for uncovering how political actors justify their political agenda. In fact, as Ruth Wodak highlights (2022, 3-4), legitimation "routinely draws on recurring argumentation schemata [...]. Thus, to understand the specific dynamics of legitimation in [a] particular context[s], it is important to focus on the typical patterns and characteristics of these discursive strategies in context".

Accordingly, in the following pages, the thesis comparatively and systematically analyses the Russian official foreign political discourse employed by Russian President Vladimir Putin to justify military interventions in the Syrian Arab Republic started on the 30th of September 2015 and Ukraine on the 24th of February 2022. To be more specific, the first research question to answer is the following: *What are the Russian legitimising discourses and correlated strategies used in the Syrian and Ukrainian military interventions to justify the use of force?* The thesis, however, further seeks to ascertain whether a continuity in discursive practices of legitimation of the use of force across time and different countries located within and outside the post-Soviet area exists. Hence, the purposive choice of the two mentioned case studies. Consequently, the second research question to answer is: *Is there a legitimation pattern between the two analysed case studies?*

To answer the just mentioned research questions, the thesis first discusses in the first chapter the existing literature on Russian foreign political discourse, as well as the underlying motivations detected in the scholarly literature on the Syrian and Ukrainian interventions. The discussion is relevant as it allows for preliminary hypotheses to be formulated regarding the possible use of legitimising discourses. Indeed, following the existing literature, the thesis expects a prevalence of the use of moral values, the latter being, particularly with reference to the positioning of the Russian Federation vis-à-vis the "Other", the basis of the thinking of contemporary Russian foreign policy schools of thought. Moreover, the use of authorisation discourses serves to highlight the strong emphasis on state sovereignty and compliance with international norms. Finally, the consistent use of storytelling helps to connect the Russian Federation with its history. This would appear pertinent in the Syrian case in which memories related to previous Western interventions of ideological exportation may surface. It would equally

appear appropriate, if not more so, in the Ukrainian case having the latter share a long historical, political, cultural, ethnic, and religious tradition with the same Russian Federation.

After the second chapter dedicated to methodology, these hypotheses are probed in the third chapter by first conducting a thematic analysis of 25 transcripts of speeches delivered by President Vladimir Putin four months preceding the official presidential declaration of intervention. This first step analysis is necessary to provide a contextual and organisational basis for the texts to be analysed, on which the various legitimising discourses and related strategies can then be identified and interpreted. Simultaneously, this step is functional to corroborate or refute the main underlying motivations for intervention detected by the extant literature. Subsequently, the hypotheses are tested through Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) and a systematic classification of the legitimation categories theorised by Theoodor J. van Leeuwen. Ultimately, the latter, in conjunction with Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), is used to interpret the identified legitimation strategies in the fourth chapter.

Chapter 1: Understanding Russian Foreign Political Discourse

1.1 Russian Foreign Political Discourse

Existing literature on Russian foreign political discourse has predominantly been produced within the realm of International Relations (IR), following a particularly neo-realist focus on materialistic power relations and a social constructivist key role of ideas and norms in shaping individuals' reality and identity. Accordingly, by thoroughly examining extant literature on Russian foreign political discourse, three deeply intertwined thematic categories primarily emerge. More specifically, the re-conceptualisation of *Russian civilisational identity* as a distinct civilisation, embedding a well-defined system of cultural, historical and social values and a combination of endogenous vulnerabilities and exogenous pressures (Tsygankov 2016, 154), *Russia's place in the international world order*, encompassing concerns of national security primarily connected to a loss of state sovereignty and territorial integrity (Lo 2015, 19), Westphalian state system, respect of international law, geopolitical position in relations to the West and Eurasian neighbourhood, as well as historical great-power status, and *Economics*, primarily enclosing attempts towards economic modernisation (Lo 2015, 30-31). Denoted by temporal continuity, these thematic categories are observable since the 1990s when Russian foreign policy goals have been shaped by the very civilisational conception of Russia's position vis-à-vis the "Other" – Europe – endorsed by the various Russian foreign policy schools of thought dominating the political class and their academic and public discourses (Baranovsky 2000, 443-444; Kassianova 2001, 822).

1.1.1 Russian Civilisational Identity, Place in the International World Order, and Economics

Following the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union (USSR), an identity crisis emerged in the newly independent state, filled by a re-contextualisation of the USSR's historical narrative (Malinova 2022, 27) via a liberal foreign policy and pro-Western civilisational identity under President Boris Yeltsin, aimed at transforming Russia into a "normal European country" (Morini 2020, 14; Malinova 2022, 38-39). Such liberal ideas were yet subsequently followed by a shift under the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Yevgeni Primakov, who promoted distinct Eurasianist civilisational priorities, anchored in the restoration of the great-power status through non-Western cooperation and dominance of the post-Soviet area (Tsygankov 2007, 376-377; 384). *Eurasianists (or Eurasian Regionalists)*, indeed, used to reject the universalism of Western values, highlighting Russian historical memory and religious traditions, along with the importance of preserving Russia's role as a major Eurasian great power through the advancement of ties with post-Soviet countries, Asia, and the Muslim world (Tsygankov 2007, 381-385; Tsygankov 2022, 198).

With the inauguration of Vladimir Putin's first term in office as President in 2000, the re-contextualisation of the USSR's historical narrative was reinforced (Malinova 2022, 27-28). Additionally, a new reformulation of Russia's foreign policy occurred, triggered by new economic opportunities for domestic recovery, particularly in the energy sector, and the need for political stability caused by the rising Islamist extremist activities in the North Caucasus and the international system, following the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers on 9/11 (Tsygankov 2019, 129-130).

Such re-contextualisation and reformulation resulted in an integration of *Westernizers'* and *Statists'* perspectives on the "Self" and the "Other" (Tsygankov 2007, 379). Westernizers' reasoning has historically encompassed a pro-Western developmental path towards modernisation grounded on cultural similarities with Western countries, whose civilisation was regarded as the most progressive (Tsygankov and Tsygankov 2021, 4-10; 161). Statists' thinking, contrarily, has been historically primarily focused on the denial of Russia's similarities with the West and the universal nature of the latter values, the promotion of the preservation of national sovereignty, as well as of an independent and self-sufficient centre of global power, survival from external threats, advancement of a strategic bandwagoning behaviour towards Western powers, and the establishment of a multipolar balance of power (Tsygankov 2022, 120-124).

As a result, Vladimir Putin started to advance a pragmatic and materialistic foreign policy based on two Westernizer-inspired national interests. First, economic growth and modernisation through geoeconomic and energy cooperation with Western European countries aimed at integrating Russia into the global market economy by strengthening its export capacity (Sakwa 2004, 53-59). Second, assistance to the United States in countering the common threat of international terrorism, as the latter could have affected the North Caucasus and Central Asia (Allison 2013a, 91-92). Per the Statists' propositions, the role of the West in domestic economic recovery was yet simultaneously capitalised for the maintenance and recognition of Russia's necessary historical condition as a great power (Svarin 2016, 131). This, in turn, would have enhanced the country's economic and political ability to exert power and defend the country's priorities in the newly multipolar world order (Tsygankov 2019, 132-145).

Anti-terrorist assistance reveals significant, as it demarks a Russian non-interventionist foreign policy based on a self-defence principle and a Westphalian conception of state sovereignty,

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which implies recognition and respect of states' legal equality, territorial integrity and non-interference in domestic affairs (Deyermond 2016, 962). Sovereignty, in fact, represents a core feature in Russian foreign policy and political discourse, reinforced by the 1990s re-conceptualisation of sovereignty norms re-defined as "contingent on the conduct of states towards their population" and aimed at the protection of human rights (Deyermond 2016, 959).

Seen as an erosion promoted by the US-led hegemonic order, especially after the 1999 Kosovo intervention and the 2003 Iraq invasion in which the removal of the local government was considered a violation of international law, such sovereignty re-conceptualisation nourished what Ruth Deyermond considers as Russian current dual sovereignty approach (Deyermond 2016, 258-259). On the one hand, Russia defends the threatened Westphalian state model between Russia, the post-Soviet space and external third states to preserve peace and stability at the international level. On the other hand, Russia advances a concomitant sovereignty approach between Russia and the post-Soviet countries based on the legacy of the Soviet constitutional model. Such a dual approach appears instrumental for balancing the US and its allies that are starting to consistently influence states' internal affairs and improving Russia's regional and international power role (Deyermond 2016, 958; 967). Accordingly, during Vladimir Putin's first term, discursive themes centred around sovereignty, great-power status, and self-defence against an external threat, along with the need for domestic economic restoration and modernisation, gathered speed.

During Vladimir Putin's second term in office as President, due to the 2003 "Rose Revolution" in Georgia, the 2004 "Orange Revolution" in Ukraine, and the 2005 "Tulip Revolution" in Kyrgyzstan (Nikitina 2014, 87), the until then pursued pragmatic foreign policy was reinforced by assertiveness and an increasing propensity towards interventionism (Lo 2015, 14). Viewed as a Western supportive tactic to spread liberal ideology and democratic values and

politically destabilise the Russian peripheral sphere of interest and the federation itself through the promotion of regime and security policy alignments change (Allison 2013a, 134-135), the Colour Revolutions fuelled Russian strategic insecurity and isolation (Tsygankov 2019, 171-173; 194-195). This insecurity was, moreover, rooted in the desire of these peripheral areas to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), in conjunction with the increasing number of terrorist attacks pervading the North Caucasus (Giles 2017, 14-15; Lane 2010, 119). As a result of the perceived geopolitical vulnerability, Statists' ideas started to gain momentum and dominate Westernizers in Russian foreign policy in advocating for deeper national defence and non-interference in domestic affairs (Tsygankov 2019, 175-177). Accordingly, the opposition towards the Western-led hegemonic international order, the legitimacy of the US use of force, and the erosion of the Westphalian state sovereignty were reinforced (Allison 2013a, 136; Deyermond 2016, 964). The 2008 Foreign Policy Concept (President of the Russian Federation 2008, 2; 4) is a confirmation of this trend, where beyond the introduction of a concept of civilisational diversity and cultural distinctiveness under the umbrella of global competition on a civilisational level, reaffirmation of Russian sovereignty, territorial integrity and the Western attempt to deprecate their fundamental role at the basis of the international rule of law, were highlighted.

As a result of the 2000s Colour Revolutions and NATO's closest approach to Ukraine and Georgia, the election of the new Russian President Dmitrij Medvedev in 2008 was characterised by the first Russian military intervention in another sovereign country since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the 2008 Georgian war. Stressing the post-Soviet sovereignty approach, later equally evident in the 2014 Ukraine crisis, the military intervention and the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia were justified by Dmitrij Medvedev as a humanitarian intervention, accusing the

perpetration of an act of aggression towards Russian peacekeeping troops and the right of self-determination of the Russian citizens residing in the region (Allison 2013a, 150).

Despite the Georgian parenthesis, nonetheless, during Dmitrij Medvedev's term, Westernizers' perspectives began to regain prominence, and economic modernisation became the foundation of Russian foreign policy once again. Such a shift was provoked by the 2008 global financial crisis, which highlighted Russia's overdependence on energy resources and lack of diversification, in conjunction with the 2010s Arab Spring, which could have destabilised the Middle Eastern quadrant and further fuelled the terrorist threat in the North Caucasus (Tsygankov 2019, 201-204). This shift produced a more nuanced strategy based on the need for domestic economic development through strengthening Russia's relations with non-Western countries – particularly those in the Middle East, Asia, and Asia Pacific – and participation in various international coalitions (Tsygankov 2016, 150).

The re-election of Vladimir Putin to a third term as President of the Russian Federation in March 2012 contributed to another shift in foreign policy, marked by a stronger sense of geopolitical insecurity and hostility from the West due to rising tensions with the United States over the 2010s Arab Spring. The latter, indeed, was characterised primarily by the 2011 non-authorised UN humanitarian intervention and regime change in Libya, which proved to be particularly worrying for Russia as a regime-change domino effect could have hit neighbouring Middle Eastern countries, especially the Syrian Arab Republic and the Russian political legitimacy (Allison 2013a, 200-202; Deyermond 2016, 966). Furthermore, once again, the principles of sovereignty respect and non-interference in state domestic affairs were breached by the suspected Western support for the 2011-2012 Russian domestic anti-regime protest movements (Malinova 2022, 28; 40). Consequently, Vladimir Putin's third term represented the defined "civilisational or

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conservative turn" in Russian national identity and the official and semi-official discursive promotion of the civilisational and cultural distinctiveness, officially introduced in his second term (Linde 2016, 606; Tsygankov 2016, 146). In fact, while in the previous years, civilisational rhetoric was used primarily in academic or public circles, since the 2012 electoral campaign (Turoma and Mjør 2022, 1), Vladimir Putin started to explicitly advance at the political discursive level an image of Russia as "a multi-ethnic civilisation [that is] cemented by the Russian cultural core" (Putin 2012). An image serving a dual purpose: First, defining Russia as "a multi-ethnic state, a civilisation-state bonded by the Russian people, Russian language and Russian culture native to all of us" (President of the Russian Federation 2012), thus capable of defending distinct national values of ethnicity, culture, language, Orthodox Christian tradition, and the state's historical role (Linde 2016, 607; 615-617). Second, describing the West as a Russian civilisational rival, therefore, legitimising an anti-Western foreign policy (Malinova 2022, 40). A rhetoric exacerbated by the 2014 Ukraine crisis, the incorporation of Crimea (Trenin 2014, 4-8), and the subsequent further deterioration of relations with Western countries after the imposition of economic and financial sanctions against Russia (Tsygankov 2016, 147-151). Additional support for this interpretation is provided by the 2013 and subsequent 2016 Foreign Policy Concepts (President of the Russian Federation 2013; 2016), in which the stress on the national security theme, incorporating the threat of international terrorism but also anxiety concerning third-party interference in internal affairs, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, persisted.

1.2 Russian Motivations for Intervening in Syria and Ukraine

Based on the three thematic categories outlined by the existing literature on Russian foreign political discourse in the previous section, the following section examines the underlying motives used to justify the Russian military interventions in the Syrian Arab Republic in 2015 and Ukraine in 2022.

1.2.1 Syrian Arab Republic

A consensus among researchers emerges on the less relevant role played by materialist political and economic interests in Russian strategic military intervention in Syria in September 2015. These interests include the long-standing political friendship between Syria and Russia since the Soviet era, economic and military businesses such as Russia's energy diplomacy, armaments export and military training, and access to the Eastern Mediterranean Sea through the naval base of Tartus. Indeed, in agreement with Dmitri Trenin (2013, 9), the primary two Russian concerns were the international order and the nature of the 2010s Arab Spring. As for the former, stress is posed on the respect of the principles of state sovereignty, non-interference in internal affairs and human rights protection, which, in the necessity of an UN-authorised military intervention, should have been confined to the defence of the local population rather than the support of opposition factions or the overthrow of existing regimes. As for the latter, the 2010s Arab Spring was considered radical in character, which could have paved the way for increasing sectarianism and a proliferation of extremist Islamist activities given the existence of links with the al-Qaeda cell in the Syrian opposition to the al-Assad regime (Trenin 2013, 11).

The nature of the Arab Spring was similarly underlined by Ronald Dannreuther (2015, 92), who concentrated on a combination of domestic, political, and ideational factors in understanding Russian strategic behaviour in the country. Domestically and politically, anxiety emerged due to the outset of the Arab Spring in a domestic revolutionary pro-democracy atmosphere during the 2011-2012 Russian Parliamentary and Presidential elections, exacerbated by the 2011 intervention in Libya and the resulting regime change of Colonel Muammar Qaddafi by Western humanitarian intervention. This established a pro-democracy nexus in which the 2010s Arab Spring, seen as a return to traditional Middle Eastern values and identity with a pronounced radical Islamist extremist component that resulted in the 2014 rise of the Islamic State (IS), could have been exploited by Western countries to advance regime change and promote a liberal ideology via humanitarian justification (Danreuther 2015, 79-82). From this point of view, the importance of Syria derived not only from its strategic geographical proximity to the Caucasus and Central Asia but especially from its role as a "litmus test for confronting the [...] issue of humanitarian intervention" (Danreuther 2015, 84). Ideationally, the Russian anti-Western critique of pluralist democracy is mentioned, in which the purpose of democracy should not be one of fragmenting civil society but of preserving state sovereignty and its historical and traditional values (Danreuther 2015, 89-92).

Akin interpretation of Dmitri Trenin's first structural concern was also presented by Roy Allison's (2013b, 795; 805; 815) interpretation of Russian foreign policy in the fear of Western military interventions, the importance of constitutional order, and the potential dangerousness of the Syrian post-regime change environment. Additionally, Anna Borshchevskaya (2022, 71-80) placed a premium on challenging the US-led hegemonic international order by deterring a Western intervention in Syria while strengthening Russia's power position and military projection in the

Middle Eastern quadrant. This would have, furthermore, allowed Russia to advance into Libya and secure additional strategic naval bases on the Mediterranean Sea. Both authors acknowledged the Islamist threat, the correlated concern of possible spillover effects in the North Caucasus, and the external interference in Russia's 2011-2012 domestic movements as equitably relevant.

Analogous narratives have been highlighted by Mustafa Menshawy (2019, 337-338), with reference to the respect of Westphalian sovereignty and international law principles, in addition to Mykola Makhortykh (2020, 1071-1072) and Stanislav A. Myasnikov (2022, 110-113) in the exploration of strategic narratives of Russian officials. In terms of the former, emphasis is posed on the role of the historical memory of Chechnya, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya in the terrorist securitising strategy of legitimation and de-legitimation of a potential Western al-Assad regime change. In terms of the latter, further concentration on the role of non-Western partners, the uniqueness of Russia's nation, and Russia's heroic role in acting in favour of the Syrian population against the terrorist threat, was stressed.

1.2.2 Ukraine

Likewise Syria, a consensus among researchers appears also in the Russian intervention in Ukraine in February 2022, albeit concentrated around a clear continuity of the Georgian (2008) and Crimean (2014) narratives. Attention is focused on the humanitarian justification previously mentioned in the 2008 support for the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, along with the related principle of self-determination, providing Russian action with self-defensive international legitimacy under Article 51 of the UN Charter[1]. The latter was also employed in the

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[1] Article 51 of the UN Charter goes as follows: "Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations until the

foreign policy discourse on the 2014 Crimean intervention where, in agreement with Kari Roberts (2017, 29-30), geopolitical, historical, and cultural ties with Ukraine and vulnerabilities in the Russian identity vis-á-vis the West were additionally stressed. Both humanitarian intervention, self-determination, and historical elements were used in the present 2022 Ukrainian intervention, according to Vasile Rotaru (2022, 94-95) and Sofia Cavandoli and Gary Wilson (2022, 384-387; 390), despite the invasion being framed officially as a preventive self-defence action against nationalists and neo-Nazis (President of the Russian Federation 2022). Additionally, the accusation of the perpetration of genocide against the Russian population of the Ukrainian separatist territories of Donetsk and Luhansk was also present.

Following John Mearsheimer (2022), instead, the key motivations behind the Russian intervention reflect the perceived threat of NATO enlargement and a closer relationship with Ukraine. Indeed, as John Mearsheimer (2022) suggested, since December 2017, the Trump administration and NATO allies worked to enhance relations with Ukraine by selling defensive weaponry, providing military training, building naval centres, and planning coordinated military activities. The co-hosting of a naval exercise in the Black Sea in July 2021 and the signing of the 2021 *US-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership* between Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba and American Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken (U.S. Department of State 2021) were also signs of the growing relationship between Ukraine and the United States. Ultimately, such measures elicited Russian self-defensive reaction to a perceived national security threat (Mearsheimer 2022).

Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security" (United Nations Commission, n.d.).

Adding to the mentioned narratives of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and self-determination and simultaneously further emphasising Russian perceived security threat, Elias Götz and Jørgen Staun (2022, 482-483) point to Russian strategic culture: "a set of discursive expressions and narratives related to security-military affairs, which are shared by a country's political leaders and elites". Such discursive narratives encompass the significance of Russia's security vulnerability vis-à-vis the West and its great power status. Following the authors' argumentations (Götz and Staun 2022, 484-485), other than NATO enlargement and the threat of Western interference in internal affairs and regime change promotion in Russia, security vulnerabilities include the geographical configuration of the country with long borders that are challenging to defend due to the lack of natural barriers shielding the country from a potential external attack, along with the memory of past invasions. As for the great power status, instead, the restoration of the Russian position, its necessary historical condition for Russia's self-preservation, and Russia's sphere of interest in the Eurasian neighbourhood are important (Götz and Staun 2022, 485-486). In agreement with the authors, the latter seems particularly pertinent in the 2022 Ukrainian scenario, as the country is directly bordering the Western nations and possesses ethnopolitical and historical importance considered to be at the epicentre of Russian civilisation (Götz and Staun 2022, 486).

1.3 The Prominence of Narrative Analysis

As the cited literature on Russian foreign political discourse demonstrates, the Syrian and Ukrainian case studies are prominent in identifying "narratives" and "strategic narratives" utilised by the President of the Russian Federation as primary motivations to justify extra-territorial

military action. Narratives, however, are not part of texts or motivations behind a social practice. Contrarily, narratives could be described as a form of *storytelling* involving a sequence of events narrated by a narrator in a particular context (Oppermann and Spencer 2022, 117-119). The fact that "narratives always and necessarily entail looking backwards, from some present moment, and seeing in the movement of events *episodes* that are part of some larger whole" (Freeman 2015, 27) further distinguish them as having a retrospective feature. In the framework of Discourse Analysis (DA), the analysis of narratives is considered one of the potential methods through which Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) can analyse "language use beyond the sentence level, as well as other forms of meaning-making such as visuals and sounds [...]" (Wodak 2015, 1). As confirmed by Teun van Dijk (2013 as cited in Wodak and Meyer 2016, 3), in fact, discourse studies may analyse meaning-making "in terms of grammatical [...], semantic, pragmatic, interactional rhetorical, stylistic, narrative or genre analyses, among others, on the one hand, and through experiments, ethnography, interviewing, life stories, focus groups, participant observation, and so on, on the other hand".

Insofar as there is a predilection of the use of narratives in the existing literature for identifying motives, a scarcity emerges of a systematic analysis of how specific strategies are semiotically employed by a political actor to achieve or change set objective(s) within existing social structures. (Discursive) strategies that are defined as "a more or less intentional plan of practice (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal" (Wodak and Reisigl 2016, 33). As a result, the current thesis does not concentrate on identifying the motivations employed by Russian President Vladimir Putin in his official discourse to justify the military interventions in Syria and Ukraine, which has already been extensively discussed in the above-described literature, nor does it focus on narratives. In

contrast, the thesis contributes to the academic discourse by providing a comparative and systematic analysis of legitimising discourses and connected strategies and an identification of the possible presence of a discursive pattern between the Syrian and Ukrainian case studies.

Chapter 2: Methodology

To detect and classify legitimising discourses and correlated strategies in Russian official foreign political discourse on the military intervention in Syria and Ukraine, the thesis investigates 25 transcripts published on the Kremlin's official website between the 1st of June and the 30th of September 2015 for the Syrian case and between the 24th of November 2021 and the 24th of February 2022 for the Ukrainian case. The selected four-month time frame prior to the official presidential announcement of intervention is justified by limited space and time and case-related considerations. Indeed, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Muallem paid an official visit to Moscow at the end of June 2015 (President of the Russian Federation 2015), whilst Russia resumed the second build-up of military forces on the Ukrainian border in October-November 2021 (Jones et al., 2021). Furthermore, since the research questions are not interested in the existence of temporal continuity of argumentative tactics ex-ante and ex-post each intervention but rather with a comparative classification and identification of a possible pattern of legitimation across time and different foreign policies, the sole focus on the ex-ante period can be considered sufficient to serve the purpose.

The transcripts in the original Russian language[2] are 10 speeches for the Syrian case (STR) and 15 for the Ukrainian (UTR) one, approximately 20% of which are codable[3]. All speeches are direct speeches by the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, delivered during press

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[2] The transcripts are exclusively analysed in the original Russian language.

[3] The percentage of codable text is calculated by counting and summing the number of words for each transcript, including title, subtitle, day, time and place, and counting the number of words whose context is related to the two case studies under analysis, on which the proportion of the total is then calculated. For the Syrian case, the total number of words is 35,689, of which 7,271 are codable, resulting in a proportion of 20.37%. For the Ukrainian case, on the other hand, the total number of words is 126,438, of which 22,610 are codable, resulting in a proportion of analysed text of 17.88%.

conferences, interviews, meetings, and official occasions. Accordingly, events reports, news or phone call summaries from the sampled period are not scrutinised. In addition, from the listed transcripts, only the Syrian and Ukrainian-connected text sections of interest for detecting discursive legitimation strategies are analysed with the assistance of the qualitative data analysis software NVivo, leaving aside the not pertinent parts of texts.

2.1 Three Steps Methodology

The first methodological step, devoted to content analysis, involves Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) intended to provide contextual awareness as the basis for subsequently identifying legitimation tactics. More specifically, the texts are read, and their actions, actors, and circumstances are summarised in the potential *codes* enumerated in Table 1, following the three thematic categories already identified in the literature on Russian foreign political discourse on Syria and Ukraine, as outlined in the first chapter: *Russian civilisational identity, Place in the international world order,* and *Economics*. In addition, this first step simultaneously serves to counterproof the main themes for military intervention detected by the extant literature and possibly add any missing themes.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) has been advanced by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2022, 44) and described as a method of data analysis used to "organise, interrogate and interpret a dataset [...]" which encompasses a critical reflection on the role of the researcher and the process of research (Braun and Clarke 2022, 46). This implies that to enable an objective conclusion when interpreting texts, the researcher's biases and limitations are actively considered (Braun and Clarke 2022, 51-53). Such a method is distinguished by a six-step process, beginning

with familiarisation with the texts through reading and re-reading (listening or viewing) the dataset and note-taking. After becoming familiar with the texts, singular-idea segments deemed notably relevant to the research questions are identified and assigned a *code label*, allowing for their description. Subsequently, based on the detected codes, the initial *themes* are formed by identifying shared patterns of meaning. These themes are then reviewed, modified, enhanced, and formally labelled before being integrated into a final analytical discussion (Braun and Clarke 2022, 101-259). Insofar as codes and related themes are already present in the mentioned literature of Russian foreign political discourse, this first methodological step proves to be relatively quick, as it is solely used to organise the texts to be more in-depth analysed with Critical Discourse Studies (CDS). The latter is, in fact, employed in both the second and third methodological steps, characterised by the identification of the dominant discursive strategies in the texts under analysis and the connected semiotic choices or realisations.

Table 1: Potential codes rooted in the thematic categories of the existing literature

Themes	Potential Codes (Syria)	Potential Codes (Ukraine)
Russian civilisational identity	1. Remarks on cultural and social values sharing 2. Mentioning USSR historical legacy 3. Unheard necessities (peripheral position vis-a-vi the West)	1. Remarks on cultural and social values sharing 2. Mentioning USSR historical legacy 3. Unheard necessities (peripheral position vis-a-vi the West)
Place in the international world order	4. Sovereignty respect (statehood, territorial integrity, and meddling in internal affairs) 5. International law respect (primarily UN Security Council and Human Rights) 6. Western interventionism and regime change 7. Mentioning of North Caucasus 8. Mentioning Color Revolutions 9. Mentioning Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya 10. Terrorist threat 11. Anti-terrorist cooperation for fighting terrorism 12. Spillover effects into Russia 13. Great power ambitions	4. Sovereignty respect (statehood, territorial integrity, and meddling in internal affairs) 5. International law respect (primarily UN Security Council and Human Rights) 6. Mentioning of North Caucasus 7. Mentioning Ukraine 2014 8. Mentioning Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, and Syria 9. Nationalism and radicalism 10. Humanitarian intervention 11. Nuclear/missiles threat 12. Western military assistance 13. NATO expansion threat 14. Ukraine joining NATO 15. Great power ambitions
Economics	14. Naval base of Tarsus 15. Arms sales business 16. Energy business	16. Gas issues

Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) is a methodologically and theoretically multifaceted and problem-oriented interdisciplinary "school" that seeks to analyse social phenomena through the study of the content and form of a text. Precisely, CDS analyses a concrete linguistic realisation of "an abstract form of knowledge", discourse (Wodak and Meyer 2016, 3-6), which, according to Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl (2016, 27), can be defined as "a cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices that are situated within specific fields of social action". Written or oral language is thus socially constructed, involving a bidirectional shaping relationship between discourse and social structure(s) (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, 258).

Being Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) methodologically and theoretically multifaceted, there are various deductive and inductive approaches to CDS. To answer the research questions, a combined framework of two inductive approaches is functional. On the one hand, the inductive Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) primarily concentrated on the analysis of power-connected social phenomena, more specifically on "linguistic forms […] used in various expressions and manipulations of power" (Wodak and Reisigl 2016, 26). One of the characteristics of DHA is the use of triangulation, allowing for multiple data, methods, and theories, to which the role of the historical context is added (Wodak 2015, 2). Indeed, to be able to correctly interpret discourse, it is necessary to consider the historical background to "permit […] the reconstruction of how recontextualization functions as an important process linking texts and discourses intertextually and interdiscursively over time" (Wodak 2015, 2). Hence, intertextuality and interdiscursivity become additional relevant features, with the former referring to existing connections among different texts at different points in time expressed, for instance, through the same events references. Contrarily, the latter refers to existing connections among various topic-related

discourses (Wodak 2015, 5-7). On the other hand, the inductive Social Actors Approach, to which

Theodoor J. van Leeuwen and his categories of legitimation refer (Wodak and Meyer 2016, 18).

2.2 Theodoor J. van Leeuwen's Categories of Legitimation

The Social Actors Approach theorised by Theodoor J. van Leeuwen (2008, 3-6) is rooted

primarily in Michael Halliday's *Systemic functional grammar (SFG)* (1985) (van Leeuwen and

Wodak 1999, 93) and seeks to analyse the reconceptualisation of social practices. This means that

social practices are transformed into and represented through discourse, commonalities of which

are explored in the different texts that represent the same social practice. As a result, as Theodoor

van Leeuwen suggests (2008, 7), each social practice is defined by a unique collection of elements,

from which "specific discourses about social practices will select [...], transform [...] and add

further elements" (van Leeuwen 2016, 141). These elements are as follows: social actors

performing or participating in a social practice, a series of sequentially performed actions, ways in

which actions should be performed, characteristics and capabilities that social actors should

possess to be able to perform a social practice, the "style" through which social actors present

themselves, the time and place where actions are performed, and the resources required by the

actions to be performed (van Leeuwen 2008, 7-12).

However, during the transformation process from a social practice into discourse, discourse

can also add elements such as *repetitions, evaluations, reactions* (mental processes) and *motives*.

Motives are especially relevant as *purposes* and *legitimations* are taken into consideration, in

which legitimations are intended as reasons ("Why?") for social practices to be conducted (van

Leeuwen 2008, 17-21). From such addition of "contextually specific legitimations", questions of

"'Why?', 'Why should we do this?' and 'Why should we do this in this way?'" consequently arise (van Leeuwen 2008, 105), from which Theodoor van Leeuwen conceptualised his four categories of legitimation: *legitimation via authorisation, moral evaluation, rationalisation, and mythopoesis* (van Leeuwen 2008, 105-106). These four categories of legitimation, summarised in Table 2, are used for the present analysis of Russian official foreign political discourse in the Syrian and Ukrainian military interventions, the application of which is explained individually for each category during the analysis in the third chapter.

Table 2: Theoodor J. van Leeuwen's categories of legitimation

Category	Sub-category of legitimation	Brief description
Legitimation via Authorisation	*Personal Authority*	No need of legitimation because of the power status that the natural person possesses. i.e., "because I say so" clause
	Impersonal Authority	Use of laws and regulations as the primary explanation
	Authority of Conformity	Social practice that everyone follows. i.e., "the majority" or "many"
	Authority of Tradition	Social practice that has always been followed customarily or traditionally
	Expert Authority	Natural person possessing power in a field in which he/she is highly qualified. i.e., "According to the expert…" or "The expert believes…"
	Role Model Authority	Natural person who is regarded as a model to be followed and imitated
Legitimation via Moral Evaluation	*Evaluation*	Attributive adjectives encompassing moral evaluative claims such as "normal" or "useful" that can invoke a moral concept
	Abstraction	Employment of abstract qualitative terminology, such as verb "cooperate" or "collaborate" or "sacred"
	Analogies	Comparison advanced between a social practice and a similar or dissimilar practice linked to hedonistic moral values. i.e., "because it is good", "because it is bad"
Legitimation via Rationalisation	*Instrumental Rationality goal orientation*	Reference to the purpose of a social practice. Clauses such as "to", "so as to", and "in order to"
	Instrumental Rationality means orientation	Reference to the function of a social practice. Clauses such as "through" and "by means of" are included, along with verbs such as "allow", "facilitate", and "help"
	Instrumental Rationality effect orientation	Reference to the effects of a social practice. Clauses such as "so" and "so that"
	Theoretical Rationality definition	Social practice is defined in terms of another and defining verbs are utilised, such as "means", "symbolise", and "constitutes". Answers to the "because that's the way things are"
	Theoretical Rationality explanation	Not a social practice to be explicated but the actors that perform it. Answers to the "because that's the way they are"
	Theoretical Rationality predictions	Based on expertise
Legitimation via Mythopoesis	*Moral Tales*	The actor behaves in conformity with socially legitimate practices, resulting in a favourable ending
	Cautionary Tales	The actor does not behave in conformity, provoking a negative outcome

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Chapter 3: Analysis

3.1 Thematic Analysis

As can be noted from Table 3, the number of codes and related instances found for the Ukrainian case study is slightly higher than for the Syrian case, attributable to both a difference in the amount of text to be analysed[4] and to the greater relevance of the Ukrainian question in the Russian security agenda, being Ukraine directly adjacent to the Russian national borders. Furthermore, the performed thematic analysis reflects the prospective codes and connected themes presented in Table 1, collected from the existing literature on Russian foreign political discourse in the first chapter. Indeed, while the thematic category of *Place in the international world order* dominates throughout the transcripts of both case studies, *Russian civilisational identity* and *Economics* play a secondary role. However, while the latter serves a minor role in both cases, Russian civilisational identity has a more pronounced impact in the Ukrainian case in which are highlighted codes related to a shared cultural, historical, and social value system (3 appearances), but especially the USSR's historical legacy (7 appearances) and the peripheral position vis-à-vis the West expressed in the form of ignored Russian priorities (7 appearances). More explicitly, the statements that Ukraine has always been territorially and historically part of the Russian Federation (UTR5, 7, 12, 15) and that the "red lines" – "prevent further expansion of NATO, refuse NATO to deploy strike weapons systems on the Russian borders and return the military potential and infrastructure of the bloc in Europe to the state of 1997" (UTR12) – exposed to Western leaders during negotiations for a peaceful resolution of the Ukrainian dispute have been

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[4] Reference made to footnote number 2.

utterly overlooked (UTR1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12). Such codes are contrariwise scarce or absent in the Syrian case, with only 1 appearance for "Common cultural, historical and social values" and "USSR historical legacy".

Table 3: Thematic analysis by individual code and case study

Themes	Codes (Syria)	N.	Codes (Ukraine)	N.
Russian civilisational identity	Common cultural, historical and social values	1	Common cultural, historical and social values	3
	USSR historical legacy	1	USSR historical legacy	7
			Unheard necessities	7
Place in the international world order	Anti-terrorist cooperation	30	Peaceful cooperation	42
	Enemy	3	Enemy	2
	External (West) terrorist support	11	External (NATO and US) support	9
	(Absence) Great power ambitions	3	(Absence) Great power ambitions	1
	Foreign interference in domestic affairs	13	Foreign interference in domestic affairs	4
	International law respect (United Nations authority)	19 (8)	International law respect (and Human Rights violation)	57 (14)
	Terrorist threat	70	Terrorist threat	8
	Interests defence	5	Security defence	68
	National security threat	11	National security threat	42
	Nuclear weapons	1	Nuclear weapons	7
	People's rights	4	People's rights	7
	Recalls Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011)	18	Recalls Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011) and Syria (2015)	5
	Recalls terrorism in Chechnya (1990s-2000s)	1	Recalls terrorism in Chechnya (1990s-2000s)	5
	Regime change	10	Regime change	5
	Sovereignty respect	12	Sovereignty respect	14
	Violence	8	Violence	14
	Democracy exportation	1	2014 Crimea and coup d'état consequences	18
	Evil	4	ABM treaty and defence missiles to Russia's bordering countries	19
	Healthy opposition	6	Balance of power	5
	Ineffectiveness of US fighting terrorism	5	Donbass future	3
	Migration	7	Humanitarian intervention	5
	Political reforms	14	NATO threat	52
	Russian – CIS citizens joining IS	3	Military assistance	4
	Support to the legitimate regime	27	Minsk Agreements (history and violation)	24
			Post-Soviet state's formation and order	19
			Radicalism – Nationalism	9
			Recalls Yugoslavia	5
			Republics recognition	7
			Ukraine formation	14
Economics			Gas Issues (Nord Stream)	2

Focusing on the primary thematic category, codes linked to national security, respect for sovereignty and international law, and interference perpetrated by the West stand out in both case studies. As far as the Syrian Arab Republic is concerned, the primary underlying motive used by President Vladimir Putin to justify Russian military intervention in the country is the international and national terrorist threat with 70 appearances (all transcripts), accompanied by the need for joint anti-terrorist international cooperation in its opposition (30 appearances, STR1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10). Indeed, following the events of the late 1990s and early 2000s in the North Caucasus, fear resurfaced on the possibility that Russian citizens who joined the ranks of the Islamic State might have returned to Russian territory and spread the terrorist threat again (STR1, 5, 8, 10).

Moreover, the Russian military assistance provided in response to an official request from the legitimate al-Assad authority proves critical, as the regime's Army is stated to be the only effective body on the ground engaged in the fight against terrorism. Military assistance is, therefore, necessary for the legitimate Syrian government to regain control of the territory that is 60% hostage to the Islamic State and other local terrorist organisations (STR8). Such a statement, however, simultaneously represents a criticism of the Western involvement in the conflict, which ineffectively acted and interfered with Syrian sovereignty by backing and arming the opposition factions (29 appearances, STR1, 4, 5, 6, 9, 9). The reason why Vladimir Putin reinforces the justness and legality of his policy by continually emphasising the assistance given to a regime considered legitimate (27 appearances, STR1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10), in conjunction with repeated breaches of UN Security Council authority perpetrated by the United States in previous self-interested interventions in Iraq (2003) and Libya (2011) (36 appearances, STR1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10). Allegedly, these interventions resulted in the creation of international terrorism through regime change.

Contrarily, as far as Ukraine is concerned, the primary motivation behind Russian military intervention is the defence of national security, with 71 appearances, in terms of NATO expansion (52 appearances) and military backing offered to countries bordering the Russian Federation (19 appearances). With 14 appearances each, human rights discrimination and violations by means of genocide (UTR3, 6, 7, 8, 12, 14, 15) and the use of force by Ukrainian authorities against the population of the separatist People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk are equally stressed (UTR3, 5, 7, 12, 14, 15), encouraging a humanitarian approach in the face of growing nationalism (UTR5, 7, 12, 14, 15).

Similar to the Syrian case, the justness and legality of the operation are enhanced not only by violations of human rights but also by references to international law violations (43 appearances), especially in Western military support for Ukraine and meddling in internal affairs (13 appearances), supported by recalls of previous interventions in Yugoslavia, the North Caucasus, Crimea, and the Middle East (33 appearances, UTR3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 12, 14, 15). Interesting is the code "People's Rights", with 4 appearances for Syria and 7 for Ukraine, in which Vladimir Putin firmly reiterates Russia's stance against outside interference by arguing how only the local people have the right to decide their political fate. Ukraine's refusal to implement the Minsk Agreements is considered an additional violation of international law (24 appearances, UTR3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 14).

Interesting is also the code "Great Power Ambitions" which, unlike the existing literature, emphasises the absence of a race for power, as stressed by President Vladimir Putin himself in the statement: "We don't have some kind of fetish about Russia's superpower on the world stage. We are engaged in only one thing – the protection of our fundamental interests" (STR8). Additionally, the depiction of Russian foreign policy as defensive is significant in the Ukrainian instance but

equally present in the Syrian case. With 42 appearances, indeed, stress is posed on the Russian attempts to collaborate, negotiate with the parties involved in the conflict and do everything in Russia's power to resolve the Ukrainian question by peaceful means (UTR1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 12, 14, 15). However, Ukraine's reluctance to adhere to the Minsk Agreements and the Western partners' refusal to consider the Russian red lines and provide security guarantees (UTR1, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12) have led Russia to recognise the separatist People's Republics and ultimately resort to force as the last available means of resolution (4 appearances). In effect, this would reflect the non-interventionist foreign policy based on the principle of self-defence outlined in the first chapter. Further support of such an assertion is Vladimir Putin's statement: "Russia pursues a peaceful foreign policy, but it has the right to ensure its security [...] in the medium or long term" (UTR2).

3.2 Legitimation Categories

3.2.1 *Legitimation via Authorisation*

Legitimation via authorisation pertains to authority, be it a custom, natural person, or commendation. Specifically, legitimation may manifest itself via *Impersonal* and *Expert Authority.* Impersonal authority emphasises the use of laws and regulations as the primary explanation, with an explicit reference to law-related nouns such as "rule" or "policy" and correlated adjectives such as "compulsory" "or "binding" (van Leeuwen 2007, 96). Expert authority, on the other hand, applies to a natural person possessing power in a field in which he/she is highly qualified. In this case, the opinion of the expert, as well as his/her title by "verbal process clauses" or "mental process clauses" such as "According to the expert…" or "The expert

believes…", are cited to substantiate a piece of transmitted information (van Leeuwen 2007, 94-95). Additionally, legitimacy through authority can equally be provided by *Authority of Conformity*, which, frequently articulated with frequency modalities as "the majority" or "many", involves a practice that everyone follows and that, consequently, the information receiver should adhere to as well (van Leeuwen 2007, 96-97).

As exemplified in Table 4, of the 205 legitimation categories via authorisation found in the transcripts analysed of both cases, 186 correspond to the just described impersonal, expert and via conformity authorisation (50 Syria and 136 Ukraine), showing a similar trend for both cases.

Table 4: Legitimation via Authorisation

Sub-category of legitimation	Number (Syria)	Instance (Syria)	Number (Ukraine)	Instance (Ukraine)
Personal Authority	3 - 5%	"In the coming days, Russia, as the Chairman of the Security Council, will convene a ministerial meeting for a comprehensive analysis of threats in the Middle East" (STR6)	5 - 3%	"As a former director of the FSB, I know this for sure: we worked with double agents, they reported to us what tasks the Western special services set for them" (UTR5)
Impersonal Authority	17 - 30%	"Russia's participation in the anti-terrorist operation in Syria is carried out on the basis of international law, in accordance with the official address of the President of the Syrian Arab Republic to us" (STR10)	79 - 53%	"There is article 5 of the treaty on the creation of NATO, from which it is clear that all the countries of the alliance must fight on the side of one of its members if it is subjected to some kind of aggression" (UTR11)
Authority of Conformity	22 - 39%	"It seems to me that many people today agree with such a position as ours" (STR1)	24 - 16%	"In my opinion, it is obvious to everyone that the current authorities in Kiev have set a course to dismantle the Minsk agreements" (UTR7)
Authority of Tradition	1 - 2%	"We have traditionally had very good relations with the Middle East in general, traditionally, I want to emphasize, we have always had very good relations" (STR8)	5 - 3%	"It has always been in history; the fate of Russia is in the reliable hands of our multinational people. And this means that the decisions taken will be fulfilled, the goals set will be achieved, and the security of our Homeland is reliably guaranteed" (UTR15)
Expert Authority	11 - 20%	"The terrorists are already publicly saying that they are aiming at Mecca, Medina, Jerusalem. In their plans there is the expansion of their activity to Europe, Russia, Central and Southeast Asia" (STR5)	33 - 23%	"In recent days, the NATO leadership has been directly talking about the need to accelerate, boost the advance of the Alliance's infrastructure to the borders of Russia" (UTR15)
Role Model Authority	2 - 4%	"We consider it a huge mistake to refuse to cooperate with the Syrian authorities, the government army, with those who bravely, face to face, are fighting terror" (STR6)	3 - 2%	"Let me remind you that in the XVIII century, Alexander Suvorov's soldiers fought for this city. Thanks to their courage, it became part of Russia" (UTR12)

In what concerns Vladimir Putin's discursive practices in the Syrian case, the dominance of authority of conformity employed in the emphasis of an international consensus in the fight against a common enemy, or as better defined by President Vladimir Putin, a "common" or "absolute evil" (STR1, 2, 8) is noteworthy, with 22 appearances. Instances are "Everyone is ready to contribute to the fight against this evil" (STR2) or "I think, I just do not doubt that almost all speakers from the rostrum of the United Nations will talk about the problem of fighting, about the need to fight terrorism" (STR8), where terms as "everyone" and "almost all" are used. Additionally, "evil" can simultaneously be traced back to the legitimation category via moralisation, where, as van Leeuwen suggests (2008, 110), legitimation via authority may be combined with values linked to hedonistic, moral, and aesthetic qualitative terminology as "good" or "bad".

The legitimation of Russian military assistance is further strengthened by concomitantly utilising this sub-category to de-legitimise the Islamic State by highlighting the number of people affected by its operations, along with the stressing of a lack of assistance to the al-Assad regime in its opposition. Indeed, examples are statements like "Today, terrorism represents a threat to many countries of the world, a large number of people suffer from its criminal acts – hundreds of thousands, millions of people" (STR8) and "I want you and your viewers and listeners to finally realise that no one, except the Assad Army, is fighting ISIS and other terrorist organisations in the Syrian territory, no one" (STR8), where terms as "thousands", "millions", and "no one" are employed with a negative connotation.

The second most encountered sub-category of impersonal authority with 17 appearances, on the other hand, is used to express the legality of Russian action by claiming that military assistance outside a state's borders is only legal within the framework of Article 7 of the UN

Charter[5], with the authorisation of the UN Security Council, or at the request of a country's government (STR6, 8, 9, 10). As in authority of conformity, this sub-category is also used to de-legitimise past Western interventions in the Middle Eastern area, as well as Western support for the opposition to the al-Assad regime at the time of the Russian action: "The provision of military support to illegitimate structures does not meet the principles of modern international law and the Charter of the United Nations. We support exclusively legal government structures" (STR8). With 11 appearances, the latter is also confirmed by expert voices, including public statements by the same terrorists (STR5) and reports from the Pentagon (STR8), Russian special services, and the Russian military (STR1, 9).

Although in the Ukrainian case, the most frequently observed authorisation sub-categories are the same, the sub-category of impersonal authority dominates with 79 appearances, followed by expert authority with 33 and authority of conformity with 24 appearances. Backed by voices of experts, impersonal authority is primarily employed as de-legitimation in three specific contexts:

(i) First, against the discriminatory laws issued by the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada against the Russian population of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (UTR5, 8, 12) and the breach of international law perpetrated by the unwillingness of the Ukrainian authority to implement the signed Minsk Package of Measures (UTR3, 5, 7, 8, 14). Whilst the former represents human rights violations suggesting legal bases for humanitarian intervention, the latter is particularly relevant as

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[5] Article 7 of the UN Charter goes as follows: "1. There are established as principal organs of the United Nations: a General Assembly, a Security Council, an Economic and Social Council, a Trusteeship Council, an International Court of Justice and a Secretariat. 2. Such subsidiary organs as may be found necessary may be established in accordance with the present Charter" (United Nations Commission, n.d.).

hindering possible Russian-Ukrainian negotiations. This can also be inferred from the questions posed by President Putin to the Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration Kozak Dmitry Nikolaevich, during the Security Council meeting on the 21st of February 2022:

> That is […] for example, the Kyiv authorities do not want to talk directly with the republics? They say that they intend to do this in dialogue with Russia, but as soon as Russia offers steps towards a settlement within the framework of the Minsk agreements, hysteria begins about Russia interfering in the internal affairs of Ukraine? […] And the key provision of the Minsk Agreements is that all these changes, including changes in the Constitution, must be coordinated with the LPR and the DPR, is ignored, do I understand you correctly? (UTR11)

(ii) Second, against the actions of the United States and NATO allies in pursuing a "[…] military strategy [...] [where] Russia is directly called the main security threat and enemy" (UTR7), along with blaming the 2008 NATO "open door" policy for Ukraine and Georgia accession to the Alliance (UTR3, 7, 8, 12, 15). Citing both the 1999 OSCE Charter for European Security, the 2010 OSCE Astana Declaration on the principle of equal and indivisible security (UTR12), and Article 10 of the NATO Treaty[6], Vladimir Putin stresses the illegality of the "open door" policy since guaranteeing security and joining any (military) alliances cannot take place at the expense of other states' security (UTR8).

(iii) Third, against the Western deployment of defensive strike weapons at Russian borders outside the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) and Agreements on medium-range missiles (UTR1,12, 6).

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[6] Article 10 of the NATO Treaty goes as follows: "The Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty. Any State so invited may become a Party to the Treaty by depositing its instrument of accession with the Government of the United States of America. The Government of the United States of America will inform each of the Parties of the deposit of each such instrument of accession" (NATO 1949).

Lastly, additional support for the defensive foreign policy highlighted in the Thematic Analysis section is provided by the appeal to Article 51 point 7 of the UN Charter[7], used by President Vladimir Putin to give deeper legitimacy to the special military operation officially declared on the 24th of February 2022, depicted as a preventive self-defensive action against a national security threat (UTR15).

In both Syrian and Ukrainian cases, other forms of legitimation via authority are less frequently used. *Personal Authority* describes a legitimation granted by a natural person who holds power or operates within an institution with an authoritative status. This type of legitimation is characterised by a "verbal process clause" not directly communicated in that it invokes the "because I say so" clause by leveraging the status and role that this natural person holds (van Leeuwen 2007, 94). In contrast, *Authority of Tradition* refers to a practice that has always been followed customarily or traditionally (van Leeuwen 2007, 96). Lastly, legitimation through authorisation could further appear in the form of *Role Model Authority* centred around a natural person who is regarded as a role model to be followed and imitated, as in the case of a celebrity or a peer (van Leeuwen 2007, 95-96).

While in the Syrian case, such forms of authorisation are virtually absent with the exception of the use of the role model authority to praise the courage and prowess of al-Assad's forces in the fight against terrorism (STR6), in the Ukrainian case, a few more appearances can be seen, although still scarce. Particularly relevant among these is the authority of tradition (5 appearances),

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[7] Article 51 of the UN Charter goes as follows: "Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security" (United Nations Commission, n.d.).

used to emphasise the historical, cultural, social and blood ties that have always existed between Russia and Ukraine, thus making the latter an integral part of the Russian Federation itself (UTR12, 15). This is additionally utilised to reiterate the foundational role of state sovereignty in each society, as suggested by the statement "And you and I know that the real strength lies in justice and truth, which is on our side. And if this is the case, then it is difficult not to agree that it is strength and readiness to fight that underlie independence and sovereignty, and they are the necessary foundation on which alone one can reliably build one's future, build one's home, one's family, one's Homeland" (UTR15).

3.2.2 *Legitimation via Moral Evaluation*

Legitimation through moralisation is concerned with values, and it is the least considered explicit legitimation category and the most difficult to detect, requiring, for the latter detection, the use of historical, social, and cultural knowledge. Indeed, legitimation via moralisation presents itself rarely as an explicit discursive structure expressed, for instance, in hedonistic terms (van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999, 108). It is, more frequently, expressed by adjectives encompassing moral evaluative claims such as "normal" or "useful" that are capable of invoking a moral concept (van Leeuwen 2008, 110). This type of legitimation is precisely named *Moral Legitimation via Evaluation,* and it is often accompanied by naturalisation, "a specific form of moral evaluation […] which […] denies morality and replaces moral and cultural orders with the 'natural order'" (van Leeuwen 2008, 111). With 24 appearances for Syria and 47 appearances for Ukraine, moral evaluation is significant in both case studies through the use of evaluative adjectives as in the

following example: "I consider an advice of this kind [(Assad to give up power)] from the outside to be absolutely inappropriate, harmful and contrary to international law" (STR8).

Legitimation via moralisation could also appear as *Moral Legitimation via Analogies or Abstraction.* As for the former, an implicit or explicit comparison is advanced between social practice and a similar or dissimilar practice linked to hedonistic moral values, circumstances or via conjunctions expressing similarity (van Leeuwen 2008, 111-112). An instance is "Because instead of responding to people's request for peace, using these sentiments in Ukrainian society, President Zelensky came to power and, instead of fulfilling them, fell, like previous leaders, under the influence of radical elements – as on Ukraine is said to be a Nazi" (UTR5), where the conjunction "like" is used. As for the latter, instead, a social practice is framed through the employment of abstract qualitative terminology, which, in turn, moralises the practice as being linked to a moral values discourse (van Leeuwen 2008, 111). An example found in both case studies is Vladimir Putin's use of nouns and adjectives such as "evil" or "sacred", establishing a direct link with religious values (UTR15, STR1, 2, 8).

Table 5: Legitimation via Moralisation

Sub-category of legitimation	Number (Syria)	Instance (Syria)	Number (Ukraine)	Instance (Ukraine)
Evaluation	24 - 12%	"I just have no doubt that practically all speakers from the rostrum of the United Nations will talk about the problem of fighting, about the need to fight terrorism, and I also cannot get away from this topic. This is natural, because it is a serious common threat for all of us, it is a challenge for all of us" (STR8)	47 - 14%	"To predict any concrete outline of possible actions is impossible" (UTR14)
Abstraction	167 - 87%	"Aggressive external interference led to the fact that instead of reforms, state institutions and the way of life itself were simply unceremoniously destroyed" (STR6)	269 - 82%	"I have always said that it is necessary to solve the problem of Donbass through peaceful negotiations and the implementation of the Minsk agreements" (UTR14)
Analogies	2 - 1%	"[…] to create a truly broad international anti-terrorist coalition. Like the anti-Hitler coalition, it could rally a variety of forces in its ranks, ready to resolutely resist those who, like the Nazis, sow evil and misanthropy" (STR6)	13 - 4%	"Even the notorious leading role of the party, like a morning fog, disappears without a trace right before their eyes" (UTR12)

Interesting is not only the fact that, for both Syria and Ukraine, abstraction is the most used sub-category of moralisation with 167 and 269 appearances respectively, but also the fact that the primary value domains instilled are the same. The primary value domains are as follows:

(i)   *Values of "(Keeping) Commitment/Engagement"* is especially used in remarking how the Russian Federation engages in conformity with international norms and maintains all the agreed commitments in contrast to the West and especially the US. Instances are "We signed big contracts with Syria five or seven years ago, and we are fulfilling them all in full" (STR4) or "They said: we will not expand. And expand. They said: there will be equal guarantees for everyone under a number of international agreements. And this equal security does not happen" (UTR5).

(ii)   *Values of "Hegemony"* is used both to legitimise Vladimir Putin's actions and simultaneously de-legitimise Western and the Islamic State operations, as in "[IS] aims at domination in the Islamic world and not only there" (STR6) and "[Ukraine] reduced to the level of a colony with a puppet regime" (UTR12), where the term "colony", reminiscent of the era of the great colonial empires, is used.

(iii)   *Values of "Leadership"* which proves the leadership of the Russian Federation as a state in the international system, as in the following "Russia, as you know, has proposed to immediately take up the formation of a broad coalition to counter extremists" (STR5) and "We are well aware of our colossal responsibility for regional and global stability. [(Indeed)] Back in 2008, Russia put forward an initiative to conclude a European security treaty" (UTR12).

(iv)   *Values of "(Respect of) States' Legal Equality and Sovereignty",* as in "treat each other with respect" (STR1) and "The future of Donbas should be determined by the people who live in Donbas" (UTR5); equally used to de-legitimise US behaviour described as an "unceremonious interference in the affairs of the region […]" (STR10).

(v)   *Values of "(Western) Offensive Foreign Policy*", as in the instances of "the export of the so-called 'democratic' revolutions continues" (STR6) and "accelerate, boost the advance of the Alliance's infrastructure to the borders of Russia" (UTR15).

(vi)   *Values of "(Russian Non-interventionist) Defensive Foreign Policy"* is expressed, for example, in the Syrian "We have not destabilised the situation in these countries, in entire regions of the world. It is not we who are destroying and have been destroying state institutions of power there, creating power vacuums that are immediately filled with terrorists" (STR5), or in the Ukrainian case "I have always said that it is necessary to solve the problem of Donbas through peaceful negotiations" (UTR14).

(vii)   *Values of "Mediation",* where the Russian Federation is portrayed as a mediating actor whose task is to convince the parties to negotiate peacefully. This reinforces the defensive, non-interventionist foreign policy, as well as the emphasis on the different foreign policies pursued by Russia and the West. Examples are: "We are ready to continue to act in the same direction, pushing both sides, both the official authorities and the opposition, to reach an agreement with each other, but by peaceful means" (STR8) and "We see our role in being intermediaries in creating the best conditions for determining the future of the people who live in this territory" (UTR5).

(viii)   *Values of "Cooperation"* is manifested with verbs and phrases such as "to join forces to solve the new problems" (STR6), "to fight terrorism and extremism effectively together" (STR 4), or "ready to work with those forces that would like to build relations with Russia in such a neighbourly way" (UTR5).

(ix)   *Values of "Public Interest"* is referred to general phrases such as "protection of our fundamental interests" (STR 8), "protecting our sovereignty and legitimate interests" (STR8), "ensuring security" (UTR5), or "unconditional provision of Russia's security today and for the historical perspective" (UTR5). It manifests, however, also with the use of modal verbs, as in "We need long-term, legally binding guarantees" (UTR4) or concerns, as in "we are concerned about their [(Russian citizens joining IS)] possible return to our territories" (STR5).

(x)   *Values of "Violence and Fear",* where the violence perpetrated by the Islamic State and the Ukrainian authority against the local population is emphasised, as in the statements "[IS] burn people alive or drown them, cut off the heads of living people" (STR4) or "Extrajudicial killings, sanctions against its citizens, which is contrary to the law and the Constitution of Ukraine, or just murder on the street" (UTR5).

(i)   *Values of "Humanitarian Assistance",* in which conditions such as "The so-called Islamic State controls significant territories and Iraq, and Syria" (STR6), signifying a loss of state sovereignty, and "Human rights are massively and systematically violated in Ukraine, discrimination against the Russian-speaking population is enshrined at the legislative level" (UTR8) express basis for the provision of humanitarian assistance.

(ii) *Values of "National Identity",* where community unification is conveyed using evocative terms such as "Homeland" or "Fatherland", as in the statement: "Ultimately, as it has always been in history, the fate of Russia is in the safe hands of our multinational people. And this means that the decisions taken will be fulfilled, the goals set will be achieved, and the security of our Homeland is reliably guaranteed" (UTR15).

The last values domain of interest, especially for the Ukrainian case, is the *"Anti-Russian" Values,* employed by President Vladimir Putin to de-legitimise Western actions in Ukrainian territory and, therefore, legitimise Russian choice of military intervention by stressing how the United States is pursuing a clear anti-Russian policy. Instances are: "In the territories adjacent to us – I note, in our own historical territories – an "anti-Russia" hostile to us is being created, which is put under full external control, is being intensively settled by the armed forces of NATO countries and is being pumped up with the most modern weapons" (UTR15) and "Their [(US)] most important task is to restrain the development of Russia. […] By dragging us into some kind of armed conflict and forcing, including its allies in Europe, to impose against us the toughest sanctions that the United States is talking about today […]" (UTR6).

3.2.3 *Legitimation via Rationalisation*

Legitimation through Rationalisation is associated with both *Instrumental* and *Theoretical Rationality*, where the purpose of social practice is linked with a *generalised* or a *moralised action*. For the identification of rationalisation, however, the latter is particularly relevant since, according to Theoodor van Leeuwen, a moral component is required to be able to legitimise the purpose of social practice (van Leeuwen 2008, 114). Despite such postulation, both types of activity are

present in the Syrian and Ukrainian case studies with generalised actions carrying implicit positive or negative moral connotations, as in the statement: "Russia has every right to take retaliatory measures to ensure its own security" (UTR12), where moral values of sovereignty, territorial integrity and protection of citizens are highlighted.

Instrumental rationality can emerge in the form of *goal orientation, means orientation, and effect orientation,* all observable in a very close pattern in terms of frequency usage in the Syrian and Ukrainian cases, as per Table 6.

As can be deduced from the label, goal orientation is anchored in the conscious or unconscious aim of social practice. As van Leeuwen argues, thus, this discursive structure responds to the formula "I do x in order to do (or be or have) y" and necessitates an explicitly expressed agency of the actor linked through clauses such as "to" and "in order to" to a practice and its aim, both of which have the same agent (van Leeuwen 2008, 114). "We are ready to work with the President of [Syria] in order to provide a path of political transformation so that all people who live in Syria feel access to the tools of power to get away from armed confrontation" (STR1) is an instance of the sub-category of goal orientation in the Syrian case, the latter of which, with 23 appearances, represents the primary sub-category of rationalisation. Likewise, with 53 appearances, "In recent months, at the end of last year, we have intensified our work with our main partners in Washington and NATO, in order to finally agree on these security measures and ensure the calm, prosperous development of the country in peaceful conditions" (UTR11) is an example related to the Ukrainian case.

With 17 Syrian and 41 Ukrainian appearances, rationalisation via means orientation, which concentrates on the mode for achieving a social practice's aim, is also observable. As a result, clauses such as "through" and "by means of" are included, transforming the moralised action into

a means for the achievement of a purpose (van Leeuwen 2008, 114). Instances are "There is no other way to solve the Syrian problem except by strengthening the existing legal state structures, helping them in the fight against terrorism, but also, of course, encouraging them at the same time to have a positive dialogue with a healthy part of the opposition and to carry out political transformations" (STR8) and "It is obvious that such events [(US and NATO regular joint military exercises with Ukraine)] serve as a cover for the rapid build-up of the NATO military group on the territory of Ukraine" (UTR12).

Furthermore, in both cases, a "need" process, linking a moralised activity (objectivated in the first instance) can additionally be noted, as in the cases of "If we set ourselves the goal of solving specific tasks, achieving a specific goal, then such work requires coordination in order to be effective" (STR9) or "In this regard, I consider it necessary to take a long overdue decision – to immediately recognise the independence and sovereignty of the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic" (UTR12), where verbs as "requires" and "necessary" are utilised.

Moreover, in the Ukrainian case, it is possible to further identify the legitimation of an action purpose based on its *potential*, expressed with verbal clauses such as "allow", "help", and "promote" (van Leeuwen 2008, 115), as in the statement "I hope that this first positive reaction and the announcement of a possible start of work in the near future, in the first days of January, will allow us to move forward" (UTR5).

Lastly, with 17 appearances for the Syrian case and 30 for the Ukrainian, it is possible to notice the presence of effect orientation rationalisation, which emphasises the consequences of social practice through resulting clauses such as "so" and "so that" (van Leeuwen 2008, 115). At this juncture, relevant examples are "We consider any attempts to flirt with terrorists, and even more so to arm them, not just short-sighted, but fire hazardous. As a result, the global terrorist

threat may critically increase and cover new regions of the planet" (STR6) and "Do you understand or not that if Ukraine is in NATO, it will return Crimea to itself by military means, European countries will automatically be drawn into a military conflict with Russia" (UTR7).

Table 6: Legitimation via Rationalisation

Sub-category of legitimation	Number (Syria)	Instance (Syria)	Number (Ukraine)	Instance (Ukraine)
Instrumental Rationality goal orientation	23 (9 generalised) - 35%	"If we set ourselves the goal of solving specific tasks, achieving a specific goal, then such work requires coordination in order to be effective" (STR9)	53 (26 generalised, 3 potential) - 37%	"The Soviet Union has done everything to build normal relations with the West and with The United States" (UTR5)
Instrumental Rationality means orientation	17 (8 generalised) - 26%	"I am forced to note that recently our honest and direct approach has been used as an excuse (pretext) to accuse Russia of growing ambitions" (STR6)	41 (8 generalised) - 29%	"As the current head of Ukraine did, for example, by anathematizing the previous head, prosecuting him criminally for some allegedly treacherous actions, he does not like the Minsk Agreements" (UTR14)
Instrumental Rationality effect orientation	17 (6 generalised) - 26%	"Without strengthening state structures in the states of the region, including in Syria, none of these issues can be solved, and if we miss the time, the terrorists will simply celebrate victory" (STR7)	30 (11 generalised) - 21%	"In general, it seems that almost everywhere, in many regions of the world, where the West comes to establish its order, bloody, unhealed wounds, ulcers of international terrorism and extremism remain as a result" (UTR15)
Theoretical Rationality definition	3 - 5%	"All our contacts with the countries of the region – we have very good relations with all countries without exception – indicate that with such an organization as the so-called Islamic State, everyone is ready to make their contribute to the fight against this evil" (STR2)	6 - 4%	"I think that just good implies the ability to protect yourself" (UTR14)
Theoretical Rationality explanation	3 - 5%	"[(IS)] It has become unique because it is becoming global" (STR8)	7 - 5%	"These are different issues, but they are nevertheless very closely linked to the global problems of ensuring security in the world in general and on the European continent in particular, because the use of Ukraine as an instrument of confrontation with our country, with Russia, poses (represents), of course, a serious, very big threat to us" (UTR11)
Theoretical Rationality predictions	2 - 3%	"We hope that the international community will be able to develop a comprehensive strategy for political stabilization and socio-economic recovery of the Middle East. Then, dear friends, you won't have to build refugee camps either. The flow of people forced to leave their native land literally overwhelmed neighboring countries first, and then Europe" (STR6)	6 - 4%	"Russia is one of the leading nuclear powers, and in some components, it is even ahead of many in modern times. There will be no winners, and you will find yourself drawn into this conflict against your will" (UTR7)

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As far as theoretical rationality is concerned, the number of appearances found in the case studies analysed is lower compared to instrumental rationality. Contrarily to instrumental rationality, theoretical rationality is connected not to "whether the action is morally justified or not, nor in whether it is purposeful or effective, but in whether it is founded on some kind of truth, on 'the way things are'" (van Leeuwen 2008, 115-116). It can be of *definition,* where social practice is defined in terms of another and defining verbs are utilised, such as "means", "symbolise," and "constitutes" (van Leeuwen 2008, 116), as in the Syrian statement "After all, what is state sovereignty, which colleagues have already talked about here? First of all, it is a question of freedom, of free choice of one's destiny for each person, for the people, for the state" (STR6). Theoretical rationality can be of *explanation*, where it is not the social practice to be explicated but the actors that perform it (van Leeuwen 2008, 116), as in the following Ukrainian example "The coup was bloody, people were killed and burned" (UTR5). Finally, theoretical rationality can also be articulated in terms of *predictions* based on expertise (van Leeuwen 2008, 116), as in "We understand, but we also understand that Russia is one of the leading nuclear powers, and in some components, it is even ahead of many in modern times. There will be no winners, and you will find yourself [(European countries)] drawn into this conflict against your will" (UTR7).

3.2.4 Legitimation via Mythopoesis

Legitimation through Mythopoesis involves *storytelling*. To be more precise, the development of *Moral Tales* in which the actor behaves in conformity with socially legitimate

practices, resulting in a favourable ending or *Cautionary Tales* in which the actor does not behave in conformity, provoking a negative outcome (van Leeuwen 2008, 118).

As noticeable in Table 7, analysing the two case studies a disproportion in the use of this legitimation category emerges, as the frequency in the Ukrainian case is significantly higher, with 79 appearances, compared to the Syrian case, with only 13 appearances. In the latter cautionary tales are used to present especially the negative consequences of Western ideological exportation and interference in domestic affairs in Soviet and post-Soviet times. Particularly, storytelling is employed by President Putin in recalling Western interventions in the Middle East and Africa, such as Iraq and Libya, thus emphasising the *topos* of history. An example is the statement:

> Here in Iraq: there was a famous character Saddam Hussein, was he good or bad, because at some stage (You probably forgot or what?) but after all, the United States actively cooperated with Saddam when he was at war with Iran: they helped him with weapons, provided diplomatic support, political support, and so on. Then for some reason, they quarrelled with him and decided to liquidate him. But by eliminating Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi statehood was eliminated, and thousands of people from the former Baath party, thousands of Iraqi soldiers who were part of the Sunni elite of the state, were thrown out into the street. No one thought about them, and today they have joined the ISIS army (STR8).

The *topos* of history is equally stressed in the Ukrainian case, where cautionary tales are primarily employed for the description of the creation and signing of the Minsk Agreements and the consequences that subsequent attempts of the Ukrainian authority to dismantle them brought, the failure of NATO members to keep their post-Cold-War promise not to expand eastwards, and the detrimental consequences that Western actions have provoked for the statehood and citizens of Yugoslavia, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and ultimately Russia. On the other hand, moral tales are almost exclusively linked to the history of the Soviet and post-Soviet relations between the Russian Federation and the Western countries, especially the United States, the history of the post-Soviet

Russian formation and the birth of Ukraine, as well as the 2014 Ukrainian coup d'état. An instance of a moral tale is the following:

> Until now, despite the fact that the Soviet Union ceased to exist, part of the historical Russian territories with the population of historical Russia turned out to be outside the Russian Federation, primarily Ukraine, we accepted this, treated it normally, moreover, contributed to the formation of new states and worked, and were ready to work, and we are working with all governments, no matter what foreign policy orientation they adhere to (UTR5).

Furthermore, with the use of tales, the contrast emphasised in the analysis of previous legitimation categories between the foreign policy pursued by the Russian Federation and the United States, and thus the strategy of the "us" v "them" comparison is exalted. Indeed, there is sometimes a victimisation of the "us" and simultaneous condemnation and blame of the actions perpetrated by the "them" against the Middle Eastern countries, the population of the separatist People's Republics, and Russia, contravening international legal and moral norms. An example in the Syrian case is the following:

> It is enough to look at the situation in the Middle East and North Africa, as mentioned by the previous speaker. Of course, political and social problems in this region have been brewing for a long time, and people there, of course, wanted changes. But what happened in practice? Aggressive external interference led to the fact that instead of reforms, state institutions and the way of life itself were simply unceremoniously destroyed. Instead of the triumph of democracy and progress, there is violence, poverty, and social catastrophe, and human rights, including the right to life, are not put into anything (STR6).

In this case, the victimised "us" is not represented by the Russian Federation but by the Middle Eastern countries experiencing aggressive actions by a Western "them". Yet, this indirectly exalts the offensiveness of Western policy in comparison to the Russian one. The instance in the Ukrainian case, instead, shows the positioning of Russia and the West on opposite sides of the spectrum of "good and evil" or "just and unjust", portraying Russia as a defensive country against an offensive opponent:

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In the 90s, in the early 2000s, when the so-called collective West most actively supported separatism and mercenary gangs in the south of Russia. What sacrifices, what losses it all cost us then, what trials we had to go through before we finally broke the back of international terrorism in the Caucasus. We remember this and will never forget it (UTR15).

Additionally, interesting to note is that although mythopoesis has slightly fewer appearances than sub-categories of legitimation via authorisation and rationalisation in the Ukrainian case, storytelling holds a more prominent position, especially in the declaration of the recognition of the independence of the two separatist People's Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk of the 21st of February 2022 (UTR12) and the declaration of the special military operation of the 24th of February 2022 (UTR15). Indeed, in these two specific transcripts, mythopoesis covers approximately 50% of the text, compared, for instance, to approximately 30% of coverage of legitimation via authorisation, being a narrated account of historical events where the use of authorisation appears less necessary.

Table 7: Legitimation via Mythopoesis

Sub-category of legitimation	Number (Syria)	Instance (Syria)	Number (Ukraine)	Instance (Ukraine)
Moral Tales	3 - 23%	"After the end of the cold war – everyone knows this – a single centre of dominance emerged in the world. And then those who found themselves at the top of this pyramid were tempted to think that if they are so strong and exceptional, they know best what to do" (STR6)	55 - 70%	"Look, back in 1918, one of the assistants to Woodrow Wilson, the President of the United States, said: 'The whole world will be calmer if a state in Siberia and four more states in the European part appear in place of today's huge Russia.' In 1991, we divided ourselves into 12, in my opinion, parts, right? But it seems that this is not enough for our partners: Russia is too big, in their opinion, for today, because the European countries themselves have turned into small states – not great empires, but into small states, 60-80 million people. But even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, where we have only 146 million left, and that's too much" (UTR5)
Cautionary Tales	10 -77%	"All of us should not forget the experience of the past. For example, we remember examples from the history of the Soviet Union. The export of social experiments, attempts to spur change in certain countries, based on their ideological attitudes, often led to tragic consequences, led not to progress, but to degradation" (UTR6)	24 - 30%	"The Soviet Union weakened at the end of the 80s of the last century, and then completely collapsed. The whole course of events that took place then is a good lesson for us today, it has convincingly shown that the paralysis of power, will is the first step towards complete degradation and oblivion. It cost us then to lose self-confidence for a while, and that's it – the balance of power in the world turned out to be broken" (UTR15)

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Chapter 4: Discussion

As can be deduced from the conducted analysis summarised in Table 8[8], all of van Leeuwen's categories and sub-categories of legitimation are employed by President Vladimir Putin in his discursive structures. Moreover, Table 8 demonstrates how, despite the results of the analysis confirming some initial propositions on how the use of the four categories of legitimation could be different for Syria and Ukraine, the degree of resemblance in the use of legitimising discourses in Russian foreign political discourse is higher than expected.

Indeed, as initially proposed, the primary legitimation category utilised in both the Syrian and Ukrainian cases is legitimation through moralisation, which occurs more frequently in the Syrian case, with almost 60%. However, although the frequency proportion of 47% in the Ukrainian case is slightly lower, this is compensated by a wider disparity concerning the mythopoesis category. In fact, the near absence of storytelling in the Syrian case is noteworthy. Notwithstanding the initial expectation of higher storytelling in the Ukrainian case study, being the latter historically and culturally linked with the Russian Federation, the Syrian proportion of 4% is significantly lower compared to the other categories, especially considering the existing literature emphasis on Russia's opposition to pre-2015 external interventions in the Middle Eastern region, perpetrated particularly by the United States. The discrepancy may be caused by the fact that, as surfaced in the Thematic Analysis section, in addition to potential Western regime change actions, the primary perceived national threat for the Russian Federation was the increasing Islamic State terrorist activity and its possible spread in the Caucasus. Yet, storytelling connected to the

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[8] The percentage frequency of each legitimation category for both case studies was calculated by first counting and summing up the number of appearances for each category and then calculating their proportion in the total.

historical fight against domestic terrorism in the North Caucasus is equally absent. In both Syrian

and Ukrainian cases, nonetheless, mythopoesis represents the least used legitimation category.

Table 8: Total number of appearances by individual legitimation category and case study

Category	Sub-category of legitimation	Syria	Ukraine
Legitimation via Authorisation	*Personal Authority*	3	5
	Impersonal Authority	17	79
	Authority of Conformity	22	24
	Authority of Tradition	1	5
	Expert Authority	11	33
	Role Model Authority	2	3
Total		**56 - 17%**	**149 - 21%**
Legitimation via Moral Evaluation	*Evaluation*	24	47
	Abstraction	169	269
	Analogies	2	13
Total		**193 - 59%**	**329 - 47%**
Legitimation via Rationalisation	*Instrumental Rationality goal orientation*	23	53
	Instrumental Rationality means orientation	17	41
	Instrumental Rationality effect orientation	17	30
	Theoretical Rationality definition	3	6
	Theoretical Rationality explanation	3	7
	Theoretical Rationality predictions	2	6
Total		**65 - 20%**	**143 - 21%**
Legitimation via Mythopoesis	*Moral Tales*	3	55
	Cautionary Tales	10	24
Total		**13 - 4%**	**79 - 11%**

Furthermore, contrary to an initial expectation of a higher presence of authorisation, given Vladimir Putin's emphasis on the importance of international law and respect for the legal equality and sovereignty of states, the categories of authorisation and rationalisation are interestingly the same in the Ukrainian case. A difference is more pronounced in the Syrian case study where legitimation via authorisation, at 17%, is lower than rationalisation, at 20%, primarily utilised to express political actors' actions purposes, as well as actions means and possible future actions consequences. Nevertheless, if we compare the two cases, the Syrian frequencies are highly close to both legitimations through authorisation and rationalisation in the Ukrainian case, with 21% each.

More importantly, five observations emerge from the analysis:

(i) The President of the Russian Federation consistently defends respect for international law in conjunction with the legitimacy and authority of the UN Security Council. Such stress not only symbolises a favouring of the Westphalian state system, as suggested by the existing literature, but it equally gives indirect insights into Russia's positioning in the international system. A positioning which sees a Russian vision against an international unipolar Western order. This interpretation is supported further by the following statement on the anarchic condition that the absence of the Security Council would create:

> We consider attempts to undermine the authority and legitimacy of the UN extremely dangerous. This could lead to the collapse of the entire architecture of international relations. Then we really won't have any rules left, except for the right of the strong. It will be a world in which egoism will prevail instead of collective work, a world in which there will be more and more dictatorship and less equality, less real democracy and freedom, a world in which, instead of truly independent states, the number of actual protectorates controlled from outside territories will multiply (STR6).

In both case studies, this view is additionally reinforced by the use of mythopoesis and moralisation linked to past and present Western violations of state sovereignty, territorial integrity, and domestic affairs, to which the de-legitimising authorisation to the non-fulfilment or withdrawal from international agreements or Security Council Resolutions designed to guarantee international security is added. This consequently paints a dangerous and worrisome international scenario in which the West consistently overrides international laws to achieve its geopolitical goals, often threatening Russian interests. A defensive foreign policy response to prevent the collapse of the international structure is, hence, legitimised.

(ii) As visible from the Thematic Analysis section, the Syrian and Ukrainian case studies present two different sources of threat to national security. Concerning Syria, the main threat is the proliferation of international terrorism and the possibility that Russian citizens who have joined the ranks of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria may return to their national territory. There is also a Western link represented by a threat related to the collapse of the Syrian political regime and possible Western aims against such a fate for the Russian Federation. On the other hand, in Ukraine, the main threat is NATO's eastward expansion, Ukraine's possible entry into the Alliance, and the placement of NATO defence weapons on the direct borders of the Russian Federation. Although the threats are thus different, they have one element in common: Both are the representation of exogenous pressures, the Russian response to which, particularly in the Ukrainian case, may resonate with neoclassical realist depictions of the world advanced by Elias Götz (2019, 101-105) on the reaction of local great powers to the presence of excessive external pressure in small neighbouring countries. As the author argues, indeed, the deeper the political-military

interactions between extra-regional powers, the United States and NATO in this specific case, and the small states neighbouring the regional great power, the higher the level of perceived external pressure. The higher the level of perceived external pressure, the more risk-taking will be the policies pursued by the local great power towards the small neighbouring states to prevent the latter from aligning with the external powers.

(iii) There is a marked strategy of positive self-presentation (Wodak 2006, 1) of the Russian Federation, which has always sought to cooperate and resolve disputes diplomatically and peacefully, mediating between the various actors and proposing solutions to safeguard international security. In opposition, there is a negative other-presentation (Wodak 2006, 1) of the Islamic State, the Ukrainian authority, and the West, the latter of which is offensive, disregards the norms of international law for its own purposes, destroys political systems, and conducts a policy of Russian containment. Hence, the Russian Federation is solely defending its national security and legitimate interests from external opponents, remarking equally a "Not 'we', but 'them'" strategy of blame allocation shifting (Wodak 2006, 11).

(iv) Adding to the strategies of positive self and negative other-presentation, blame allocation occurs through four strategies. First, the employment of indirect accusations of the opponent under the umbrella of negative moral evaluation and abstraction (Western, IS, and Ukrainian authority behaviours) or of direct accusations, as in the case of "What is happening now, the tension that is developing in Europe, is their [(US)] fault" (UTR4). Second, the undermining of the opponent's credibility, showing the nonadherence to defended views, as in the case of Syria, where the Western export of liberal ideology to

Middle Eastern countries aimed at ensuring liberty, equality, and prosperity created a restriction of the same (STR6). Third, the victimisation of the Russian Federation, Middle Eastern countries, and the population of the separatist People's Republics, especially exalted via mythopoesis and the frequent appeal to negative emotions, such as fear, pain and suffering. Fourth, the denial of Western allegations made against the Russian Federation, as in the following case:

> We see attempts being made today almost to lay the blame on Russia […]. Allegedly, the refugee problem arose due to the fact that Russia supports the legitimate authorities in Syria. […] I would like to note this, people from Syria are fleeing, first of all, from the fighting, which is imposed largely from the outside through the supply of weapons and other special equipment. People are fleeing from there from the atrocities of terrorists (STR5).

(v) Lastly, the primacy of the legitimation category of moralisation highlights a clear distinction in the moral values on which Russian and Western foreign and, therefore, domestic policies are grounded. This indicates that Russia's actions are framed and shaped by endogenously internalised values, principles, and qualities considered fair and just. It is precisely from these moral values related to sovereignty, state equality, and the importance of historical and cultural heritage thus that the vision of an aggressive West emerges, which acts against morally considered principles and from which Russia must defend itself.

Conclusion

The thesis aimed to systematically identify discursive practices employed by the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, to justify the foreign political action of military intervention in the Syrian Arab Republic in 2015 and Ukraine in 2022. Furthermore, the thesis sought to equally determine whether a discursive legitimation pattern exists between the Syrian and Ukrainian case studies, symbolising temporal and tactical discursive continuity. In order to answer the just mentioned research questions, 25 transcripts of direct official speeches delivered by President Vladimir Putin four months prior to the official announcement of intervention were analysed. The analysis concentrated first on a thematic analysis rooted in the existing literature and directed to frame the context in which the foreign policy decisions were embedded. In addition to providing a basis for subsequent analysis of the texts through Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), the thematic analysis confirmed the three main thematic categories identified as primary Russian underlying motivations in the scholarly literature: *Russian civilisational identity*, *Russia's place in the international world order* and *Economics*. No additional themes were detected. The analysis subsequently turned to identify legitimising discourses and correlated strategies through Theoodor van Leeuwen's four categories of legitimation.

The thesis demonstrated that Russian President Vladimir Putin employs a wide range of legitimising discourses to justify his foreign military interventions in Syria and Ukraine. The President, in fact, uses all van Leeuwen's categories and sub-categories of legitimation, identified in *legitimation via authorisation, moral evaluation, rationalisation, and mythopoesis.* More specifically, the thesis demonstrated that the President of the Russian Federation primarily employs evaluative and abstract moralisation legitimising discourses centred around values and

principles connected to sovereignty, international norms, historical and cultural values, and Russia's position in world politics. These moralisation legitimising discourses are significant, inasmuch as they help in portraying an image of the Russian Federation rooted in a non-interventionist and self-defensive foreign policy toward exogenous threats, whether represented by terrorism (IS) in the Syrian case or Western expansionism (NATO) in the Ukrainian case. Such an image is further supported by utilising authorisation legitimising discourses, along with storytelling. The mentioned legitimising discourses are, more importantly, employed to advance specific legitimising strategies of blame allocation through a self-positive and other-negative presentation, "us" v "them" comparison strategy, direct and indirect accusations against the opponent, undermining of the opponent's credibility, victimisation, and accusations denial against the Russian Federation. This indicates that a legitimation pattern of the Russian Federation's discursive practices across time and different foreign policies within and outside the post-Soviet area, indeed, exists.

Although these findings permit a better understanding of how exactly the Russian Federation justifies military foreign policy actions, the thesis has two limitations. First, the thesis focuses on legitimising discourses and related strategies preceding the two considered military interventions. Whilst this time frame was sufficient to answer the research questions, legitimising discourses may change once an intervention is started or "stalled". Consequently, it would be interesting to further investigate whether the discovered legitimation pattern persists after the military interventions and whether changes in the use of van Leeuwen's four categories of legitimation and blame allocation strategies occur. Second, the thesis solely examines Russian discursive structures. Hence, future research could investigate whether a similar pattern of legitimation can be observed in other countries. Given the high level of difference between the

Syrian and Ukrainian analysed cases, one may expect these legitimising discourses and strategies of legitimation as key for all foreign policy actors. Future studies could thus shed light on whether Middle Eastern and US interventions or even actions led by international organisations such as NATO use similar legitimation discourses or rather present significant discrepancies.

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Appendix

Transcripts of the President of the Russian Federation: Syrian Arab Republic

	Title of the Transcript (in Russian transliterated)	Date of Publication
Transcript 1	Plenarnoe zasedanie Peterburgskogo mezhdunarodnogo ekonomicheskogo foruma http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/49733	19.06.2015
Transcript 2	Vstrecha s glavoi MID Sirii Validom Muallemom http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/49781	29.06.2015
Transcript 3	Zaiavleniia dlia pressy po zavershenii rossiisko-egipetskih peregovorov http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/press_conferences/50184	26.08.2015
Transcript 4	Vladimir Putin otvetil na voprosy rossiiskih zhurnalistov http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50234	04.09.2015
Transcript 5	Sammit ODKB http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/50291	15.09.2015
Transcript 6	70-ia sessiia Generalnoi Assamblei OON http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/50385	28.09.2015
Transcript 7	Vstrecha s Generalnym sekretariom OON Pan Gi Munom http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/50387	28.09.2015
Transcript 8	Interviu amerikanskomu zhurnalistu Charli Rouzu dlia telekanalov CBS i PBS http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/50380	29.09.2015
Transcript 9	Otvety na voprosy zhurnalistov http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50394	29.09.2015
Transcript 10	Soveshhanie s chlenami Pravitelstva http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50401	30.09.2015

Transcripts of the President of the Russian Federation: Ukraine

	Title of the Transcript (in Russian transliterated)	Date of Publication
Transcript 1	Investicionnyi forum «Rossiia zoviot!» http://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/speeches/67241	30.11.2021
Transcript 2	Sovmestnaia press-konferenciia s Premer-ministrom Grecii Kiriakosom Micotakisom http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67320	08.12.2021
Transcript 3	Zasedanie Soveta po razvitiiu grazhdanskogo obshhestva i pravam cheloveka http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67331	09.12.2021
Transcript 4	Rasshirennoe zasedanie kollegii Minoborony http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67402	21.12.2021
Transcript 5	Bolshaia press-konferenciia Vladimira Putina http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67438	23.12.2021
Transcript 6	Press-konferenciia po itogam rossiisko-vengerskih peregovorov http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67690	01.02.2022
Transcript 7	Press-konferenciia po itogam rossiisko-francuzskih peregovorov http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67735	08.02.2022
Transcript 8	Press-konferenciia po itogam rossiisko-germanskih peregovorov http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67774	15.02.2022
Transcript 9	Vstrecha s rukovoditeliami frakcii Gosudarstvennoi Dumy http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65013	17.02.2022
Transcript 10	Press-konferenciia po itogam rossiisko-belorusskih peregovorov http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67809	18.02.2022
Transcript 11	Zasedanie Soveta Bezopasnosti http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67825	21.02.2022
Transcript 12	Obrashhenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federacii http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828	21.02.2022
Transcript 13	Peregovory s Prezidentom Azerbaidzhana Ilhamom Alievym http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67830	22.02.2022
Transcript 14	Vladimir Putin otvetil na voprosy zhurnalistov http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67838	22.02.2022
Transcript 15	Obrashhenie Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federacii http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843	24.02.2022